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The Role of Liberian Community Organizations in the Integration of Liberian Immigrants: A Case Study of Immigrants in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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THE ROLE OF LIBERIAN COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS IN THE INTEGRATION OF
LIBERIAN IMMIGRANTS: A CASE STUDY OF LIBERIAN IMMIGRANTS IN
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

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Student name: Solomon Muin Date: 12/15/2016

DEDICATION

I am dedicating this paper to the memories of my father who departed this world on August 15, 2002. He is the single most champion of my education and is proud to this day that I am achieving this end.

To my dear mother who constant prayer is to discover the root of her mother, an effort that have started to connect the past generation to the present for a better future. For “people without a knowledge of their history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots.”- Marcus Garvey

To my brothers and sisters who continue to stand up as personal motivators in reaching this far.

To my dear daughter Gracious, for her deep sense of appreciation

To my soon coming son that is embodied by his mother, Ms. Garmai Jarry, the news of your soon coming continues to propel the desire for further advancement to be the positive change I desire for my country, Liberia

Moreover, to my country Liberia, remaining a beacon of hope for many African nations. Even in the midst of adversity, Liberia continues to be the sweet land of liberty

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ABSTRACT

Immigrants that settled in a dominant new culture face significant challenges during the process of acculturation. Though minority culture is always at the disadvantaged end of acculturation in most cases, most research done on acculturation in the West mostly focused on the impact of immigrants on their societies, or on ways of strengthening integration in the host countries. As this continues, the dominant culture role and importance of the majority culture is what influence most narratives and not much is seeing from the minority culture. Most research on acculturation in the United States for example, placed more emphasis on the Hispanic or Asian communities with less attention on the African community despite the massive wave of African immigrants in the US and the impact they are making on their US host communities.

As Liberians formed part of the African narrative, there was a need to know through a case study, to what extent acculturation is impacting Liberian immigrants, especially the youth population, and what the Liberian community in the United States is doing to minimize its effect. More to the impact of acculturation on Liberian immigrant, the research explored the unique way of life of Liberians and how Liberian immigrants are making impact in their host communities as well. Philadelphia is the context for this study because of its host to the largest population of Liberian immigrant in the United States. The research considered the role being played by two of the many Liberian community organizations in Philadelphia and to what extent their work is impacting the community. The research conducted series of interviews to listen to personal stories, accompanied by a survey to gather Liberians perspective of how these organizations are impacting the lives of the immigrants. The findings are interesting as revealed in this paper.

INTRODUCTION

Working with the Liberian community in Philadelphia opens one to the realization that the new wave of Liberian immigrants to the United States faces several challenges as a result of acculturation. These include social, culture, identity, psychological and economic challenges in settling in a new culture with not the much-guided process of integration. Before 1980, Liberians who traveled to the United States came from the privileged Americo-Liberian group either on student visas, business, and tourism or exchange visitation, and return after their short stay. However, the recent arrival of Liberians is as a result of the country's fourteen years civil war, which brought a massive wave of Liberian immigrants to resettle in the United States between 1990 to present. Liberians in the United States as such came from significantly diverse backgrounds with lots of fragile social issues coupled with the lack of proper rehabilitation from the trauma experience from the war in Liberia.

Like their adult counterpart, young Liberian immigrants are bombarded by numerous challenges due to the unguided process of integrating into the American culture. As a result, most young people are reported to be on the fringe of society with reported problems of drugs, and substance users, gang- related crimes, school drop-out, teenage pregnancy and much more that have triggered alarming calls for intervention. In the midst of this, Liberian organizations working in Philadelphia continue to report tremendous progress made to help the integration of Liberian immigrants. If achievements published annually are faithful to these organizations' workings, why are there alarming calls for intervention to stop the wave of unguided integration? What are the real causes of these challenges being faced by these young people? Moreover, what is the impact of the work of the community organizations on the lives of Liberian immigrant? The goal of the research was to know the cause of these challenges through conversation with

leaders of community-based organizations and review of pieces of literature on the subject. The study also seeks to understand the role the organizations are playing to address these challenges.

The research used a case study approach beginning with the description of the case and includes a look at Liberia transforming identity and unique way of life. The paper continues with the migration of Liberians to the United States and the experiences of Liberians through their personal stories. It discusses how the movement of Liberian is impacting the social, economic and culture life of their host communities in Philadelphia. The literature review related to immigration and acculturation, psychology and culture, a complexity of identity, social stigma, and identity were brought into focus to understand the situation of Liberian immigrants. The paper continued with an explanation of the research design and the analysis of data gathered from the survey and moved into findings from the research. The paper brings into focus a comparative study using a scholarly framework of the challenges immigrant teen faced in integrating into the United States culture and relate it to the challenges faced by Liberian young people in the process of integration. It continues with the impact of Liberian immigrants on their host community and society anxiety over immigration. A look at the two community organizations and how their work is changing the lives of Liberian immigrant community. The paper ends with recommendations and a personal statement.

II. DESCRIPTION OF CONTEXT

Liberia is one of the countries unique to the experience of cultural, social, Psychological, and identity crises. Since the founding of the nation, identity crises continue to plague Liberians. The people continue to go through processes of integration from one culture to another, a shift that continues to cause challenges on the youth population. Liberia came into existence as a

result of freed black slaves from the United States repatriated by the American Colonization Society in 1822. Coming to Africa was for them, an opportunity to civilize and Christianize the African tribes. Even as this was a cultural violence, civilization for them was to school the African tribes whom they considered savages, in the western way of life, language, and values with the expectation of being like Americo-Liberians. Christianization for them was the teaching of the Bible, conversion of the African tribes, and making them followers of Jesus. These two became the central mission of their return. What was not realized by the freed slaves was the fact that they were once Africans who lived the African way of life before their captured or were sold into slavery, and coming to Africa would have been an opportunity for reorientation in the rich traditions and customs of Africa they once lived.

Acculturation significantly impacted the Africans held as slaves in the United States for centuries. Their identity changed, the language changed and integrated into a culture foreign to theirs. The African slaves saw themselves more like their masters than people captured from Africa, a place of their origin. On the other hand, the African tribes were people who settled in the area now Liberia, due to the fall of the Ghana Empire from the invasion by a Muslim sect called the Almoravids in 1076. Additionally, the African tribes' settlement in the area now Liberia was also due to the expansion of the Sahara desert making farming difficult where they were, and therefore sought fertile farmland. This improbable journey in search of a new home free from war ended when the tribes found this fertile tropical area now called Liberia. The tribes settled as families, clans, and chiefdoms, setting territorial boundaries for protection. The tribes that settled included the Kru, Kpelle, Krahn, Kissi, Lorma, Gbandi, Mendi, Gio, Mano, Bassa, Grebo, Vai, Mandingoes. The Gola were believed to occupy the land before others. Each of these tribes had a unique cultural identity, language, and way of life. It was in this space as time

elapsed, African brothers and sisters from across the Mediterranean Sea tagged as former slaves joined the African tribes.

The Americo-Liberians ugly experience of slavery as written in the declaration of independence of Liberia tells of their horrible conditioned in the United States. In an online journal, Liberia, and Friends Journal topic, Liberia: A brief history and the Declaration of Independence. (Ken R. Well.2016). Retrieved from <http://liberiaandfriends.blogspot.com> Liberian Declaration of Independence. The former slaves noted that they were originally part of the United States of North America but debarred by laws from all rights and the privilege of a human. It continues that in other regions of America where they lived as former slaves, public sentiment was stronger than law, and it frowns them down. They faced exclusion from participation in the government and taxed without consent. The freed slaves coming to West Africa facilitated by the American Colonization Society was an act of benevolent and philanthropist. According to the former slaves, there were times they uttered their complaints but were unattended too. (Liberian Declaration of Independence. Well. 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.onliberia.org/claration.htm>).

Interestingly, the coming of the former slave sealed the migration of people in search of a land, and space was declared Liberia in 1847. As a melting pot, each of the tribes along with the former slaves begun assimilating of cultures. The Americo-Liberian were small in number, but their American cultural influence and strategies played a role as the dominant culture since they led government with absolute control. The assimilation process was more to the disadvantaged of the indigenous tribes as they faced structural and cultural violence from the system of the Americo-Liberians.

For 133 years, the nation was ruled by Americo-Liberians at the exclusion of the indigenous. The ruling class perpetuated a class system that benefitted the Americo-Liberians immensely. At times native lands were seized by the government under the condition of the indigenous becoming civilized before their properties returned. As a result of this policy, native sons and daughters were sent to live with Americo-Liberian families, and or sent to missionaries' boarding schools to be "educated and civilized." This process made several indigenous children lose their cultural identity and most time their family roots. Christianity impacted the life of the native as well. Families converted to Christianity would at times distance themselves from their cultural practices which they would regards as sinful or satanic. Indigenous children living with Americo-Liberian or converted to Christianity faced names changed to Christian names and tribal languages mostly prohibited in homes of Americo-Liberians except for English. A classic example is the story told by a mother when asked her a profound question of where her mother originated. This was the oral story the mom received from her mother:

"Your grandmother told me she was the most beautiful little girl in a village in Bong County and Lofa highway. Her name was after her bright color-"Nenie polie," a Kpelle word meaning "bright girl." One day, a president wife stopped by to speak to the people of the village and noticed this fair-color little girl. She asked to take her to Monrovia to live with her. Her parent had no option but to consider what the president wife requested without knowing how it would end up. Since that day, she never saw her parents because transportation was not affordable, nor have the time to communicate with them because she had no access. She lived and worked for the president wife all her life without a trace of her village or her parents. Only her memories as a little four years old girl in this village. Her people have died as well and not one of them to relate to us. Hopefully, her grandchildren will find out where she came from to give her a smile in her grave".

(E. Dahn-Nyemah, Personal Communication, March 2013)

This experience is a reality lived by thousands of indigenous children who were brought to live with Americo-Liberian families. Name change was the entrance into the new family and a disconnection from one's roots and unique cultural practices. These were orchestrated to turn the indigenous child's identity 360 degrees to break away from their origins. As Liberia hinterland

and urban areas became connected through a policy of unification promoted by the Late President William Tubman in the middle of the 20th century, more Christian outreach with church schools became present in rural areas granting more access to education, especially Christian education. Though some see this unification policy as a means of the government to have more access and control of the abundant natural resources in the indigenous areas, it was gradually changing the social and cultural trajectory and the demography of Liberia. The native population started to become a political asset for those interested in political offices. To communicate to the elders of the indigenous tribes, Americo-Liberians will need to learn the ethnic language for effective communication and a show of connection with the people. Americo-Liberians themselves were in search of their identity, a reality check of whether to continue living as Americans or be real Africans. This search for identity led several Americo-Liberian to begin learning Liberian indigenous languages and opening up to learning indigenous cultural practices.

Under the leadership of President William Tolbert, many indigenous young Liberians who had lived with Americo-Liberians families and carrying the names of those families, or attended missionaries schools, were given scholarships by the government to seek higher education in the United States and parts of Europe. During this time, the Pan-African movement in Africa have started, and Liberia was a champion in the fight for the independence of African countries. On the other hand, the civil rights movement in the United States was at its peak. Influenced by these changes, a process of identity search for belonging begun among many indigenous Liberian students in the United States. Progressive movements were formed by Liberian students in the United States to influence Liberia domestic politics. The first uprising in Liberia was on April 14, 1979, when couples of Liberian students who had returned to Liberia

boldly stood up in opposition to the Liberian government rise in rice price. On April 12, 1980, a first coup d'état by enlisted indigenous men of the Armed Forces of Liberia ended 133 years of rule by the Americo-Liberians. Power shifted to the native and started a revolution of indigenous identity. There were two characterizations of Liberians during this time, either a Liberian is an "a Congo" a name associated with those who are Americo-Liberians or a Liberian is "a country," a name referring to indigenous Liberians.

Liberians who felt targeted by the Indigenous government started a mass exile from Liberia to the United States. According to research published online in an article *Liberian American-History, Modern Era*, before the 1980 Liberian immigrants to the US was a tiny number of hundred as compared to the number of Liberians that went to Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Before 1980, the primary reasons for Liberians entering the US, were business, tourism, student, and exchange visitation, with the majority returning at the end of their stay. What attributed to little immigration of Liberians to the US were Liberia stable democracy and prosperous economic conditions. However, there were two major shifts in Liberia that impacted mass exodus of Liberians to the United States. The 1980 coup that saw the overthrow of the Americo-Liberian government was the first major change, and Liberia fourteen years civil war which started in 1990 is the second significant shift. These two changes saw increasing migration of Liberians to the US which added a new classification to Liberian immigration status in the United States as an immigrant, asylum, and refugees.

The figure of Liberians immigration to the United States as researched by Ciata Victor of *TLC Africa Magazine* shows that from the year 1925 to 1929, Liberians who immigrated to the United States were 27. Progression in the number of immigrants begins to rise. By the 1950s, a significant jump from 27 to 232 immigrants was seen. However, it was not until the last decade

of the twentieth century that witnessed significant immigration of Liberians to America. Between 1990 and 2003, the population of Liberians in the United States jumped to 99,607 though the UNHCR has it at 110,589. (*See appendix for detailed statistic*) The reason for the influx was said to be Liberians search of a place to satisfy their basic human needs as the condition in Liberia was far less favorable to enable people to meet their self-actualization. (TLC-Africa-Statistics on Liberian in the US. (Victor. 2003). Retrieved from http://www.tlcafrica.com/Liberian_statistics1.htm)

Migration of individuals from one culture to another does not go without challenges. The underlying consequences of this massive migration of Liberians into the United States are the cultural, identity, socio-economic, and psychological challenges impacting the lives of the people. Though adapting to the new way of life is not strange to Liberians since Liberians have been going through cultural, and identity transformation from the foundation of Liberia, adaptation in a foreign land with dominant culture influences bring several challenges. These problems are those this research seeks to study through the perspective of Liberians and community organizations that are involved in helping Liberian integrate.

III. THE LIBERIAN UNIQUE WAY OF LIFE

Liberia traditions, customs, and beliefs passed down by the various ethnic groups and interwoven with the Americo-Liberian way of life were some of the unique and most admired among Liberia West African neighbors. Because of this uniqueness, other countries in Africa held the myth that Liberia had a common border with the United States. Each of Liberia 16 ethnic groups has unique cultural practices observed for a century but the assimilation of cultural practices of the ethnic groups and the former slaves from America for over 100 years impacted an evolution of common traditions, belief, and customs uniquely familiar to all. Common to all

Liberians is the English language spoken with its thick accent, the traditions, the proverbs, the songs and dances, the cuisine, the family, and community dynamic. Every Liberian tribe valued education and considered as a means of empowering a child to be responsible adults. Though the traditional school is not a western style education, it is unique to the development of the child emphasizing particular gender role for society cohesion.

A unique custom among Liberians is the "snap-shake" greeting. According to the Liberians during the shaking of hands, both hands come together and bring up a quick snap of the fingers. Interestingly, this snap-shake derived from slave days in the United States. The story is that a slave owner often would break the middle finger of a slave's hand to indicate bondage. The "snap-shake" greeting began in the nineteenth century as a sign of freedom among former slaves.

Liberia ethnic groups are known for their collective rather than individual artwork. Particular to tribal groups are the folklores, parable, and proverbs of Liberia. The common theme of these sayings is animals. A general saying for example as cited by Ken Well is: "He who knows the way must conduct others." Common to the Kpelle tribe is the proverb that says: "when pointing an evil finger at someone, three fingers pointed at yourself. Alternatively, "the rock that a person throws in a well to kill a frog will cause them to suffer when they drink the dirty water. A common saying from the Bassa tribe is "He who steps in (a river) first shows the depth of the current." An example of a Krahn saying would be: "To cure a bad sore, you must use bad medicine." Common to the Gola tribe were wise sayings like: "As tall as one is they will never be taller than their head." "Don't expect to have clean clothes if you wash with dirty water." Among the Vai, one will hear wise saying like "where you slipped is where to look but not where you fell." The Kru would say theirs in this way: "a child who listens to his parent

advice will see the end of the world" or "there is never a wrong forest to throw a spoiled child." Elders use most of these proverbs and parable in public speaking or advice to the young generation. Most of them sang through the Liberian folk songs.

Traditionally, healthy diet consisting mainly fish, rice and green, and vegetable are everyday dishes among Liberians. Liberians eat rice as breakfast, lunch, and dinner. There is a common saying that if one wants conflict in Liberia, take away their rice. A Liberian will eat every food, but once the rice is not part of what they ate, they have eaten nothing. Another staple of Liberians is cassava which turns into "fufu" or cook and eaten as it is. "Dumboy" is fresh cassava roots boiled and beaten in a mortar with pestle and finally cut into small pieces. Liberians swallowed "dumboy" with a soup made of peanuts and okra. Liberians also take Fufu with soup. The Liberian Cassava leaves-sauce is one soup unique in cooking. It is prepared by washing and beaten the leaves, mashed, or finely chopped with pepper and onion. The ground product of the cassava leaves is boiled with beef, dried fish or chicken until well done, and blended with palm oil when most of the liquid has evaporated. Liberian women prepared the best of food. It is hilariously said, what makes Liberian women distinct from others in Africa is the way they take care of their husbands by preparing healthy food.

Ken R. Well (2013), a writer on Liberia, explains in detail about Liberian dances and songs. Well (2016) said the tapestry of Liberian life, both in the homeland and in America, is woven together by the thread of music. Birth, death, planting, harvesting, and the other main events have their music. "Traditional Liberians" according to Well (2016), "dance according to the sounds of various musical instruments. (Well.2016) The heart of Liberian song and dances according to Well (2016) is "the drum."

Liberians are known for wearing the best in custom. Liberians produced the finest traditional cloth made into shirts or gown. Women frequently wear what is known as "traditional lappa suit." Customs differ by tribes and the Americo-Liberians. While the Americo-Liberians wear coat suits and ties during Sundays, the Vai-shirts and hats are common among indigenous.

The former slaves repatriated to Liberia had a huge influence on holidays celebrated in Liberia because they were in charge of the government, many of the holidays observed in the United States were copied and celebrated in Liberia. Holidays like Christmas, New Year day, Easter, Thanksgiving are traditional holidays celebrated in Liberia, Liberia Independence Day is celebrated on July 26 while America does theirs on July 4th. Liberian celebrate Flag Day on August 24th and Armed Forces Day on February 11th.

Much to the credit of the former slaves who returned to Liberia was their assimilation practices that made English the official language of communication by all Liberian. One way they succeeded in doing this was in the central mission discussed previously: by Christianizing and civilizing the indigenous Liberians. Indigenous Liberians lands were seized and held until they become "civilized enough" their land taken wouldn't be returned. The benchmark for the educated enough was to send their children to school or live with an Americo-Liberian family to teach them a civilized way of life. The primary ethnic languages of Liberia are Kpelle, Bassa, Mano, Grebo, Kru, Krahn, Sarpo, Gio, Mano, Loma, Kisi, Mende, Gbandi, Gola, Dey, and Vai. More than half the population speaks English, diluted English spoken by the people as a means of communication.

THE PROBLEM

The 1980 coup and the civil war in Liberia ignite a major challenge to Liberians forming a collective identity for national development. The 1980 coup d'état in Liberia is considered an affront on the privilege Americo-Liberians by the indigenous and the civil war heighten ethnic tension among ethnic groups who felt threaten of exclusion by the others. Although efforts have been made by groups to resolve the major problem of ethnic tension and the class divide between Congo and country, political instability, and lack of national integration through different structural reforms, have produced limited results. Despite the commitment of state leaders to instill a sense of national identity, the allegiance of ethnic groups to their particular ethnicity still surpasses their loyalty to the country, and Americo-Liberians still feel like the privilege, and perceive that political power is theirs. As a consequence, working together as Liberians even in the diaspora for the common good of Liberia is challenging, and a greater degree of interethnic accommodation and national integration constitute the most critical problem facing Liberians in the diaspora.

More to the already existing problem of Liberians is the challenges Liberian immigrant experience in integrating into the American culture. The movement of people from one culture to another does not go without challenges. The massive migration of Liberians into the United States is impacting the lives of the citizens. Liberians are experiencing the cultural shift as a result of the American dominant culture effect on them. More to the cultural influence, identity crises of who Liberians truly are and how this new character is received and perceived by Liberians in Liberia. Identity crises also hang over children born of Liberian parents in the United States. Social challenges like particular gender role and parenting of children in the American way as against the African way is also a problem. All of these along with the

psychological challenges to maintain stability is critical to this research. In the midst of these difficulties are the Liberian youth bombarded with all these challenges, how can they maintain a balance to ensure that integration into a new culture does not rip them of the unique culture practices of their homeland?

LITERATURE REVIEW

To build a sound basis for this research and have an informed understanding that will guide the inquiry process, a review of several kinds of literature and the perspective of different authors on acculturation. The literature reviewed included: a. the research on acculturation, social identity and social cognition, b. The research on the challenges faced by the teenager in the process of acculturation in the United States. There was also the utilization some of the theoretical frameworks in the fields of intercultural communication, social identity conflict, the social construction of Identity and the complexity of identity since acculturation deals basically with individuals, culture, communication, and identity.

Definition of Key Terms Associated with Acculturation

It is was good to bring in context the meaning of the word acculturation to begin the review. To understand acculturation one need first to understand the based word for acculturation, culture. The culture according to Jessica McCallister is simply "the way of living and a way of life." With this understanding, culture implies that there are certain ways and reasons in which individual and a group of people speak, conduct themselves, celebrate holidays, and express their belief systems. From this explanation, there is a tremendous diversity of cultures around the world. There are African culture, American culture, Asian culture, Arab culture, European culture, South American culture and Australian culture. Culture is classified using two key distinctions: the people and the geography. Why Americans or Africans have their

culture, culture can be distinct by individuals and their geographical setting. For example, the people of Liberia and Nigeria are Africans, but each has a distinctive way of living based on the people and geography. With this understanding of culture, it is easy to understand what acculturation is. Acculturation just means individuals or groups of people transitioning from living their way of life to moving into a way of life of another culture. That process of adapting to that new culture's behavior, language, value and customs are what defines acculturation.

As a theory, acculturation is divided into four parts that play in one's adaptation to a new culture. These components include: understanding a language, immersion, assimilation, and integration. The language and immersion according to acculturation scholars are the key to the process of acculturation. Language according to a study by Social theorist John Schumann is the largest factor to people successfully acculturating in a new society. (Acculturation: Definition, Theory & Examples - Video (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://study.com/academy/lesson/acculturation-definition-theory-examples.html>. Immersion is key to learning a language. As one surrounds oneself with entirely the new culture, it makes easy to understanding and speaks the language of that culture.

Assimilation is also critical in the process of acculturation. The term assimilation involves the acculturation of information about that new culture and resulting adaptation to match the culture. One person who fully assimilates has picked up all the habits and traits of their non-native culture or host culture, while integration includes participating in the social life of society to be considered an equal among the society. Integration involves the participation in social events, community event, and local clubs or group. According to scholars, the process of assimilation and integration takes time and are often experience as part of the entire acculturation process.

For the purpose of this inquiry, it is also important to consider the definition of immigrants and the wave of immigration by Liberians to the United States. According to the Merriam-Webster Learner Dictionary, an immigrant is a person who comes to a country to take up permanent residence. Immigration to a country can impact lives of people immigrating and the community they reside. In the case of Liberians, Ciata Victor of TLC Africa, a leading online Liberian diaspora magazine, researched the number of Liberians in the US between 1990 to 2003 from the UNHCR and the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service perspective, categorizing reasons for admittance in the United States as seen in this

Literature on Acculturation, Social Identity, and Social Cognition

In an attempt to point out the current deficiencies in acculturation research as they see them, Amado M. Padilla and William Perez did research on Acculturation, Social Identity, and Social Cognition, which they refer to as a new perspective. The intent of their work was to present a schema of a new model of acculturation that incorporates recent work in social and cognitive psychology. To discuss this new paradigm of acculturation, Padilla and Perez presented a model of acculturation that focuses on four pillars: social cognition, cultural competence, social identity, and social stigma.

Padilla and Perez (2003) believe cognitive processes stem from people's realistic goals, which themselves derive from multiple sources. These sources according to Padilla and Perez include the "person-level variables, situational constraints, societal structure, and evolutionary mechanisms." (Acculturation, Social Identity, and Social Cognition: A ... (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://web.stanford.edu/~apadilla/Padilla Perez03a.pdf>). They believe, "thinking is for doing," that cognition follows from people's goals, which vary according to their social situation. Padilla, Perez / Acculturation & Social Cognition (P.41). Padilla and Perez see Cultural Competence as

the academic ability to function in a culture in a manner that that ties one's values, beliefs, customs, mannerisms, and language of the majority of members of the culture. In this, Immigrants who are involved in culture transitions because of migration must cope with their new cultural-societal pressures and norms. They must understand their new social environment and decide how and whether they are going to integrate themselves into the host culture. Padilla and Perez noted, when members of the culture come to view the person as an "insider," it means that that person has attained full competence in the new culture. However, acceptance as an insider is not a prerequisite for cultural competence per se. The important thing is for that integrated person to act in ways acceptable to the culture norms of the society. What seems real about this is the way Liberian community organizations are becoming part of the mayor-commission that meets every second Wednesday at the Philadelphia City Hall to discuss a matter of importance to the city. Being at the table, they feel like insiders as political leaders treat them as such because of the large Liberian population for political purposes. What is left behind is the people themselves and the connectivity to the people.

Padilla and Perez (2003) social identity theory stressed that individual behavior reflects individuals 'larger societal units." Expanding upon this, they noted that primary societal structures such as groups, organizations, cultures, and most importantly individuals' identification with these collective units guide internal structures and processes. Cultural competence according to them, "lies at the heart of this theory because what determines individual thoughts and behavior is the collective group membership influences. Thus, individuals are not self-contained units of psychological analysis.

Social identity theory according to Padilla and Perez, states what people think, feel, and act as members of collective groups, institutions, and cultures. Padilla and Perez social identity

approach reinforce the idea that individuals' social cognitions are socially construed depending on their group or common frames of reference. For instance, an immigrant who perceived him or herself negatively stigmatized because of the skin color or accents may be less willing to acculturate. Such person will hold this view believing that such stigma will always exist regardless of whether they are what Padilla and Perez refer to as "culturally competent in the dominant culture." Brewer (1991), holds that two core human motives: the need to be unique and the need to belong. Having a social identity (e.g., ethnic, religious, or national) satisfies individuals' simultaneous needs for inclusion and differentiation. In other words, we need to fill the need simultaneously to belong to a social group (e.g. African) while maintaining our distinctiveness from another group (e.g., American). In this way, we are motivated to identify with social groups with which one feels the kinship to and be separated from groups of which we do not feel a part and from which one strive to remain detached through a manifestation of distinctiveness.

Literature on Social Dominance

Professor James Sidanius made a contribution to the study of social dominance. In his piece, *the Psychology of Group Conflict and the Dynamics of Social Oppression: A social dominance perspective* done in 1993, points that all social institutions and cultures involve some form of hierarchy. Unlike most of the minorities that focus on situational explanations, this theory of intergroup relations rests on individual differences in social dominance. One's orientations toward social dominance are pragmatic insofar as hierarchies are functional for the collective unit. What validates social hierarchies according to Sidanius, are the cultural ideologies that sustain the legitimacy and centrality of authority within the larger society. This

theory according to Padilla and Perez accounts for large-scale examples of intergroup dominance that occurs in the absence of apparent conflicts, such as ethnic, religious, or gender oppression.

Social dominance theory differs in form from the cognitive and motivational analysis of self-categorization and optimal distinctiveness theories, stressing both the inevitability and functionality of consensual hierarchies, such as legitimized social class distinctions and roles of gender, as a function of individual differences in social dominance according to Padilla and Perez. In sum, these socially derived constructs like social cognition, cultural competence, social identity, and social dominance, are critical to the theory that they advance in their article to explain the processes involved in acculturation. Padilla and Perez believe that acculturation is harder for those persons who are more distinct as a result of their skin color, religious practices, and so forth from the dominant in-group. Thus, people also need to address the question of social stigma in understanding cultural change. Dealing with the problem of social stigma is necessary because individuals who are more identifiable as outsiders are likely targets of prejudice and discrimination by the socially dominant in-group. The consequence of this may lead to the affected persons enduring more physical and psychological hardships. He or she status as outsiders that call into question their motives for wanting to adapt to the host group. They may as well have fewer opportunities to engage with the insiders, which can limit their chances for successful adaptation. Also, they may be implicitly or explicitly excluded from entry into groups and institutions that offer privileges to their members (Acculturation, Social Identity, and Social Cognition: A ... (Padilla and Perez.).

Literature on Social Stigma

Goffman (1963) Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity, reasoned that if other people's reactions influence our behavior and identity, then it is reasonable to state that people can control the reactions of others by using what they reveal about themselves. (Acculturation, Social Identity, and Social Cognition: Retrieved from <http://web.stanford.edu/~apadilla/PadillaPerez03a.pdf>). He further stated that in their interactions with others, people often expose or hide certain beliefs, ideas, or behaviors to manipulate the perceptions held by these people of them. According to Crocker, Major and Steele handbook of social psychology (1998), social stigma is a function of having an attribute that shows a devalued social identity in a particular context. (Acculturation, Social Identity, and Social Cognition. Retrieved from <http://web.stanford.edu/~apadilla/PadillaPerez03a.pdf>). More specifically, possession of a particular attribute might lead individuals to be stigmatized in one context but not in another. The key distinction is in the unfortunate circumstance of possessing a quality that in a given social context leads to devaluation. Characteristics that may cause negative stigmatization include skin color, accented speech, certain religious apparel, gender, homosexuality, homelessness, mental illness, and so forth. It is important how these attributes associate with minority standing and powerlessness.

Literature on the Complexity of Identity

Liberian immigrants struggle to maintain their identity in the midst of a dominant culture and their survival. To best understand their present state, it was important to review literature that deals with the complexity of identity. Beverly Daniel Tatum work on the complex nature of identity fits into that literary guidance.

Beverly Daniel Tatum (2010) in her particular piece on, Complexity of Identity: "Who Am I" believes that the concept of identity is complex and shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political context. Tatum (2010) believes the question of self-identity will always receive an answer depending in large part on whom the world around one says they are. There are several factors Tatum believes that comes into play in answering the question of self-identity, which one is? The factors have to do with: whom do one parent say they are? Whom does one peer say they are? What message reflects a person in the voices of their teachers, their neighbors, the store clerks? (Tatum. 2013) Alternatively, how am I the person represented in the cultural images around them? Alternatively, is a person missing from the picture altogether? What has this person social context been? Like the question did they grow up speaking Standard English at home" or another language or dialect? Did they live in a rural country, an urban neighborhood, a sprawling suburb, or a reservation? Tatum credited Erik Erikson, the psychoanalytic theorist who coined the term social identity for introducing the notion that the cultural, social and historical context is the ground in which individual identity embeds". (The Complexity of Identity: "Who Am I?" (Tatum. 2013). Retrieved from <http://www.whiteprivilegeconference.com/resources/05-The-Complexity-of-Identity>)

Tatum noted that the part of our identity that does capture our attention are those that people notice, which reflect back to us. The aspect of personality that is the target of others' attention and subsequently of our own is often that which sets us apart as exceptional. However, Tatum states there are seven categories of "otherness" commonly experience in the United States and each of those categories has a form of oppression associated with them. Tatum defines People as other in the US by race or ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, physical and mental ability. However, Tatum believes our ongoing examination of who we

are in our full humanity and embracing all identities, creates the possibility of building alliances that may ultimately free us all. (About Us | Saint Mary's College. Retrieved from <https://www.stmarys-ca.edu/intercultural-center/about-us>)

literature on the Social Construction of Difference

The work of Allan G. Johnson on the Construction of Difference to know how society labeling can harm the social identity development process of people from the different culture was important to the context of this research.

Allan G. Johnson (2010) brings to focus the idea of the late African- American novelist James Baldwin that "there is no such thing as whiteness, or for that matter, blackness or more generally race. No one is white before he/she came to America, it took generations and a vast amount of coercion before America became a white country (Johnson P.15). Johnson gives clarity to Baldwin statement by noting that "unless one lives in a culture that recognizes such significant differences, they are socially irrelevant and therefore, in a way, do not exist. (Johnson 2010). Johnson also gives an example of a black woman living in Africa and has not experienced white racism. Such a person will not think of herself as black or experience herself as black, nor do the people around her. She will see herself as African but not a black woman. However, coming into the US, a society where privilege is according to race, suddenly she becomes dark because people assign her to a racial category that bears the name, and they treat her differently as a result. Johnson believes that the way people notice and label and think about differences and how they treat other people, therefore, depend entirely on ideas connected in a system's culture. Reducing people to a single dimension of who they are separates and exclude them, mark them as "other" as different from ordinary people and therefore as inferior. Johnson (2010).

Johnson noted that "socially constructed reality is so powerful because people rarely if ever experience it like that. One may think the way the American culture defines something like race or gender is simply the way things are." (Johnson, 2010) Johnson cites a 19th century US law as an example which identified those having any African ancestry as black, the "one-drop rule,"(Johnson 2010) This rule he said, "defines white as a state of absolute purity about black." (Johnson) In contrast, Native Americans status according to Johnson, "required at least one-eighth Native American ancestry to be qualified as Native American (Johnson 2010). Johnson reveals that the construction of this system is the way to make hard people claiming Native American ancestry because Native American could claim financial benefit from the federal government. Designating someone as black, however, took away power and denied the right of making a claim against white, including white families of origin'. (Johnson, 2010. P.15)

Literature on Psychological Needs and the Creation of Culture

Other conceptual approaches as we discussed the cultural impact of acculturation focus on specific psychological needs and their consequences for the establishment of cultural norms. One perspective is the Evidence for Terror Management Theory, propounded by five researchers in a joint work entitled: Evidence for Terror Management Theory: The Effects of Mortality Salience on Reaction to those who Violate or Uphold Culture Value published in 1989. Abraham Rosenblatt, Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon, Deborah Lyon, and Tom Pyszczynski in 1989. Solomon et al. believe that "culture emerged, in part, to serve as a psychological buffer against the anxiety that exists as a results from the awareness of our mortality." According to them, culture acts as a shield because many specific beliefs and behaviors that define cultural worldviews offer symbolic immortality. Religion also provides a buffer against anxiety by providing a set of values and normative standards to judge a person worthwhile and socially

acceptable. The goal is to feel that one is a valuable member of a meaningful culture, which in turn gives a feeling of symbolic immortality that mitigates the fear of finitude.

This line of reasoning leads to two broad hypotheses. One hypothesis is that sense of self-worth buffer against existential anxiety. Consistent with this hypothesis, events that temporarily enhance self-esteem also reduce stress responses to death-related thoughts and imagery. The other according to a Harvard University study on Psychology and Culture theory, is that awareness of one's mortality leads to improve attempts to defend one's own cultural worldview. Dozens of studies have supported this hypothesis in many ways. For instance, a punishment of individuals who violate social rules rewards to those who uphold cultural values, and people's unwillingness to desecrate iconic cultural symbols. More broadly, what is offer in this theory is a psychologically functional explanation for the remarkable persistence of existing cultural norms and values, including those that objectively appear to be trivial or even self-defeating.

Another approach suggests that culture stands in part from an epistemic need for verifiable knowledge, and for certainty and confidence in peoples' perceptions of the world around them. The creation of a shared reality—a common set of beliefs, expectations, and rules for interpreting the world—helps fulfill this need to validate one's construction of reality (Hardin & Higgins 1996).

Classic research on norm formation is consistent with this perspective that attitudes are more likely to be activated into active memory under conditions in which those beliefs are compatible with perceived cultural norms. Individuals are more likely to conform to perceived norms under conditions in which needs are high. While Individuals are more liable to reject deviants from social groups and are quicker to achieve consensus, the need for epistemic

certainty contributes to the formation and persistence of culture. (PSYCHOLOGY AND CULTURE -Harvard University. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic915105.files/psychologyandculture\)Kruglanski](http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic915105.files/psychologyandculture)Kruglanski) .

RESEARCH DESIGN

A non-experimental robust design was used for this research, combined with the flexible design elements of a case study and some of the theoretical frameworks. The purpose was mainly to know to what extent Liberian community organizations are impacting the lives of Liberian immigrant in the United States. Moreover, also how Liberian immigrants are affecting the lives of their host communities. The research mainly focuses on adults who had had their experience in integrating into the United States to compare and contract from the experience of young people undergoing integration. Hearing their experience will serve the research well since they are presently working with individuals who are experiencing what they once experienced, and even more specifically in interviewing mostly individuals connected to the community.

The people interviewed were colleagues of the community with great familiarity. They were aware of the fact that their participation or non-participation in the interview would have no effect on their work nor their relationship with their work. Moreover, they were informed that this project was something done as part of a graduate work. Besides the interview, the research had ten survey questions on the impact of Liberian community organizations on the lives of an immigrant in Philadelphia. The survey questionnaire targeted 20 adults with ten selected females and ten males. The equal gender representation was a means cream created a balance and provided an understanding of the gender perspective of how Liberian view the works of the community organization.

Since the intent of this research was to identify the challenges Liberian youth faced in the process of acculturation in the American culture, and what Liberian community organizations are doing to help in this process, gathering perspective was valuable to enabling the research to understand these challenges. The survey questions were designed to know from the respondents the following: 1. How likely are they to recommend community organizations to the colleague; 2. their overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the institutions; 3. their description of the work of the organization; 4. How well these organizations meet their needs; 5. the rating of the organizations' program implementation; 6. The evaluation of the services in helping Liberians integrate into the US; 7. the responsiveness of the institutions to their concerns; 8. How long the respondent resided in the US; 9. the likelihood of becoming the member of these community group; and 10. Moreover, any comment they would prefer making.

As a guide to how I would conduct this research, I developed and answered some preliminary questions: What data did I want to gather with my interviews? Which voices would I need to make sure to include to collect comprehensive data? What questions would I need to ask to collect quality and comparative data?

My interview questions were structured first, to gain a baseline of each's level of prior knowledge and experience of acculturation. Then I drove the respondents in the comfort of narrating what life was with then during the process of integration, comparisons and details from specific experiences they had, and finally, I broaden our conversation to the current state of socio-economic identity conflict in America and brainstorming ways that community organizations can make the significant impact.

FINDINGS

Immigrants significantly affect the diversity of the population of their host country they bring a broad range of cultural values, norms, and practices that help to make each context unique. Liberians, unlike other African immigrants, assimilate into the American cultures quickly because of most of the similarity between the two culture. Though these similarities are not as many as one would consider, much credit is to the Americo-Liberians who took those values and way of life to Liberia. Liberia Social gatherings, are the same as compared to those of Americans in general and more specifically to African Americans. Liberians holiday are the same to the Americans, including Christmas, Easter, New Year's Day, and Thanksgiving. These holidays are celebrated according to American custom, although occasionally some Liberian and African traditions are incorporated.

Most Liberians came to the United States in the late twentieth century, fleeing civil war and socio- economic collapse in their homeland. Therefore, young people of school ages often had a difficult time catching up with their American counterparts, as newer immigrants are also unfamiliar with American culture and sometimes have difficulty in adapting to their new environment.

Courage, a Liberian student, came to the United States from Liberia in 2010 when he was in his early 20s. He had come on a scholarship to attend University in South Carolina. Language and immersion were a challenge for him as college work was more demanding than the process of adapting to his new society. In the interview with him, Courage recalls his difficulty in adjusting to this new culture:

My initial excitement about the United States of America viewed by most Liberians a heaven on earth quickly faded. There was a feeling of discrimination and alienation because thick Liberian accent spoken. Waking up every morning for school was like going to meet a nightmare. However, because of the scholarship expectation, there was no way to drop out. The reaction from classmates had a psychological effect every day. A death news of my wife gave a break from school. Returning to school and maintaining the grade point was a challenge, so drop out was the option left. There was a relocation to Philadelphia where there was a huge Liberian presence, and could easily relate and breathe fresh air. African students who want to come to the US need to know that discrimination exists in the United States. (C. Siebo, Personal Communication, June 2016)

Author Stephen Chicoine writes about a Liberian family, in his book *A Liberian Family*.

The family, Chicoine said fled to the United States in 1990 escaping the civil war. Chicoine details the family Houston, Texas new life, including problems adjusting to living in a small apartment, with low-wage jobs for the adults, and isolation from their-native culture.

Although such experiences still happen, they are less common today due to the enormous population of Liberians in the United States with share cultural experiences.

A Liberian community worker in his late 60s presently heads a major community organization in Philadelphia. He was a successful business person in Liberia in the 1980s and had graduated from the University of Liberia but was compelled to leave due to the conflict in Liberia. He narrated this:

Coming to America with a business experience and undergraduate education background should have been an added advantage. It was at a time when not much Liberian could be seen on the streets as it is today. There was less family connection here and friends to socialize with were nowhere to be seen. It was a very dull, lonely and homesick experience especially walking the street of the United States. Craving every day to return to Liberia was the only option. At then, the feeling being in Liberia was better than being in the US. It was not until a church group organized a meeting on ways the religious groups could help the Liberia situation that had my participation and further higher mobility. The truth is, without any relationship or a community to support as a Liberian integrate here, it is difficult. (F. Jabateh, Personal Communication, June, 2016)

A Liberian Christian minister who fled the Liberian civil war and settled in Ghana before finally resettling in the United States, tells of his experience as a refugee and new immigrant to the United States. His success story in the US is against the background of his ability to maintain the connection to a church group which helps him to assimilate and integrate into the United States. This pastor currently runs one of the biggest immigrant community churches in Pennsylvania with his church group. He narrated this:

Refugee camp either make you or break you, but God always has a way of preparing people for the life he has for them. My experience as refugee helps me to cope with the early challenges in the United States. I have just come to a place in life realizing that God is in control. Going to the seminary in the US provided a family for me that I left behind which gave me some stability. When we left Liberia, we left everything behind, but we took our faith with us. Because we did not leave our faith behind, our faith produces in us the persons we are today, and the church plays a vital role in my stability. (M. Suah, Personal Communication, June 2016)

One of Liberia's renowned gospel artist shares her experience of resettling in the United States after years of successful achievements in Liberia.

Coming to the US was not my first experience. I have been here on several visiting trips for programs and resource mobilization for my ministry to children in Liberia. I finally decided to settle after a tragic experience of the loss of my kid. Because I was known to most of the Liberian community and churches, there was not much difficulty I experienced. The churches helped me a lot to get me moving. My major experience was economic stability since I could not work due to work authorization paper since I was not a permanent resident. I think relationship built over the years plays a significant role besides the churches to help me move ahead in the United States. (M. Cassell, Personal Communication, June 2016)

What is real from the stories of people interviewed is either how some community organization, like the church, play a role in helping them have stability or relationship they have had with others. The immigrant personal network is critical to achieving successful acculturation. The personal network of friends and family one establishes helps him or her find stability in a new country. There is a saying in Liberia that "who knows you puts you in place and what you

know keeps you in place." (*A Liberian proverb*). From the personal stories of that interview, this was what came forth. Also underneath this saying is the importance of interpersonal communication and how this as well impact acculturation. Communication is essential to acculturation. In research on the kinds of literature acculturation, Paul N. Lakey (2003) disclosed that communication is central to the process of acculturation. Lakey (2003) saw communication as the tool assisting immigrants to satisfy their basic personal and social needs in their new host community. Communication for him facilitates the cultural awareness process and the necessary adaptation in acculturation. Lakey believes the extent at which s person masters the communication process of the host culture; they will become acculturated.

Integration Challenges of Immigrant Teens in the United States

To understand the challenges faced by the young people of Liberia in the process of integration as immigrants in the United States is to understand the context of where, when and how they came to the United States. A Liberian Youth Fragility report done by the United States Aid for International Development (USAID) gathered poverty, ignorance, and disease as three great plagues of the human race that stalk the Liberian people, cripple with the hopes of young minds and make weary those who struggle against the forces that have so tragically distorted a nation. Poverty in its most extreme and dismaying forms afflicts 48% of Liberia's people according to the report. An epidemic of war-fueled ignorance is reflected in the education statistics but given meaning through the eyes of 23-year olds trying to learn the alphabet, in the tears of teenage mothers who did not know the effect of their actions and in the blank faces of traumatized youth who are young only in body. The disease kills and maims in significant numbers – half die before age 45 and the wailing for those youth for whom fragility has become death forms a cacophony of grief. The report reveals that Liberia is a fragile state, and its people

suffer the consequences of war and the frustrations of dreams denied. Some surveys did – the latest of several. All reveal the unsurprising truth that youth do not demand much. In fact, they simply wish for a healthy life – the kind of life that comes with access to food, shelter, education, health care and the prospect of someday earning an income, even a modest one. For many, this is the impossible dream.

For fourteen years between 1989 and 2003 Liberians were subject to daily terror by the hands of rebel leaders who only desire power and control of the country's resources. Mothers were raped, fathers killed, children forcefully conscripted into rebel fighting forces, without consent. Children lost their innocents as they witnessed gruesome killings of their family or others or dead bodies in the hundreds lying in the streets. Zarlee, a Liberian lady in her early 30s who came to the United States on resettlement at the age of 13 from the war narrated this:

"My mother and I were walking distance from Monrovia to Fendel. (An extended campus of the University of Liberia outside Monrovia). It was for safety from the fighting and to find food for survival. We were told to walk in what is known as "single-five" as we approach the rebel checkpoint so that each person will be seen and search by the rebel fighters. Imagine the fear. Seeing a pregnant woman called off the line by rebels arguing among themselves of child's sex the pregnant woman was carrying. To prove who was right or wrong, they took her behind a made up fence. The next thing heard was the sound of the gun, and vividly saw the cloth from the pregnant woman head flying in the air over the wall. 'Oh, they kill her.' Others were saying in fear and quiet tone. There was an incredible moment of fear that covers everyone, and that moment took away the innocent as a 13 years old girl. From that day the trauma of the horrible scene still lingers in seeing a pregnant woman. (Zarlee, Personal Communication, June 2016)

Liberians who were the successful ones to seek refuge in neighboring countries were rare in a broken social setting, only wishing to survive one day at a time. Survival was a universal instinct disregarding society norms. Threaten by these needs, family and individual hopes were for the opportunity to come to the United States or other western countries for better living. There was no healing from the psycho-social trauma experienced by most Liberians during the

civil war. A good education was not affordable due to the breakdown of social institutions. The family that should be the nucleus of the society are apart. With these many problems; Liberian youths settled in the United States.

As an immigrant with minority cultural world-view, it is evident that my personal biases carried in conducting this research. I struggled to check and review objective sources of information, as well as sources from many different viewpoints and perspectives. I have attempted to compile this research in conjunction with my personal experiences and observations with both the subjects interviewed.

As an African male from Liberia, who have not gone through the refugee experience as many other who settled in the United States, I carry my identity components that impacted the way that I view and analyze socio-economic conflict in my society. In addition to my personal identity, my social identity within the community where the research conducted brings into play several biasing factors. However, I took as many precautions as possible to mitigate these biases and the completion of my interviews, as well as interview individuals who know me personally and therefore trust that they can be truthful. For my data analysis, I looked for planned and unplanned themes that arose in my interviews and compared responses across the four different categories of socio-economic identity that I had identified. The majority of my data was qualitative, and therefore subject to interpretation, which I attempted to codify by promoting specific data points such as initial attitudes towards others of lower socio-economic status, shifts in these attitudes, causes for these variations, and generalization of these experiences for wider application. Also, I compared the data points from my interviews with personal observations and experiences, as well as interpretations/applications of current research.

First, to provide a frame through which to view my research, I will detail my descriptions of Susan McCammon work on the Challenges faced by an immigrant teen. McCammon contribution to this field is vital to understanding what the Liberian youths undergo. My findings show many similarities to what McCammon identified along with the American Psychological Association as challenges faced by Youths in integrating into the United States culture, and how these findings inform and compare to my results from the analysis of my interviews.

According to an online article by Susan McCammon, Challenges Faced by Immigrant Teens | Our Everyday Life. (2016), Retrieved from <http://oureverydaylife.com/challenges-faced-immigrant-teens-17281.html> , the American Psychological Association believes recent immigrants face difficulty adjusting in the United States. The reasons they think having to overcome language and cultural barriers and encountering "prejudice and discrimination because they are different" McCammon (2016) this statistic plays into Goffman (1963) input on social stigma where these attributes associated with minority standing and powerlessness. This statistic also includes Liberian immigrant youth who had come to the United States on resettlement program with their parents or relatives. Teens are especially adversely affected because they are trying to discover their identities amidst numerous physical, emotional and psychological changes that mark this stage of life. Immigrant teens may experience hardship in language adjustment, acculturation, socio-economic and psychological challenges in their new lives in America.

Language as a means of Communication

An immigrant who is a teen according to Susan McCammon (2013), "often come from countries that do not speak English." The language barrier is a challenge since they are not able to socialize easily with their peers, and making friends may be hard. Linguistic challenges also

affect the education of immigrants as well. Sometimes they have to spend more time than their colleagues in classes for improvement to enable them to understand their teachers or classmates. According to Amy Morse in her article, "A Look at Immigrant Youth: Prospects and Promising Practices." A teenager who is not able to learn the language quickly may feel lonely and isolated because of limited interaction with peers. Many Liberian youths who share their experience during a youth gathering in Philadelphia in 2014 noted the humiliation received from the American counterparts at school for their thick Liberian accent. Some discontinue school or attended special classes at libraries for English proficiency to catch up. Interestingly, those who have had a satisfactory adjustment tend to poke fun at their parent when they speak in their full Liberian English and mispronounce words. Communication change was the example mentioned of Courage in his early days in South Carolina for school. Courage felt his accent was a challenge in fitting with his classmate. Courage felt taunted by this and discontinued his studies.

Cultural Differences

Cultural difference is one major problem that poses a significant primary challenge to teen integration in the America society. Culture as mention here refers to the norms, attitudes, perceptions, values, beliefs and patterns of behavior that people from the same society share. American culture is widely open, democratic and individualistic. Liberian immigrant comes from collectivist and authoritarian cultures and, would have to adjust to the differences in the culture of the American society to relate to authority figures such as teachers, their parents or older people. Immigrant youths struggle to make a balance between maintaining their original culture at home to satisfy their parents' expectations while struggling to adopt American culture outside the house to fit in with their peers. In the midst of this adjustment, peer pressure plays an

important factor in how much Liberian youths were caught up in drugs, gang related crimes, teenage pregnancy, and other antisocial behaviors that led some of them in jails.

Socio-economic Challenges

Socio-economic challenges are among the factors that slow process of acculturation in the United States. When Liberian families move to the United States, they had to start life all over again. Starting life all over again placed a hardship on the youth who might have been used to a better quality of life, especially when the parents immigrated for political reasons or sought asylum from the war. Gus, a Liberian health practitioner, related his experience from the socio-economic difficulties as an immigrant:

"I was working as a senior health worker in Liberia, in a position compare to expatriates from the foreign country. I had everything to my needs and saw no reason for coming to the United States. However, because my wife won the Diversity Visa Lottery, I was compared to join her after sometimes. A few months after my arrival, accommodation was excellent with my wife relatives but soon got strained due to economic hardship at the time the US economic was in free fall. My background in the health field could not be recognized since my paper was not one from the US. The suburban location crippled the means of finding a job as we were with no access to public transportation. That economic stability alone affected my wife and kid for months until we relocated and found a job near Philadelphia. (A. Doe, Personal Communication, June, 2016)

In cases like these, a young person may also want to join his or her peers in activities like shopping and going to movies and trips but finds that s/he is unable to do so because of family economic stability. In most cases, the youth also needs to work to supplement the family's income, but such job is of minimum wage which adds not much significant economic benefit. Socio-economic challenges may be overwhelming, and the youth might find it hard to cope with the new reality.

Psychological Challenges

Young people who immigrate may also suffer from mental issues when they cannot acculturate into their new environment. The exposure of immigrant teens to different music, fashion, lifestyles, food, communication styles and other forms of cultural expression throw them into culture shock, particularly when their primary cultures are extremely different from the American one. In some cases, young people experience culture shock, and they are unable to make the adjustment, so they become depressed, filled with anxiety, and may even develop destructive habits to cope. Prejudice, discrimination, and sometimes bullying may also cause the young person to become withdrawn and have low self-esteem because young people cannot fit in with their peers, yet this is one of their greatest needs.

Minimization of the Impact of Acculturation

The Liberian community in Philadelphia is one of the fortunate in maintaining a balance in the process of acculturation. Philadelphia host the largest immigrant population of Liberians in the United States and as such they are changing the demography and impacting their host communities. Liberian churches and mosques give access to gathering and practicing the Liberian way of Life. In the churches, Liberian songs are sung, and dances performed. This was the experience shared with me by a Liberian major gospel artist:

My affiliation with the church helped me connect quickly and adjust to this society. Because I am a musician, every church called upon me to perform at their major gathering. At those gatherings, we wore our Liberian attire, sing our traditional gospel songs and eat our traditional food. The church is playing a significant role in keeping Liberians connected to the homeland. (M. Cassell, Personal Communication, June 2016)

Besides the churches, Liberian Businesses are increasingly opening in Southwest Philadelphia with Liberian and African food and commodity secure for purchase. These Liberian stores give access to Liberia to continue cooking Liberian cuisine. What is interestingly happening is the naming of Businesses after major Liberian markets from home. In Southwest Philadelphia, we have the Waterside Market, the Duala Market, and the Red-light Market among others. A Liberian can purchase goods from here and received in Liberia by relatives through connecting stores. Shipping agencies are owned and operated by Liberians to give easy access to Liberians who desire to send things home to their relatives or friends in Liberia. Besides the stores, Liberian restaurants are increasingly opening and providing everyday Liberian dish. A visiting Liberian clergy commented on how a significant similarity exists between Liberia business district of Monrovia and Woodland Avenue in Philadelphia:

The majority of people or businesses that were seen or heard from the start to the end of Woodland Avenue in Philadelphia were Liberians or African Businesses. It was either a Mandingo speaking their language or the Gio or Krahn speaking their language. This scene was exactly the one in Liberia. There is a need to name Woodland Avenue the Liberia Avenue because it is not different. (E. Johnson, Personal Communication, July 2016)

In Liberian homes, there is never an absent of a Liberia soup in the refrigerator. A visitor makes a choice of which soup they want to eat with rice. The soup is either Cassava Leaves, Palm Butter, *Toborgee", or some spicy soup with dried meat, fish, pig feet, beef, and chicken mix with peanut butter awaiting Fufu or what Liberians called GB.

Liberian are insiders in the decision-making process of what goes on in the City Philadelphia or other Pennsylvanian cities like Darby, Upper Darby, East Lansdowne, Levittown, Bristol, Allentown, and Coatesville. Liberian community organizations are formed in these cities to help Liberians in the diaspora as best as possible to relate to each other or access

possibilities for enrichments. Leaders of Liberian Community Organizations meet with other leaders from African community organizations and the Caribbean to discuss the life of the City of Philadelphia and its people. These meetings take place every second Wednesday of the month under the leaders of the Philadelphia Mayor-Commission for African and Caribbean Immigrant Affairs.

Major Liberian Community organizations continue to work to ensure the integration of Liberians with less dominant culture impact. These groups include the African Cultural Alliance of North America, the Liberian Association of Pennsylvania, the Multicultural Community Family Services, the Liberian Ministers Association of the Delaware Valley, Education Care Africa, Women of Substance, the ABC Men's Club, and the Pennsylvania Old-timers Athletic and Sports Association among others. The various ethnic or tribal groups from Liberia have their county or ethnic association as well. There is the Grand Gedeh Association, the Sinoe County Association, the United Nimba Citizens Organization, the Grand Bassa Association, and the United Manding Association of Philadelphia among others. Philadelphia and the surrounding cities in Pennsylvania are host to over 100 Liberian churches and mosques for Liberians to meet for worship. Some of these churches are Faith-Immanuel Lutheran Church, Victory Harvest International Fellowship, and Church of the Living God, Mission Bethel, United Missionary Baptist Church, Agape International Baptist Church, Refuge Baptist Church, Overbrook Assembly of God. Others are Christ International Lutheran Church, United People Church of God, Breath of God Ministries, and International Free Pentecostal Church among others. Two famous mosques with huge Liberian presence in Philadelphia are the 63rd and Grays Street Mosque, and the 65th and Elmwood Street Mosque.

American Public Anxiety about Immigrants

Already immigrants are witnessing the display of public anxiety against immigrants in the United States election. It is either the 2016 nominating candidate of a major United States party proposing to build walls between Mexico and the US or sending Africans back homes to Africa, or banning Muslims from entering the United States or deporting millions of undocumented immigrants at major rallies. This sentiment against immigrant reveals the impact of acculturation is both ways. The massive migration of individuals from foreign countries to another does not only have a bearing on the minority culture migrates but the host culture that accepts the migrants. Such a presence creates public anxiety and if not guided can create tension between the immigrants and members of the host community.

Several factors lead to such anxiety. The factors identified in a 2016 Migration Policy Institute report compiled by Demetrios G. Papademetriou and Natalia Bogdan need careful studies. The factors included the rapid pace of social change taken place due to the presence of immigrants, the competition for scarce resources, the threat to public value or norms, crime and security, and lack of control and loss of confidence government and elites. Papademetriou and Bogdan (2016) Understanding and Addressing Public Anxiety about immigrant, Retrieved from <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/understanding-and-addressing-public-anxiety-about-immigration>.

An interesting point to note regarding the public anxiety about immigrants especially those from Africa, there was this believe that by settling in Philadelphia with such a huge presence of African American, assimilation will be easy for Liberians and other African. On the contrary, a shared complexion does not equal a shared culture, nor does it guarantee friendship. There exist a serious chasm between Africans and African-American though they are blacks in

general. Most adults interviewed during this research noted that the good reception Liberian children received from classmates in school come more from white classmates than African-Americans. With this observation, an African-American colleague was chosen for an interview about their perception of black from Africa. “ Many of us African Americans do harbor much hostility towards Africans, says Frank.” Many Africans have no idea what our ancestors endured during slavery.” “If an African-American sees a White American preferring you over him, they get upset. They feel the system gives Africans better treatment over them”.

EVALUATION: SURVEY ANALYSIS

A survey was conducted to gather data for this research to know to what extent Liberian community Organizations are impacting the lives of Liberian immigrants. The objective of the survey was to receive feedback from community members on the impact of Liberian community Organization on the lives of Liberian immigrant. The survey participants were 20 Liberians and 10 of each sex, to enable balanced gender perspective. The questions of the survey were designed to know the following: 1. How likely are they to recommend community organizations to a colleague; 2.their overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the institutions; 3. their description of the work of the organization; 4. how well these organizations meet their needs; 5. the rating of the organizations' program implementation; 6. The evaluation of the services in helping Liberians integrate into the US; 7. the responsiveness of the institutions to their concerns; 8. How long the respondent resided in the US; 9. the likelihood of becoming the member of these community organization; and 10. Any comment they would prefer to make.

As to how likely Liberian immigrants to recommend community organizations to their colleague, 85% of the respondent said likely or extremely likely while 15% did not see it likely. As to the question of their overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the community

organizations, 70% felt satisfied while 30% felt dissatisfied. As to the question of their description of the work of the organization, 75% saw it useful and reliable while 25% saw it ineffective, poor quality and unreliable. As of the question of how well these organizations meet the needs of the people, 50% saw it extremely well and very well while 50% saw it somehow, not so well and not at all.

As to the question of the rating of the quality of the organizations' program implementation, 45% saw it very high quality, and high quality, 35% saw it neither high nor low, while 20% saw it as low quality and very cheap quality. As to the question of the rating of the services in helping Liberians integrate into the US 15% saw it as above average and excellent, 55% saw it as average, while 30% rate it as below average or poor. As to the question of how responsive the organization has been to their concerns 75% responded very responsive and extremely responsive while 25% answered somehow responsive, not so responsive, and not at all sensitive. As to how long the respondent resided in the US, 90% have lived for over three years while 10% have been here less than two years. As to the question of the likelihood of becoming the member of these community organization, 80% responded extremely likely and very likely 15% responded somehow likely, while 5% responded not at all likely.

As to the space provided for any comment respondents would prefer making, more than half of the respondents expressed the lack of unity among Liberians and called for the need for unity among Liberian. This response allows research to see through the spectrum of collectivism vs. individualism. More to this, respondents believe the county, tribal or ethnic organizations are more organized, very responsive and useful than the community groups. The response also allows examination of the framework that deals with ethnicity and nationalism, what should be more preferred by Liberians in the diaspora. Others emphasized the need for community

organizations to be more proactive in activities that promote Liberian cultural heritage. With this, the paper examines acculturation vs. enculturation and link it to the need stressed by Liberians.

Collectivism vs. Individualism

As noted in the survey response, more than half respondent believe unity does not exist in the Liberian community, and there is a need for national integration. This saying revealed the impact of acculturation on Liberian immigrants. The facts that the more Liberians stay and adapt to the American way of life, they become more individualistic than collectivist and see no relevance of community organizations. As noted by S. A. Tizmizi (2008) in his writing on the Impact of Culture in Multicultural Team, in individualistic cultures, individual needs, preferences, and desires receive more attention than common needs. Collectivism focuses on the needs of everyone in the society according to a study on Cross-Cultural Difference in Coping, Connectedness, and Psychological Distress.(P.31) A Liberian community organization is a communal effort to foster the culture of collectivism that is part of who Liberians are. There is a significant difference between the American society and the Liberian society. As such, if Liberians go through a process of adapting to the American culture, they become more individualistic with less involvement in community action. The emphasized in the planning of community organization are strategies that will promote collectivism. Collectivism is a unique quality that distinguishes Liberians, and the people hold dearly the philosophy that the village raises a child.

Nationalism vs. Ethnicism

The survey also revealed that people are more attached to their ethnic or tribal organizations in the Liberian community than Liberian community organizations that seek to work for all Liberians. According to the framework for Ethnic Conflict Management, as propounded by Robert Debie (2003) in the book *Conflict Resolution and Peace Education in Africa* (p.163), high ethnic diversity may lead to increased civil strife, political instability, and destructive competition for rents by ethnic factions. Dible (2003) believe countries characterized by people who identify primarily with the values and interest of competing ethnic groups are at a distinct disadvantage compared with cultures whose people share national values and objectives. Racial or tribal groups' formation in the diaspora is a creative force that provides assistance to members of these groups when in need, and provide a sense of identity and purpose. However, ethnicity can be a highly destructive force as well if competition is at the core of their existence. Serious tension among people from the same country surfaces when ethnic groups begin to compete for relevance over the other, resource mobilization for their exclusive benefit, cultural survival over the other, or increase in the physical presence of one group over the other in their host communities.

The bottom line is ethnic groups will tend to work with community organizations that have a collective focus and cooperate with other ethnic groups within the given society as long as they feel that they are equality benefitting and feel acceptable. If there exist a big difference among the group on how they feel accepted and enjoying the benefit of their association, the stronger the incentive for the losing ethnic group to look out for its interest rather than cooperate with the other groups. In the extreme case where the lost ethnic groups can do better on its own,

it may decide to stay on its own with less support given to community organization with national agenda.

Acculturation vs. Enculturation

Liberians as a people bring together a unique way of life, custom, values, and norms practice for a century and even envied by West African neighbors. These valuable way of life formed through the assimilation of the various ethnic groups and the Americo-Liberian who return as freed slaves from the United States. With the influx of Liberians to the United States as an immigrant, refugees, asylum seekers and transforming to permanent residents in the United States, acculturation will have a significant impact in changing the way of life of the people. However, the maintenance of Liberian culture in the process is as important so that the devaluation of Liberian indigenous culture would not be a consequence of acculturation. To understand this transition among Liberians, the construct of acculturation and enculturation can be useful. Redfield et al. (1936) first defined acculturation as a phenomenon which according to the *Theories and Research on Acculturation and Enculturation*, results when groups of individuals sharing different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture pattern of either or both groups". (P.149)

Closely related to the construct of acculturation according to study from the *Theories and Research on Acculturation and Enculturation*, is the concept of enculturation. Herskovits (1948) defines enculturation as "the process of socialization into and maintenance of the norms of one's indigenous culture, including its salient ideas, concepts, and values." This characterization of culture support can best describe the theLiberian situation. There are cultural values and customs unique to Liberians and in no way can these be abandoned. The language Liberians speak distinctively unique and easily identifiable to librarians. Liberian tradition, customs, and beliefs

passed down by the various ethnic groups and interwoven with the Americo-Liberian way of life are just unique and shared to all Liberians. Moreover, Liberians culture is more collectivism than individualism. This collectivism links to the ideology that it takes the village to raise a child. In the midst of the impact of acculturation due to migration to the United States, enculturation should be key to Liberian maintaining their self-identity and values to pass down to children born to Liberian families in the US

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The work with the Liberian community over the last five years gave an insight into the many challenges the Liberian community is facing. Moreover, the research gave a deeper sense of the intricacy that lies beneath these difficulties. The contextual description of this paper discussed the various problems Liberians were going through as a people since the foundation of the country. These challenges that include accepting a national identity, ethnic divide, among others cannot be under-carpeted and hope that migration and resettlement in the United States will solve them. The “country vs. Congo” divide still exist among Liberians on the one hand, and division among the tribal group on the contrary. These gaps continue to challenge the process of instilling in Liberian a sense of national identity. Members of ethnic groups pay more allegiance to their particular ethnic group than their loyalty to their country. As a consequence, working together as Liberians for the common good of Liberia is challenging with a greater degree of interethnic accommodation and national integration constituting the critical problem facing Liberians in the diaspora.

Kelman (1997) expressed it precisely what national identity means and not the contrary. Kelman said insofar as a group of people sees the acquisition of national identity comes about when people sees “themselves as having a unique, distinctive entity, with a tied to a shared value over time, to a bond across geographical distance, and to the rights of various forms of self-expression.” (Kelman. 1997, P.17) International Journal of Information Research and Review. (Igwe and Onuegbu. 2015). Retrieved from <http://www.ijirr.com/sites/default/files/issues/0406.pdf>. National identity implies an individual sense of belonging to one nation states. The identity that Liberians have is not a sudden characterization but one that has existed for a century and a half. Liberians need to embrace it and work together for the common good of the country. To emphasize tribal identity over national identity is an effort without self-realization that national identity is a property of every Liberian. National identity is the Liberian definition of itself as a group”. Migration to the United States should be an opportunity for socio-economic empowerment of Liberians and advancement in the way of life that shouldn’t disadvantage Liberians indigenous culture. The sense of nationalism is possible if Liberian see themselves as a collective unit in a foreign land. There is no way to escape the social stigma as a result of skin color or accented speech as Liberians.

While the challenges of acculturation are inescapable, community organizations need to do more to ensure stability and minimize the impact it brings on Liberians. Especially the youth population who are the most vulnerable. Already mentioned are the language, cultural, social-economic and psychological challenges these youth faced in their everyday encounter with their peers at school or in their host communities. There is a need for Liberian organizations working in Philadelphia to be more proactive in their job with Liberian immigrants. The achievements published annually are faithful to these organizations' workings, but more needs to be done to

stop the wave of unguided integration. Stopping the unguided wave of integration is achievable especially if these organizations develop a comprehensive youth program that will include mentorship to help minimize the impact of acculturation of Liberian immigrant youth.

This research was limited to finding out all of the problems the Liberian immigrant community faced with in the process of acculturation in the United States. There is a need for further research to expand upon this work. Areas for further study should include the impact of the return of Liberians to their homeland, the feasibility of dual citizenship and its impacts on Liberian indigenous culture. Also of interest is the idea of national identity, does Liberia have a national identity after many social and cultural transitions?

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APPENDIX

I. A TLC Africa Statistics on Liberians in the US from 1990-2003

Liberians Admitted into the US under various classifications	Estimates of the number of Liberians in the US, using <i>Immigration value for number of Refugees</i>	Estimates of the number of Liberians in the US, using <i>UNHCR value for number of Refugees</i>
Nonimmigrant Admitted	41,631	41,631
Immigrants Admitted	27,197	27,197
Visitor	14,000	14,000
Refugees Arrival in the US	16,904*	27,076*
Refugee-Status Applications Approved	981	981
Immigrants-Orphans Adopted by US Citizens	22	22
Deportable Aliens Located by Status at Entry *	102	102
Aliens Removed by Deportation	-420	-420
Total number	99,607	110,589

*UNHCR reports according to TLC researcher Ciata Victor, that by September 2003, 27,075 refugees had arrived in the United States, This statistic is 11,251 more than the 16,904 number tallied using numbers from 2003, Immigration Year Book. If the number of refugees adjusted to UNHCR number, Ciata Victor believes the total number of Liberians in the US by 2003 estimates at 110,589.(TLC Africa - Statistics on Liberians in the US. (Victor.2004.). Retrieved from http://www.tlcafrica.com/Liberian_statistics1.htm)

II. Survey Question

The Impact of Liberian Community Organizations on the Lives of Liberian Immigrants in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

1. How likely is it that you would recommend Liberian community organizations to a friend or colleague?

Not at all likely

Extremely likely

<input checked="" type="radio"/> -0	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 10
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2. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with Liberian community organizations in Philadelphia?

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Somewhat disappointed
- Very dissatisfied

3. Which of the following words would you use to describe the workings of Liberian community organizations? Select all that apply.

- Reliable
- Useful
- Ineffective
- Poor quality
- Unreliable

4. How well do Liberian community organizations meet your needs?

- Extremely well
- Very well
- Somewhat well
- Not so well
- Not at all well

5. How would you rate the quality of the programs implemented by Liberian community organizations?

- Very high quality
- High quality
- Neither high nor low quality
- Low quality

Very low quality

6. How would you rate the services of Liberian community agencies in helping Liberians integrate into local communities in the United States?

Excellent

Above average

Average

Below average

Poor

7. How responsive have Liberian community organizations been to your concerns?

Extremely sensitive

Very responsive

Somewhat sensitive

Not so responsive

Not at all responsive

Not applicable

8. How long have you been residing in the United States?

Less than six months

Six months to a year

1 - 2 years

3 or more years

9. How likely will you become a member of any Liberian community organizations?

Extremely likely

Very likely

Somewhat likely

Not so likely

Not at all likely

10. Do you have any other comments, questions, or concerns?

III. Capstone Research Question

Research Project: The Role of Liberian Organizations in the Integration of Liberian Youth: A Case Study of the Liberian Community Based Organizations in Philadelphia

The intent of this research is to identify the challenges Liberian youth faced in the process of acculturation in the American culture, and what Liberian community organizations are doing to help in this process. Your personal perspective is valuable to enabling the research to understand these challenges. Acculturation is a process of cultural change and psychological change that results following the meeting between cultures. The following questions will help the research to gather these challenges and means that will help these youth.

Research Questions

Thanks for participating in this research project. To start with, for the first question, I would like to ask you where you were, what your life was like when you arrived in the United States

Can you tell me more about what that was? Where did you live at that time?

1. What was your relationship with your family, your friends?
2. Were you working, if so, what was your job?
3. What was happening during that time, as you came into the United States?
4. Can you say more about that experience?
5. Were there any avenues of support that you pursued which helped in any way?
6. Were there any avenues of support that did not help or maybe even caused more problems? What happened?
7. When you newly arrive in the United States, what were your interactions like with others who were already here – people walking down the street, family members, friends, people in school, people at work (if relevant)?
8. In your opinion, in general, what do us as individuals, and we as a society, think about the challenges faced by Liberian youth in acculturation in the United States?
9. What do you say most people think causes those challenges?
10. Do you believe most people just see these challenges as something that is part of the way the Liberians are or do you say most people see these challenges as something we can prevent?
11. Do most people think it is an individual problem, or a society problem, or both?

(This can come from your experience of how you felt people viewed you personally when you came to the United States, or your general thoughts and feelings about it, or perhaps thoughts or opinions held by your family or friends back home)

12. Did you have a view about acculturation before you experienced it yourself
13. If so, what did you think about acculturation, and did your opinion change after having the experience?
14. Before you experienced acculturation, do you remember ever interacting with a Liberian who had acculturated in the United States Society, What did you think of that person?

15. Looking back, would your opinion of that person change at all now? Do you still think that?
16. Can you pinpoint why your opinion changed?
17. Can you pinpoint why your opinion did not change?
18. In your opinion, what are things that we as a society and as individuals are currently doing about the challenges being faced by Liberian youth in the diaspora?
19. What are community-based organizations doing already that helps in a significant way?
20. What are groups doing that does not help, or perhaps causes more problems? What are we doing as a society?
21. What are individuals doing?
22. What are your thoughts on things we could do as community-based organizations, society, or individuals that we are not already doing in the Liberian community in America that would help?
23. Can you tell more about what that would look?
24. What would the specifics of that be?
25. How do you think that would affect the acculturation of youth? Would that be something that would work anywhere?
26. What other things would have to be in place to make that happen?