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## A Multimodal Literacy Exploration: Lived Experiences of Haitian Immigrant Adolescent Girls in The Bahamas

Natasha Swann  
*University of South Florida*

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A Multimodal Literacy Exploration: Lived Experiences of  
Haitian Immigrant Adolescent Girls in The Bahamas

by

Natasha Swann

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction  
with a concentration in Literacy Studies  
Department of Language, Literacy, Ed.D., Exceptional Education, and Physical Education  
College of Education  
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Jenifer Jasinski Schneider, Ph. D.  
Sarah Kiefer, Ph. D.  
Janet Richards, Ph. D.  
Brenda Walker, Ph. D.

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Keywords: acculturation, youth, writing, photography, tableaux

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Pernell Eloise Jones, who died October 29, 2018, amid my Ph.D. journey. She understood the power and influence of education and encouraged me to pursue it with great tenacity.

## **Acknowledgements**

I acknowledge, Jesus Christ as the head of my life. I uphold His word in Jeremiah 29:11, ““For I know the plans I have for you, ‘declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” My pursuit of this dissertation is the plan I have placed in God’s hands. I knew and I know this is His doing.

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## **Abstract**

As the geographic landscape of our world increasingly changes, a constant migration is occurring, with people seeking refuge and asylum. Many of those seeking a better way of life are children and adolescents. It is important not only to consider and accommodate how children and adolescents develop and grow, but how they do so in a country that is not their home and with language and literacy practices that are often new to them. Adjusting and acculturating into host countries might compound issues youth experience during child and adolescence development. This study provided a space and a platform for immigrant adolescents to describe and communicate their lived experiences of acculturation. When exposed to literacy events that mirrored their lives and included relatable experiences, the research participants saw themselves as “part of the larger human experience” (Christ & Sharma, 2018, p. 56). Supported by the theory of multimodal literacy practices, in this exploratory-descriptive study I explored how Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas described their lived experiences of acculturation. In semi-structured interviews and focus groups, study participants examined their experiences, integrating multiple modes of writing, photography, and tableaux. The findings suggest that Haitian immigrant adolescents’ integration of multimodal literacy provided opportunities for them to describe and communicate their lived experiences.

## Preface

### My Positionality as the Researcher

*I squeezed the hand of my three-year old as we raced to the car rental line at Orlando International Airport. We navigated clumsily through the crowd, leaving behind, “my apologies, excuse ‘mes’ and thank ‘yous’ like bread crumbs as we rushed through to get to our destination. Small groups of people huddled together, some waiting in lines, others waiting at kiosks to purchase souvenirs, and some waiting in a line to get to the rest room. We hurriedly walked toward the counter reaching in our bags to take out identification and credit cards. I did not want to let my little girl’s hand go. I thought she would wonder off and get lost amidst the crowd, but she stood by me closely; a stuffed animal, “Avery,” tucked under her arm as she watched the crowds of people with her inquisitive eyes. She did not ask any questions then, but I knew it would come later. My other daughter, four-year-old, Ki, whispered in my mother’s ear about the tantalizing smell of warm pretzels; what she referred to as bread. Her whisper was not so much of a whisper rather a loud hissing sound it seemed. I could hear her questioning my mother about a piggy bank and the money she saved to buy American food. I rested my bag on the counter, shifted tirelessly from one leg to the other. The baby I carried was heavy and rested gently on my pelvic bone. She did not move or stir, but slept peacefully. I tried to take it all in, but the mere thought of it all overwhelmed me.*

In 2015, my family and I consisting of my husband, mother and my two young daughters traveled from New Providence, Bahamas to the United States. I had been accepted to the University of South Florida to pursue a doctoral degree. A year prior to our arrival to the US,

my husband and I made the calculated decision that I would further my education and our children would go with me. They were too little to stay in The Bahamas with my husband because his hours at work were unpredictable and dynamic. He in turn would stay in The Bahamas to support us financially. I admit, the decision was made with tear-stained cheeks, head nods of approval and hugs of blessings. We knew that we did not have a choice, but to pursue this degree for the benefit of our children. The leading tertiary institution in The Bahamas did not offer the degree, nor were there many universities that offered it online. Further, I was awarded with an Organization of American States (OAS) scholarship to pursue this particular degree because of the need for literacy educators and scholars in my country. The OAS is a regional organization that brings together more than 30 independent states of the Americas, where the Bahamas is a member. Among its multi purposes, one of the objectives of the OAS is to provide attractive and competitive scholarships for its members. The University of South Florida is a part of the consortium of universities of the OAS scholarships; therefore, it was a fine option for the intent and purpose of my studies.

My children and I had many conversations about this relocation. I tried to talk to them about the challenge of leaving the comfort of their home, school and family to find new comforts in another country if only for a few years. They understood as best they could, at four and three-years old. I wanted them to be aware of this move and to have a hand in the decision. They would often jump gleefully at the thought of attending a new school and making new friends. It seemed that they would adjust to living abroad more easily than I anticipated. However, the reality of acculturating into a new country did not manifest until my children and I started to have bittersweet moments.

As an international student from The Bahamas, living in the US with my three little girls, my children and I found ourselves vacillating in and out of transnational and cultural spaces (Rubinstein-Avila, 2007). It was not easy adjusting and at times, it was stressful. Many things were different in the US, from driving on the right side of the road to driving right-handed vehicles. Even dropping the children to school was different if we opted to walk them to their classes, which we did each day. Our drivers' licenses had to be scanned and processed and we were issued nametags in order to walk our children to class. The measures were advantageous and beneficial to ensure that children were safe. The food stores were different and sold items I was not accustomed to eating. There was more of a variety of restaurants to choose from where my family and I found ourselves in an eatery utopian of sorts, eating Indian, Ethiopian and Mediterranean dishes as often as we could. We thoroughly enjoyed every aspect of the differences.

However, while I understood the cliché 'when in Rome...' I wrestled with the fact that I am not Italian, but rather Bahamian and though I spoke English, I preferred and mastered my Bahamian dialect. Although I ate some of the same dishes, my own dishes were cooked differently. And though I danced to beat of some of the drums of my host country, I also danced to the beat of rack and scrape, a Bahamian genre of music.

I tried to capture these moments of the two cultures intertwined as one if only for short periods of time. I had bittersweet moment of adjusting as I experienced acculturative stress that at times made me feel alone and isolated often desiring a sense of belonging (Nicolas & Smith, 2013). There were moments when I became acutely aware that I was black, foreign, and female and in some ways a single mother in the US. There were times when I sensed the subtle micro racial aggression and other occasions when I experienced overt racism that left me speechless. I

tried my best to distract, hide and shelter my children from this. I would do a good job until the day one of my daughters came home in tears, broken and hurt because one of her friends told her she no longer wanted to play with her because she was black. Through tears, my daughter, who was five at the time, said, “She doesn’t even know her colors, I am a dark amber!” We laughed that day, but I could not forget how those words hurt her tender heart.

However, as time progressed during my tenure in the US, I had sweet moments where I had the support of fierce and mighty professors and colleagues who not only accepted me, but encouraged me to share my culture, my dialect, my blackness, my children, my life with them to help me to grow, learn, and live. I will never forget the time my classmates and I were tasked with writing fictional pieces after reading several young adult novels. I wrote a story about a twelve-year-old girl growing up in the ‘ghetto,’ an impoverished neighborhood in the city of Nassau in The Bahamas. I distinctly remember reading a portion of this prose to my classmates. Within the story, the dialogue between this girl and her sister were told in Bahamian vernacular. I read it with ease in my dialect. When I was done, my professor looked at me and told me to publish my story and to keep the Bahamian dialect in it. Admittedly, I was taken aback thinking my story was mediocre and the language in which it was written would be not accepted or even appreciated. My professor gave a short, but inspiring talk with us encouraging us to tell our truths, to find a safe space in the art of literacy to explore, to learn, to grow and to be, no matter what the world might think. It was then and there that I realized that she and my classmates had made a home for me in their hearts—all situated within the United States. I embraced every opportunity to share my lived experiences with my cohort. It made me feel alive and even though I still missed home, the sting of isolation was not so evident.

I began to long for the same experiences for my three girls as well. The first experience occurred when my oldest girl engaged in a Social Studies lesson at her school right before the Christmas break. This lesson revolved around the old classic story, *The Gingerbread Man* written by Joseph Jacobs. The teacher required the children's family members from all over the US and the world to write emails, letters, and postcards of the various sightings of the Gingerbread Man. I took the initiative and ran with it asking my family members from all over the Bahamian Islands to write about their sightings of the Gingerbread Man in their various homes and work places. I then sent the information to my daughter's teacher. Using a map of the world, the teacher told her students where the Gingerbread Man was seen from a home in Houston Texas, to a small city in China. This teacher took the time to discuss each sighting, for example, when the Gingerbread Man was seen in Nassau, Bahamas, the teacher engaged my daughter in a discussion about her home country, foods we ate and how we celebrated Christmas. She even invited my daughter to make a presentation about Junkanoo, a cultural parade in The Bahamas. It was then that I realized this teacher provided a space for my daughter to discuss her culture and lived experiences. She used this literacy activity as a vehicle to learn about my daughter and The Bahamas. In truth, the teacher gave each child an opportunity to discuss, describe and explain these types of experiences in a safe environment.

The Gingerbread Man teaching experience made me think about my own role as a Bahamian teacher. I questioned my previous interactions with students and I wondered if I supported my own students whose culture and race differed from my own. Was I accepting like my professors? I wanted to learn how foreign adolescents weathered their own experiences of adjusting to a country that was not their own. I wanted to know their thoughts, their beliefs, their lived experiences and if, perhaps by chance, were they given a safe space to speak freely, to live



without discrimination and to learn without stigmatization. Hence this became the catalyst of my study.

Drawing on my own experiences as an international student who was pursuing further education in a foreign country, I sought to examine the lived experiences of adjustment and acculturation of the youth participants in my study. I identified with their feelings, attitudes and opinions. I opted to learn more about the accommodation of foreign students and how they are given or not given the opportunity to share their lives with others whether in a school, work or worship setting. I conducted this study to investigate how Haitian immigrant adolescents were given a safe space to describe, explain and explore their experiences.

To this end, as a literacy educator in pursuit of a doctoral degree, I sought to explore how literacy might provide the necessary affordances for immigrant adolescents to further understand their lived experiences.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The World Migration Report (WMR) estimated 272 million migrants in 2019 (WMR, 2020), which equates to 3.5% of the world's population. Individuals leave their homes and countries predominately for economic reasons, as well as education and family-related matters. In more extreme cases, political unrest, poverty, natural disasters, and violence cause people to seek refuge in other countries. The United States has been the main destination for migrants since the 1970s (WMR, 2019). Similarly, for persons living in the Caribbean, migration has become a “central feature” (Bakker et al., 2009). The issue includes seasonal migrations, persons migrating within their own countries, and those migrating to other countries (Bakker et al., 2009). Throughout the Caribbean countries, including The Bahamas, migration has been established as a “widely accepted aspect” (Tinker, 2011, p. 167) of life. Fielding et al. (2008) reported that Caribbean migrants have been travelling to other Caribbean islands, the Americas, and Great Britain since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Swann (2014) described migration as simply a way of life for many in the region.

In countries like Haiti, people who have experienced years of extreme political dictatorship, economic instability, and a series of natural disasters have found homes in countries like the United States, Canada, The Bahamas, and other Caribbean countries (Olsen-Medina & Batalova, 2020). Many migrating to The Bahamas from Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago,

Barbados, Turks and Caicos, Cuba, and other countries are searching for a better way of life with the intent to avoid the oppression of their home countries (Fielding et al., 2008).

Many Haitians have migrated to The Bahamas because of its close proximity to Haiti, seeking either employment there or wanting to use The Bahamas as a transition before relocating to the United States. Children and adolescents under the age of 18 are among those who have migrated from Haiti and settled in The Bahamas (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2012). Many of these children and adolescents left their countries to enter into new countries by themselves, making this population of migrants especially vulnerable (Stewart, 2013). The impact on migration for children and adolescents can impede their psychosocial and emotional well-being. Bakker et al. (2009) argued that children who migrate face many challenges including depression, low self-esteem, behavioral issues, and academic challenges. Furthermore, children who migrate struggle with acceptance and belonging (Stewart, 2013). Among the many challenges immigrant children and adolescents face is the ideology of adapting to a new country, vacillating between the cultures of their home country and host country. Resultant risk factors include intermittent school attendance, lack of social networking, and challenges with language skills (Veum et al., 2020).

It is important to create spaces for immigrant children to explore, discuss, and describe their experiences as they grow, develop, and learn more about themselves. Researchers like Marhir and Sablo (1996), Price-Dennis et al. (2017), and Stewart (2015) advocated for the inclusion of culture and lived experiences, an event in an individual's life that has some value or meaning (Ranney et al., 2020). Christ and Sharma (2018) asserted that when children are exposed to literacy events that "mirror" their lives or that include their lives, they see themselves

as a “part of the larger human experience” (p. 56). Understanding immigrant children and adolescents’ experiences is necessary for those engaged in research with immigrant populations.

### **Problem Statement**

Foreign nationals account for 17.39% of the population of The Bahamas (Ministry of Education Research & Planning Committee [MOERPC], 2015). The Ministry also indicated that of the 64,874 students enrolled in public and private schools in The Bahamas in 2015, 0.02% Trinidadian, 0.04% Turks and Caicos Islands, 0.05% Cuban, 0.2% Barbadian, 0.29% Guyanese, 1.50% Jamaican, 2.25% other countries, 9.73% Haitian and 86.09% are Bahamian. Hence, Haitian nationals are the leading population of immigrants in The Bahamas.

Consequently, the inpouring of Haitian immigrants, many of whom are school age children under the age of 18 (IOM, 2015), have resulted in a complicated dilemma for Bahamian teachers (and teachers in many areas affected by issues of migration): teaching students of different descents, cultures, languages, and backgrounds. Educators need to be adequately prepared to effectively and equitably support immigrant students’ holistic learning (Bottiani et al., 2017). Considerations should be made to the acculturation factors that contribute to how immigrants learn and develop. Veum et al. (2020) also noted that while immigrant adolescents are developing, they are also exposed to additional challenges related to acculturation such as inconsistency in school attendance, challenges contacting socially and difficulties with speaking and communicating in the language of the host country..

Hall-Campbell (2011) posited that the dominant cultural discourse of education rests heavily on Bahamian culture and way of life and might not necessarily include the cultures of other countries. Similarly, Carter (2012) stated that disregard of the lived experiences of immigrants might impede their learning experience, and result in low self-esteem, suboptimal

academic outcomes, and high rates of crime and poverty. Wearmouth (2017) stated that educators need to support students from diverse backgrounds and align with pedagogies that are “responsive to and respectful of how students are culturally situated” (p. 2), with the hope that students excel holistically. Without an integrative curriculum that includes learning opportunities responsive and relevant to students’ lives, a crisis will continue for those whose nationalities differ from their host country (Wearmouth, 2017).

An extensive look at the lived experiences of immigrant adolescents offers the potential to provide a platform where immigrant adolescent can explore who they are and how their lived experiences of acculturation might shape how they see themselves in a country that is not their own. Hall-Campbell (2011) recommended the need to examine social justice and the nonalignment of immigrant students’ lived experiences within the Bahamian context. She argued these types of explorations might have implications for how Bahamian teachers interpret the impact of cultures (and lived experiences) of immigrant students. Further, many immigrant girls are vulnerable when acclimating to host countries because many are unaccompanied by adults they know—and many are being exploited (Stewart, 2013). My current study raises an awareness of Haitian-immigrant girls’ life-stories and adds to this body of literature.

During this study, I actively engaged adolescents during a critical stage of development, self-discovery, and exploration (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1996) where they were consistently negotiating their participation as they interacted with others, the environment, and themselves (Flum & Kaplan, 2012). This stage of development is also an ideal opportunity in an adolescent’s life to help them create a voice in the integration of their cultural and lived experiences within their own learning and identity.

In this study, I integrated multimodal literacy practices as a platform that allowed immigrant adolescent girls to represent their lived experiences of acculturation. These multimodal literacy practices included the use of writing (Danzak, 2011), photographs (Wiseman et al., 2016) and tableaux (Branscombe & Schneider, 2013); all detailed in Chapter 2.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to use multiple modes of literacy to explore and describe Haitian immigrant adolescent girls' lived experiences, specifically acculturation. To understand these complex and multi-layered lived experiences, I used three inter-related sub-goals: (a) to explore and describe Haitian immigrant adolescent girls' migration stories and acculturation into The Bahamas, (b) to describe the acculturation process of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls who live in The Bahamas, who participate in the Bahamian educational system, and live within the Bahamian community, and (c) to determine how the Haitian immigrant adolescent girls constructed their identities.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching research question that guided this study follows:

*What are the lived experiences of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas as expressed through the multimodal literacy practices of writing, tableaux, and photography?*

The following sub-questions were also valuable to this research:

- How do Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas describe their acculturation process through the multimodal literacy practices of writing, tableaux, and photography?

- How do Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas perceive their identity construction through the multimodal literacy practices of writing, photography, and tableaux?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to the literature of immigrant students' lived experiences of migration, acculturation, life-experiences, and literacies. The study supports the ideology of providing a space for immigrant adolescents to explore, describe, and communicate their lived experiences of acculturation through multimodal literacy practices. The research literature suggests the inclusion of academic content and opportunities that mirror the lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and identities of immigrant students (Christ & Sharma, 2013; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Stewart, 2012; Wearmouth, 2017). Likewise, within The Bahamas, providing equitable opportunities for the learning of all children and youth, including immigrant children and youth and their lived experiences, is needed; and would help researchers and practitioners value how these children are accommodated while also helping them garner voices for themselves.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The most suitable approach for this study was an exploratory-descriptive qualitative research. Qualitative research captures the essence of people's stories and seeks to gain an in-depth perception of their experiences and values (Creswell, 2000). For example, Patton (2015) explained that to know how much a child can read, they should be given a reading test; however, to know how meaningful that reading is to the child, they should be invited to converse and tell their stories. Similarly, in this study, I integrated multimodal literacy practices while seeking to understand Haitian immigrant adolescent girls as they shared their experiences of life in The

Bahamas. Participants were invited to share in in-depth individualized semi-structured interviews, focus groups interviews, while utilizing multimodal literacy practices like writing, photography, and tableaux. Chapter 3 provides additional information on the study's methods and design.

### **Definition of Terms**

This study involved constructs defined within the definition of terms. All concepts are expanded upon in Chapter 2. However, for this introduction, the following terms are defined in alphabetical order to familiarize the reader with the nature of this research.

*Adolescence:* Adolescence is a time of transition, ongoing negotiations, and biological, cognitive, neurological, moral, and psychosocial development (Casey & Anfara, 2014; Hollenstien & Lougheed, 2013). Steinberg and Morris (2001) identified three stages of adolescent development: early adolescence (10-14 years), middle adolescence (15-17), and late adolescence (18-21).

*Acculturation:* Acculturation is a deliberate and reflective vacillation in and between two cultural differences. (Blodgett et al., 2014; Lum & Wade, 2016).

*Cultural competence:* Cultural competence is the ability to accommodate individuals from diverse backgrounds, enabling them to glean a better understanding and appreciation of their own cultures as well as those of other cultures (Kurtz-Costez, 2017).

*Diaspora:* Diaspora is a group of individuals who have spread from one original country to another (Belton, 2010).

*Identity:* Identity is an interplay between the individual and society. Erikson postulated eight stages of psychosocial development orientation. Inclusive of these eight stages, Erikson's stage of identity vs role of confusion attempted to explain how adolescents negotiate who they



are and what their purpose might be in the world. As adolescents develop, they encounter many experiences, both good and bad; and acting on the experiences influence adolescents' inner identity (Erikson, 1968).

*Immigrant:* An immigrant is a person who relocates or moves from their home country or a country not of their origin to reside in another country (Vasquez et al., 2006).

*Lived experiences:* The lived experiences of an event include how one might define that experience, how it might be experienced and perceived by that person, and whether it has some value or meaning in the person's life (Ranney et al., 2020).

*Multimodal literacy:* Multimodal literacy practices refer to meaning making through linguistic, visual, audio, and spatial modes of communication (New London Group, 1996). Further, practices of multimodality allow all learners with different abilities, learning styles, experiences, and cultures the opportunity to view texts and learning opportunities as “visual, spatial, and auditory as they are linguistically centered” (Healy, 2008, p. 6).

*Safe space:* A safe space refers to a safe and supportive environment absence of fear, intimidation, and stress. It is a “sanctuary” from institutional demands and perspectives and represents where one might feel accepted and free to be themselves. Brady (2005) argued that any information gleaned from situations within this safe space ought to be private and confidential.

*Semiotic resources:* Semiotic resources is a term used in social semiotics and other areas or disciplines and refer to ways of making meaning (Hawkins, 2018). This includes actions and artifacts a person uses. For instance, the integration of actions, materials and artefacts used for communicative purposes serve as a means for meaning making.

*Tableaux*: A tableaux is a “dramatic structure” or “stance” where a participant uses their body (facial expressions, positions, and gestures) to create a particular scene frozen in position (Branscombe & Schneider, 2013).

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations of this study. Firstly, hermeneutic considerations must be taken into account where others might view the acknowledgement of the lived experiences, data analyses and conclusions differently from my conceptualization of them. Secondly, the study participants may not want to share all of their views, attitudes and opinions about their lived experiences of acculturation in The Bahamas. They might decide to keep silent given the nature of the study or the controversial connection between Haitians and Bahamians. Lastly, I acknowledge my study participants’ communicative experiences and preferences given that English is not their first language. However, while I acknowledge these limitations, I hope to overcome them to keep a researcher’s journal to record my observations and thoughts about the entire research process.

### **Acknowledging Bias**

In the context of this study, the dominant discourse of culture and identity rests heavily on being Bahamian. As the sole researcher, I am Bahamian, and I acknowledge that discrimination against immigrants, particularly of Haitians, has been an ongoing concern for years. Many Bahamians see the influx of this population as a concern (Fielding et al., 2008). Haitian immigrant adolescents might find it challenging to freely discuss or engage in multimodal literacy practice events that may require them to discuss, act, or write about personal experiences of culture and identity.

The sampling technique utilized in this study was a purposeful sample (Merriam, 2009) of two Haitian immigrant adolescent girls from teachers' recommendation in Preston Jackson Junior High (PJJH) School (pseudonym). I had a professional relationship with some of the teachers at PJJH and was strategic in selecting known and unknown teachers who helped identify suitable students for this study.

The literature on immigrant adolescent girls and their lived experiences, literacy, and multimodality in The Bahamas is non-existent. Literature of this population of Haitian immigrant adolescents in The Bahamas is also minimal. Much of the literature obtained in this study came from the experiences of immigrant adolescents living in America. However, I made some parallels from the literature to fit the Bahamian context, as it might be beneficial in capturing such experiences of other immigrant adolescents.

### **Organization of the Study**

In the following chapter, I provide an extensive review of literature that is undergirded by the tenets of a multimodal literacy framework, identity and acculturation of adolescent immigrants to host countries. Within this chapter, I also weaved in discourses of Haitian migration, the Haitian diaspora in The Bahamas, and immigrant adolescence. It is essential to incorporate these seemingly disparate components from the literature review to undergird the research aims. In subsequent chapters, I describe the methodology, provide a presentation of the data, and conclude with a discussion.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of the Literature**

In this chapter, I explore the theoretical framework of multimodal literacy and the nexus of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls' acculturative experiences living in The Bahamas. First, I give a brief history of the relationship of Haiti and The Bahamas, Haitian diaspora and Haitian migration to The Bahamas. By providing this information, it serves as a background for the literature review of Haitian immigrants in The Bahamas and helps the reader situate some of the lived experiences of Haitian immigrants living in The Bahamas. Second, I provide a literature review on adolescent immigrants and their experiences of acculturation to their host countries. Lastly, I present an explanation of the theoretical constructs of multimodal literacy that framed this study. By doing this, I provide a brief overview of the paradigmatic shifting of traditional literacy and how this shifting resulted in the emergence of three contemporary fields of literacy. A synthesis of recent empirical studies that integrated and supported multimodal literacy practices of adolescent immigrants is included.

Previous literacy studies have not revealed any information specific to literacy practices of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls in The Bahamas, nor multimodal approaches for understanding identity and acculturation. However, a few studies addressed within this section pertain to the utilization of multimodal literacy practices of immigrant and minority children and adolescents in their negotiations of identity and acculturation. While this literature does not specifically address the literacy practices of Haitian immigrant adolescents, it does provide

information of the challenges and experiences of other immigrant and marginalized adolescents who face similar experiences of identity and acculturation. Some parallels are made here.

The purpose of this study was to use multiple modes of literacy as a vehicle to captivate the lived experiences of acculturation of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas. To better understand these experiences, I used three inter-related sub-goals: (a) to explore and describe Haitian immigrant adolescent girls' migration stories and acculturation into The Bahamas, (b) to describe the acculturation process of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls who live in The Bahamas, who participate in the Bahamian educational system, and live within the Bahamian community, and (c) to determine the Haitian immigrant adolescent girls constructed their identities.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching research question that guided this study follows:

*What are the lived experiences of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas as expressed through the multimodal literacy practices of writing, tableaux, and photography?*

The following sub-questions were also valuable to this research:

- How do Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas describe their acculturation process through the multimodal literacy practices of writing, tableaux, and photography?
- How do Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas perceive their identity construction through the multimodal literacy practices of writing, photography, and tableaux?

## **Migration and Diaspora of Haitian Immigrants in The Bahamas**

Before the independence of The Bahamas in 1973, there were mutual negotiations of trade between Haiti and The Bahamas. In fact, as far back as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the two histories of The Bahamas and Haiti were intertwined with the trade of livestock, soil and vegetation between white Haitian slave owners, free slaves, and wealthy Bahamians. Often, these persons would return to Haiti after their trading, or they would travel on to the US to seek residence. After the Bahamian independence and the indoctrination of the first black political party, emphasis on migration law, the restriction of Haitian nationals and rich white foreigners on residing in The Bahamas became more and more stringent for these two populations (Fielding, Balance, Scriven, McDonald & Johnson, 2008).

During this time, Haiti and The Bahamas enjoyed a reciprocal relationship of trade. Both countries were relatively the same in terms of economics. However, by the end of Haitian president Jean-Claude Duvalier's dictatorship rule that resulted in the political deterioration of the country as the poorest in the western hemisphere, many of its nationals fled to The Bahamas (Fielding et al, 2008). This reign of dictatorship manifested in political unrest, poverty, unemployment and violence of a failed country (Perry, 2014). The unrest resulted in a mass exodus out of Haiti to The Bahamas, the US and other neighboring countries. Some entered The Bahamas with legal visas, but stayed without renewing their visas, which resulted in illegal statuses. Others entered illegally paying to be smuggled into the country (Perry, 2014). For most impoverished Haitian immigrants in The Bahamas, they occupy land space and create many 'shanty towns' in rural areas of New Providence, Abaco and other islands of The Bahamas. The ripple effect of their migration has added to the myriad of problems Haitians face who reside in

The Bahamas and continue to contribute to the ‘perennial problem’ or the “Haitian problem” of this host country (Knowles, 2018, p. 65).

The literature found on The Bahamas and Haitians primarily explores illegal or undocumented Haitian immigrants and their impact on the Bahamian society (Fielding, 2008; Jacques, 2011; Joseph, 2014; Knowles, 2018; Louis, 2011; Perry, 2014 & 2016). The presence of Haitians in The Bahamas has been an ongoing source of contention and animosity for many Bahamians for years. With the heavy influx of Haitian nationals to the country, many Bahamians are concerned, “their identity (and sovereignty) as a people is threatened by the integration of Haitians and their culture into Bahamian society” (Joseph, 2014, p. 64). This is an overarching concern for many Bahamians (Fielding, 2008; Joseph, 2014; Perry, 2014).

The pervasive stigmatization of Haitian immigrants in The Bahamas is a real and prevalent one. It has resulted in an unfavorable treatment of this population who continue to suffer abuse because of their ethnicity (Belton, 2010). Haitians are seen as a burden to the Bahamian country’s governmental institutions, including free educational and health services. The context of Haitian migration has imposed a strong stigma and discrimination on Haitian immigrants. Firstly, many Haitians, because of their illegal status are unable to find appropriate or affordable places to live without proper identification. Many ‘squat’ or occupy or live on an abandoned piece of land illegally. Many live with family members and friends whose homes are already crowded. They live in unsanitary conditions because they are unable to rent or own homes with efficient or proper running water and bathroom facilities (Fielding, 2008).

Haitian immigrants are unable to find jobs if their status is an illegal one. If they do find jobs, they find employment that mostly includes menial tasks making little to no money as many are paid ‘under the table.’ Others have no source of income at all and rely on their family and

friends to help them. Additionally, Haitians are perceived by Bahamians as having lots of children. Bahamians object that with so many Haitians utilizing the services for themselves and their children, these resources become limited (Fielding, 2008). Further, having children born in The Bahamas to Haitian immigrants creates a deeper problem. According to the Bahamian constitution, a child born to parents in The Bahamas who are not Bahamians are not automatically eligible for citizenship. He or she, however, can apply to be a registered citizen on or before his/her eighteenth birthday. They have one year to apply, if they do not apply, they will not be considered for naturalization (Perry, 2008). In the interim, within the 17-18 -year gap, that child is considered stateless. The waiting time for such registration to be processed can be anywhere between two and six years. Further, many Haitian Bahamians are denied citizenship. Where do they go? This population will have no governmental identification like a passport used for access to jobs, colleges and travel. Similar to the Dreamers in the US, this population may have never traveled to Haiti and only know The Bahamas as their home (Joseph, 2008; Perry, 2008). Strachan (2011) argues this disenfranchisement has created frustration, anger, and shame for these persons.

Fielding (2008) posited at length how and why Haitians are stigmatized in The Bahamas. He writes, Haitians are stigmatized because of their language differences that creates a barrier between Haitians and Bahamians. Haitians speak French and Creole; Bahamians speak a version of English. This language difference is a distinct feature attributed to Haitians which might make them a target for stigmatization, discrimination, and abuse. As a result, some Haitian immigrants and Haitian Bahamians (Haitians born in The Bahamas) refuse to speak Creole in public (Perry, 2014). Fielding (2008) also explored the lack of education Haitians have compared to Bahamians. Most Haitians in The Bahamas have attained a junior high school level



of education, fewer have gotten to high school and about 12% have had no source of education at all. Furthermore, most first-generation Haitian immigrants have no college level education at all (Fielding, 2008).

However, despite the stigma attached to Haitian immigrants and their abuse, some scholars and government officials are calling for an alternative view when addressing the “Haitian problem” in The Bahamas. The Minister of Immigration vehemently stated in the local news (Wells, 2017) that no immigrant child should be denied access to an education in The Bahamas, despite the immigrant parent(s)’ legal status. Fielding (2008) advocated that it is within the best interest of The Bahamas to educate all students regardless of their nationality. This is essential to the social structure of the country, as discrimination and marginalization will continue to increase if non-Bahamians are not properly educated. According to current research, heightened levels of discrimination and poorly educated members of society can give rise to criminal and anti-social behaviors, thus destroying the moral fabric of a country.

### **Acculturation of Immigrant Adolescents**

Out of 80 million individuals living in the United States, about a fourth of this population are immigrants or children of immigrants, known as first- or second-generation immigrants respectively (Stewart, 2015), likewise living in The Bahamas, there are 20,000 to 50,000 Haitian nationals and many are undocumented (IOM, 2017). Immigrants migrate for many reasons, including fleeing war, terrorism, torture, poverty, and political unrest of their home countries. Individuals migrate to countries like the United States and The Bahamas with an overarching motive to improve their quality of life, whether that might be to find jobs or to provide a more promising future for their children (De Las Fuentes & Vasquez, 2006).

In order to fully appreciate how adolescent immigrants might develop and acculturate, De Las Fuentes, Han, and Vasquez (2006) suggest being knowledgeable about immigrants' lives prior to immigration, their reasons for leaving their home countries, and their adaptation to living in their host countries. Many enter host countries legally, obtaining visas from host countries, others are smuggled in, or enter that country's shores illegally (Fielding, 2008). Immigrant children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable when unaccompanied by parents or a trusted adult (Stewart, 2013). As a result, many are sexually exploited, taken advantage of and abused by adults who help to smuggle them into host countries (Stewart, 2013). Understanding immigrants' societal background is not something only teachers and other education stakeholders should try to do; but rather, this is something that everyone in a country should strive toward. Having an understanding of where immigrants come from, how they lived prior to their relocation to the host countries, they adjusting to new countries all are pertinent to the acculturation process.

Acculturation is defined as the changes that take place in an individual's 'practices, values, and identity' as a result of firsthand and continued contact with another culture; it is complex and multidimensional that can impede the individual's social and psychological well-being (Osman, Mohammed, Warner & Sarkadi, 2020, p.1). Additionally, consistent contact may produce changes in immigrants' behaviors, values, and attitudes (Berry, 2008). As proposed by Lansford (2007), the process of acculturation may significantly affect one's cultural identity. Cushner, McClelland, and Safford (2012) describe the pressures for cultural change as intense. They suggested "for successive generations, these pressures may take on a different form as the groups evolve into established ethnic communities" (p. 117). A seminal piece from Berry's (1997) acculturation theory emphasizes how well individuals adapt to their host countries. His

acculturation strategy, “a significant predictor of immigrant adaptation” (Choi et al, 2016, p.1) is widely integrated and tested among scholars who research how adolescent immigrants adjust to their new host countries (Baldwin-White, Kiehne, Umana-Taylor, & Marsiglia, 2017; Ferguson & Bornstein, 2014; & Choi, Tan Yasui, Halm, 2016). His theory rests on two cultural premises: acculturation defined as “learning and adopting to mainstream culture” and enculturation, defined as “maintaining one’s heritage culture” (Choi et al, 2016, p. 1381). Berry’s acculturation strategies identified as several stages: assimilation (high acculturation and low enculturation); integration (high on both); separation (low acculturation and high enculturation) and marginalization (low on both). However, scholars like Osman, Mohammed, Warner & Sarkadi criticize Berry’s theory based on his oversimplification on various strategies calling for a redirection on how acculturating individuals see themselves as vacillating in and out of cultures. Osman et al postulate that this “elucidates richer understanding of the acculturation process and accommodate for the interwoven contexts and processes” for such individuals (p.1). Hence the purpose of this present study is to seek how Haitian immigrant adolescents describe their own lived experiences of acculturation into The Bahamas.

It is understandable why acculturation and identity are shown to be interrelated (Berry, 2008). Immigrants’ identity often determines how they are able to acculturate. This premise is supported by Ward and Kennedy (1994) who examined host national and co-national identification. Their findings revealed that immigrants who had a strong national identification experienced less sociocultural adjustment difficulties. These findings were echoed by those of Berry (2008), who suggested that the psychological effects of acculturation which individuals experienced depended significantly upon the personal and social variables residing in their country of origin.

## **Challenges of Acculturation**

How immigrants view themselves is crucial to their successful acculturation into unfamiliar cultures and societies. Researchers (Ferguson, Iturbide, & Raffaelli, 2020; Humphrey, 2013; Liem & McInerney, 2020) found when utilizing multimodal literacy practices, students were provided a space to explore their personal and social identities, by reconstructing, redesigning and repositioning themselves across premise of immigration. Their identity, which hinges upon their self-confidence may prove to be a significant hindrance to their future advancement socially and educationally if it is a negative one. Immigrant adolescents must feel a sense of belonging; such feeling correlates with having a positive identity. They must be made to feel that although they are different, they still have something significant to contribute to their new world (Ferguson, Iturbide, & Raffaelli, 2020).

When individuals migrate from their home countries willingly or not, they suffer the psychological effects of leaving the comfort of home, language, education, cultures, and even family members depending on the situation. Such psychological effects might be compounded with acculturative stressors to assimilate to the Western culture, because the efforts to assimilate is contrary or different from the immigrant adolescent's home country. These psychological effects wreak havoc on their ability to develop a positive identity of themselves. De Las Fuentes, Han and Vasquez maintain for many immigrants the realities of living in their home country does not prepare them to live in host countries like the US as there are differences in what is considered developmentally desirable, optimal and acceptable between the two counties. For example, parents might have issues with acculturation as it differs from how they were raised or how parents see their adolescents being raised. Several researchers found parents and older adult immigrants acculturate to host countries slower than their adolescents creating an 'acculturation

gap' resulting in mounting challenges faced by adolescent immigrants. This might result in parent-child conflict. One study found, "the strongest predictor of low self-esteem and higher depression in second-generation adolescents was parent-child conflict which significantly affected adolescent girls disproportionately" (De Las Fuentes & Vasquez, 1999, p. 140).

Immigrants often relocate to host countries where their values are not prioritized according to the values of the host countries (Schachner, Juang, Moffitt, & Van, 2018). For example, an issue that immigrant adolescents might face is the dilemma of abiding by their parents' rules of how they might be raised as opposed to what they might see in the homes of non-immigrant adolescents. Often immigrant families have a specific way of raising their children based on their own country's beliefs however, these beliefs might clash with those of the host country. In Western society, adolescents are often given more autonomy as they develop. However, some immigrant families see the danger in too much freedom and want to protect their children if harm should come their way (De las Fuentes & Vasquez, 1999).

Many of the issues which immigrants face in America are quite similar to those in The Bahamas. Despite the dearth of empirical research found in the Bahamian literature, the bounteous information of American research on immigrant adolescents provides a foundation for my study (Schnacher, Juang, Moffitt, & Van, 2018 & De Las Fuentes & Vasquez. 1999). This parallelism of American literature is similar to the context of Haitian immigrant adolescents of color. Some pertinent development issues for this population include immigrant adolescents' self-belief (how they see themselves); low socioeconomic status, multiple roles and responsibilities; discrimination; family conflict in how adolescent are raised and the need to provide a safe space to help them cope with challenging situations beyond their control (De Las Fuentes & Vasquez, 1999; Kurtz-Costes & Woods, 2017; Moench, 2018, Muhammad, 2015).

In addition, immigrant adolescents may face a language barrier if their first language is not the same as the host country's language. Variations in English proficiency create a number of obstacles in schools as well as in the community (Kurtz-Costes & Woods, 2017). Further, in terms of schooling, this can lead to decreased motivation, poor grades particularly in reading and writing, and negative attitudes from teachers and peers. Often, even if immigrant adolescents become proficient in English, their parents might not be as proficient. As a result, adolescents become translators and, in some instances, take on adult roles. Kurtz-Costes and Woods also found that stereotypes and discrimination toward immigrant students often lead to reduced competence motivation in these children.

Immigrant adolescents might be faced with a myriad of discriminatory experiences such as stereotype threat, stereotype endorsements and differential treatment in school (Kurtz-Costes). Stereotype threat refers to when an immigrant adolescent is aware of a stereotype associated with his group and hence becomes reluctant to identify himself as being associated with that cultural group (Steele & Aronson, 2004). This is evident when Haitian immigrants in The Bahamas choose not to speak their native tongue in public (Fielding, 2008). Stereotype endorsement is when an immigrant adolescent internalizes the negativity associated with his/her cultural group. Kurtz-Costes and Woods (2017) maintained this internalization has negative effects on immigrant adolescents' motivation and identity. Lastly, immigrant adolescents of color might be treated differently from their non-immigrant counterparts. Teachers and peers may show favoritism toward non-immigrants, creating a clear divide between the two groups.

This proposed research might serve as a platform in initiating discussions with the Ministry of Education policy makers, that address the process of educational reform in terms of best practices for engaging all learners and facilitating student achievement among immigrant

students. Data revealed in this study will show the potential impact of implementing a multimodal literacy approach to support students' enculturation to schools and access to school discourses . In this era where globalization has been the new norm for decades, teachers' whose instructional practices, beliefs, and attitudes do not support immigrant students must change significantly if all students are to excel and become highly educated, contributing citizens of the future.

Xenophobia is a global issue that is prevalent in many countries (Hjerm, 2005). When adolescents enter a new country, they are not only entering the country' educational system or health care system, but the country as a whole. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all citizens to embrace these individuals with a spirit of understanding, tolerance, and compassion. Bringing an awareness to this populace will undoubtedly shed some light on their academic, social, and psychological development, and the needs they have which must be immediately and effectively addressed.

If immigrant students are to receive quality education and equal opportunities for success, some level of education reform must take place. This must be initiated by all primary stakeholders at the helm of a country's education system. Policies addressing the integration of cultural beliefs, behaviors, and traits in school curricula according to student populations in schools across the country must be implemented and enforced. Teachers, the major leaders in an educational system must recognize the importance of adapting their instructional strategies to accommodate all learners in their charge. It takes collaborative efforts to facilitate success in education. Research has shown that achieving schools possess strong partnerships between all education stakeholders: administrators, teachers, students, and parents (Ärlestig, 2008; Bottoms, O'Neill, Fry, & Hill, 2003; Dubin, 2017).

With an understanding of the importance of culture to Bahamian people, the educational system of The Bahamas presents a unique and fertile environment to explore the dynamics and cultural experiences of all students. The Bahamian educational vision is heavily endowed in Bahamian culture, experiences, and identity. This vision mandates academic excellence to equip students with the necessary multiple literacies in order to enable them to make meaningful contributions as nation builders competing globally (Ministry of Education, Nassau Bahamas, 2017). The Bahamas' rich cultural heritage permeates the educational system, making it distinct to The Bahamas; all children living in The Bahamas inclusive of immigrant children within Bahamian schools are afforded the same opportunities.

The Ministry of Education Research and Planning Committee MOERPC (2010) of The Bahamas reiterates the need to accommodate all students, including immigrant students, to meet the demands of a globalized world. MOERPC (2010) emphasizes the improvement of the quality and delivery of an educational system that prepare students to live productive lives and break global borders that might hinder their educational prowess. However, despite these mandates, the need to provide equitable education for all students inclusive of immigrant students has not proven fruitful (Wearmouth, 2017). Findings of some studies suggest the broadening concepts of literacy practices inclusive of multimodality; the securing of safe spaces; responsive practices in education which acknowledge and confirm literacies of immigrant adolescents by developing pedagogies that mobilize their cultural identities in and out of school; however, the pedagogical discourses of schools and education in host countries are dominating and hence, overrides such concepts (Gay, 2000; Honeyford, 2014; Humphrey, 2013; Muhammad, 2015; Oliver, & Lalik, 2001).



## Identity

Identity, a psychologically abstract term, is hard to define conclusively. Cote (2009) notes no one single definition might convey identity as “operational or theoretical” (p. 528). However, while researchers might define identity as “heavily burdened,” “elusive,” and “deeply ambiguous,” researchers, including Flum and Kaplan (2012), concur that identity is “multidimensional and versatile” (p. 240). Kroger (2017) maintains identity enables a person to navigate with direction and purpose in life with a “sense of inner sameness and continuity over time and place” (p. 1). Erik Erikson (1968) work continues to be a foundation for many theorists who explore identity theory. His seminal work on psychosocial development is instrumental in many researchers’ quest to operationalize identity development specifically of adolescence (Cote, 2000; Flum & Kaplan, 2012; & Kroger, 2017).

Erikson (1968) proposed an eight-stage theory of psychosocial development over an individual’s lifespan as part of his proposal to construct a cohesive theory of human development. Scholars of identity and adolescent identity development have focused specifically on his fifth stage of development, identity vs. role confusion. Within this stage, which takes place between 12 and 19, adolescence develop a sense of self and their own personal identity. As they experience life their successes influence their ability to stay true to themselves while failures result in confusing negotiations of how they see themselves; this is done on a continuum. Kroger (2017) posited the importance of having adolescents explore meaningful experiences as their identity develops over time; this process of both successful and failing experiences requires what Erikson identifies as an exploration of, and commitment to tasks. Erikson posited the premise of identity development rests on the connection between the individual and society (Flu & Kaplan, 2012). In other words, Erikson (1968) postulates as individuals develop when faced

with experiences (good and bad) encountered in contextual circumstances, individuals tend to act on such experiences, thus forming a sense of inner identity. Faircloth (2012) concurs that identity can be seen as an ongoing negotiation of participation, shaping in response --the context(s) (relationships, group solidarity and communal culture) in which it occurs. It is through these interactions with others and themselves, adolescents construct an ‘inner identity’ through the exploration of options, followed by firm commitments to what adolescents might understand as meaningful, they come to achieve their identity (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Immigrant adolescents experience the same negotiations of constructing and reconstruction of their identities through their lived experiences of migration and acculturation. Each experience, whether good or bad of migrating from their home countries and entering the doors of a new country with differing expectations adds to their sense of self (Danzak, 2011).

While Erikson’s theory is fundamental to understanding identity in a general sense, it is equally important to have an understanding of how immigrant adolescents develop identity and what cultural factors might influence how immigrants see themselves. Therefore, it is essential to consider ethnic identity when exploring immigrant adolescents and their perceptions of their lived experiences. Phinney’s (1990) work scrutinized ethnic identity as an important facet to the development of immigrant adolescents.

Phinney and Rosenthal (1992) argued “ethnic identity . . . [is] a multifaceted, dynamic construct...with complex and subtle interactions between different elements of ethnic identity and external forces” (p. 148). In other words, as immigrants build their sense of self, this is influenced by external forces of acclimating into their host countries. Umaña-Taylor et al., (2014) posit ethnic-racial identities, (ERI) are “increasingly being considered central to the normative development of ethnic and racial minority youth” (p. 21). In their article, they provide an

analysis of ERI with salient developmental and contextual issues for adolescence focusing on key milestones of adolescent development. Umana-Taylor et al draw from multiple perspectives of identity theory positing, “ERI as a multidimensional, psychological construct that reflects the beliefs and attitudes that individuals have about their ethnic-racial group memberships, as well as the processes by which these beliefs and attitudes develop over time” (p. 23). Integrating a multimodal approach to help immigrant construct their identity is not only productive, but essential to a fast-growing globalized world where the influx of immigrants is more prevalent in nonindustrial and postcolonial countries than it has ever been before (Vasques, Han & Fuentes, 2006).

### **Theoretical Foundations of Literacy**

Traditionally, literacy broadly defined, has predominately emphasized the acquisition of skills for reading and writing (Street, 2003). As the world’s global landscape is increasingly changing, scholars from the New London Group (1996) in their seminal article, “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures,” envisioned a pedagogical and epistemological shifting in their definition of literacy. This redefining of literacy required an accommodation of traditional literacy, new literacies and multiliteracies brought to the teaching and learning table. The call was not to eliminate print-based literacy and linguistic skills as primary forms of literacy, but rather to reformulate literacy to bring an awareness of multiple modes of communication individuals use to make meaning within social engagements (New London Group, 1996). Scholars, while understanding this paradigmatic shifting of the definition of literacy do not deny the importance of traditional print-based literacies or that the emergence of contemporary fields of literacies should replace traditional print-based literacy practices, but rather encourage the integration all types of literacies as persons seek to communicate and make

sense of their world (Mills 2005; Thomas 2007 & Yi, 2014). Further, The New London Group's conceptualization of literacy emphasized the dynamic relationship of how meaning is constructed within modes (intramodally) and across modes (intermodally) Serafini (2015). In an effort to support the importance of combining traditional literacy practices and contemporary literacy practices, this present study emphasized how Haitian immigrants study participants explored the modes of writing, tableaux and photography to describe and communicate their lived experiences of acculturation into The Bahamas. Interacting within and across these various modes, study participants were better able to communicate their experiences in multiple ways, based on social and contextual engagement. Further, The New London Group also emphasized influences of an increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of students and the many modes in which they experience the world, designing and redesigning their understandings of such required a rethinking of literacy pedagogy (New London Group, 1996). This allowed educational practitioners opportunities to conceptualize individual's interactions with literacies through meaning making and communication of their experiences.

Based on this understanding, scholars like Ajaya (2015) then define and theorized literacy as 'multiple, social and contextual' (p. 218). Literacy, according to Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek & Henry (2017) is defined as deictic or rapidly changing because of constant change of information and communication of the era in which we live. For this present study, literacy is viewed as a combination of multiplicity of communicational modes, within social and contextual premises in our world of information that changes rapidly. Literacy has engaged individuals in discourses that traverse space and time in which individuals can access semiotic resources (meaning making) to convey knowledge. The concept of semiotic resources is a key term from social semiotics derived from the linguist Michael Halliday. Halliday's theory posits that the

grammar of a language should not be considered a set of rules or codes for correction, but rather a resource used to make meaning (Van Leeuwen, 2005). Likewise, semiotics in multiliteracies can be conceptualized as resources of representation individuals use to negotiate meaning.

Semiotic resources can be defined as:

The actions and artifacts we use to communicate, whether they are produced physiologically – with our vocal apparatus; with the muscles we use to create facial expressions and gestures, etc. – or by means of technologies – with pen, ink and paper; with computer hardware and software; with fabrics, scissors and sewing machines, etc. (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 285).

With this seismic reevaluation of traditional literacy, presented by the New London Group, three related fields of literacy emerged. Those fields included New Literacy (NLS), Multiliteracies and Multimodal Literacy Practices. Leu et al (2017) refers to New Literacy as not just new today, but literacies that are new everyday of our lives. In other words, “new literacies include the skills, strategies, and dispositions necessary to successfully adapt to the changing technologies that include all aspects of our personal and professional lives” (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro & Commack, 2004, p. 3). Karkar (2019) refers to new literacies as the techniques needed to utilize various practices to make meaning. Such practices are specific to cultural and social environments (Ajayi, 2015). Recognizing that traditional literacy has been viewed as monolingual and monocultural, the New London Group developed the term ‘multi literacies’ to address, “the multiplicity of communication channels and media and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity (NLG, 1996, p.63). The New London Group maintained that literacy should be viewed with a wider perception taking into account how literacies are conceptualized based on social, cultural and technological changes of the world. Multiliteracies

consist of four tenets, situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transferred practice (Argay-Crowder, Choi & Yi, 2013). The last of the three literacy related fields, and the theoretical focus of this study, is multimodal literacy practices. The term multimodal literacy practices are used in this study to describe the interconnections of three specific modes including writing, photography and tableau study participants used to describe their lived experiences of acculturation living in The Bahamas. Serafini (2015) describes multimodal literacy as a “process of generating meanings in transaction with multimodal texts including written language, visual images (photography and tableaux) from a variety of perspective to meet the requirements of particular social contexts” p. 413). Multimodal literacy pertains to how persons convey or make meaning integrating two or more modes, an approach that attend to the full range of communicational forms and modes individual employ to make meaning (Serafini, 2015). Meaning can be composed through various semiotic resources or modes inclusive of spoken language, written language, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial (The New London Group, 1996). Such modes are ‘socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resources for meaning making (Kress, 2009, p. 80). With an understanding that multimodal literacy enhances the learning opportunities for students from diverse cultural and socioeconomic experiences, many researchers examine multimodal literacy practices of immigrant adolescents in the United States.

### **Multimodal Literacies of Immigrant Adolescents**

Multimodal literacy refers to the study of language which combines two or more modes of meaning (Mills & Unsworth, 2017). Multi-modality refers to the constitution of multiple modes in meaning making. Modes are the socially and culturally shaped resources for making meaning. Examples of modes include speech, gesture, written language, music, mathematical notation, drawings, photographic images, or moving digital images. Language and literacy

practices are considered multimodal because communication requires attending to diverse kinds of meanings (spoken or written words, visual images, gestures, posture, movement, sound, or silence). Researchers contended that the use of multimodal literacy in classrooms for instructing diverse learners is effective in not only enabling them to achieve academic success, but also develop positive identities which facilitates continued competence motivation (Unsworth, 2014). This approach has several implications for understanding students' identities.

Emerging research on multimodal literacy practices included agentic writing opportunities through rap, poems and stories. Moench (2018) conducted a study involving eight, 17–20-year-old African American, urban, adolescent girls. These girls self-identified themselves as lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. Moench Integrated multiliteracies into the context of an out-of-school book club. She wanted the girls to view themselves as authors and artists - meaning makers representing their understanding of their social worlds. The girls engaged in a variety of literacy activities such as book discussions, literature circles, journaling, composing poetry, and visual arts (as a way of interpreting their identities).

Moench contended that multimodal literacy is an effective tool in the Secondary English Language Arts classrooms (SEL) as it challenges the idea of what is “normal,” because writing and visual artifacts differ in tone, voice, and power. The girls in this study enjoyed the use of the multimodal literacies and they reported feeling more confident in their identities. Moench warned, however, that teachers must understand that multimodal literacies in a secondary classroom is never fixed but is always in flux to accommodate the needs of the students and the teacher. This implies that teachers must know their students well enough to know which strategies or multimodal mode would be best suited for them. It is imperative, therefore, that teachers are aware of their students' learning styles, areas of strengths, and weaknesses.

Like Moench, Wiseman, Pendleton, Christiansen, and Nesheim (2017) supported the use of multimodal literacies in classrooms. While this approach has been hailed as an effective one specifically for students of diverse cultural origins, Wiseman, Pendleton, Christiansen, and Nesheim found that this is useful when working with all types of students. Wiseman, Pendleton, Christiansen, and Nesheim's presented findings from a case study conducted on a third grader as she participated in a language arts curriculum that incorporated multimodal literacy practices. These multimodal practices included photography, drama, and art; these were used for the teaching of reading and writing. The study was informed by the theoretical framework of multimodal social semiotics, which provided insight into how mediational tools facilitates greater complexity of thought, thereby expanding the potential for learning. Findings revealed the significance of using photographs for the third grader's meaning making process. Wiseman maintained that multimodal video data analysis is an effective way of understanding the complexity of multiliteracy practices in the classroom.

Research findings conducted by Stewart (2013) corroborated those of Wiseman, Pendleton, Christiansen, and Nesheim (2017), Moench (2018), and Mills and Unsworth (2017), as she found that immigrants' engagement in multimodal literacy modes are useful in the instruction of multicultural learners. Her study reported on the circumstances of a recent Salvadoran immigrant high school student who successfully achieved her learning goals despite the difficult circumstances caused by her immigration status, economic realities, and the educational system itself. Stewart's study focused on one student's engagement in tableaux, photographs, and digital writing to express details about their lived experiences. Stewart advocated for literacy educators to transform their relationships with students, subject curricula, and pedagogy. She discussed the need for teachers to give their immigrant students support



through caring relationships, and value of their lived experiences through relevant literature. This study is another example of the effectiveness of multimodal literacies in classrooms of immigrant learners. The resolve of the student in this study reconfirms the importance of possessing a strong identity in the face of acculturation.

### **Writing**

Multimodal literacy practices of writing require a look at a myriad of modes that facilitate students' writing. Engaging immigrant adolescent girls in multimodal literacy practice of writing provides a space for them to articulate their ideas and thoughts (Muhammad, 2015). It also provides them with a sense of agency (Stewart, 2013). During a six-week summer writing program, Muhammed (2015) engaged a group of eight immigrant adolescent girls to write about their lives including their stories of living in the United States. She provided an opportunity for these girls "to participate in a space that honored their histories (cultures) and identities, as they wrote across multiple, self-ascribed identities in the categories of ethnicity, gender, communities, intellectual academic, individual, kinship and sexuality" (p. 290). Each week, the girls would gather to have discussions about topics relevant to their lives that the researcher initiated. After the discussions, the girls would read books about other women's stories of immigration, resilience, and fitting in their host countries. The girls reflected on such narratives and created poems, memoirs and short stories of their own that depicted their own individual experiences.

Moench (2018) engaged 8 adolescents in multimodal literacy practices that included the composition of poems and stories after they participated in book discussions and literature circles. The books adolescents read, and their discussions pertained to those from marginalized populations. These activities not only allowed these girls a safe space to live through their

experiences but provided them the opportunity to write without fear or intimidation because their ideas or experiences might not conform to the dominant discourses of society (Moench, 2018).

### **Photographs**

Photographs can be used as a multimodal literacy practice to support students' critical reflection and thinking as immigrant adolescents make connections to their lived experiences (Taylor & Leung, 2020). Through the use of visual representations (in photographs), children are able to create meaning within their social and learning interactions. Photography may be integrated as a tool for advance thinking and communicating. It empowers students to experience meaning making in new and exciting ways that help to build their identities and strengthen their literacy skills. Visual literacy integrates methods of color, shape, spatial representations, print, messages, meaning and communication where teachers are able to accommodate students' learning in new ways reinforce their identities and lived experiences (Benson, 1997; Branton, 1999; Dwyer as cited in Kleinman & Dwyer, 1999; Stokes, 2002; Wiseman, Makinen & Kupiainen, 2016). This multimodal literacy practice might be beneficial to those who struggle with traditional practices of literacy.

Zendok, Ewaida, Bell and Lynch (2012) conducted a study of 14 ELL middle school adolescents who were encouraged to generate photos used to describe their experiences in school as ELL students. The photos collected were utilized in the study as elicitation devices to evoke students' perceptions of negative school experiences. Students were given cameras and encouraged to point and shoot images reflective of their school experiences. Integrating a multi-stage qualitative and visual analysis method, researchers conducted semi-structured and small group interviews with students over three months. Through content analysis and informal member checks, the researchers found the image-based activity helped promote students'

abilities to share their insights about schools. This activity allowed both students and researchers a deeper insight into how students experienced school from multimodal literacy practices.

### **Tableaux**

Encouraging immigrants to physically reenact their lived experiences of migration, discrimination and stigmatization is a powerful means of allowing immigrants' voices to be heard (Darvin, 2015; Normand & Savi, 2019). However, this can also prove to be very dramatic for the individual. Research supported that dramatic activities allow adolescents to describe their lived experiences. Wilson and Boatright's (2011) conducted a study which was undergirded by the social semiotic and multimodality framework; they explored the multimodal literacy practices of dance and drama of a Native American adolescent. The adolescent was encouraged to make journal entries about his preservation of his Native American heritage. The researchers documented field notes of their classroom visits and observations of the student. They also conducted semi-structured interviews with the student and his teacher. To illustrate, this student performed his Native American dance in an effort not only sustain his culture, but to bring an awareness of the importance of acceptance and diversity. The researchers' use of drama as a medium of cultural expression conveyed the importance of cultural identity and preservation for this student.

As an extension of dramatic multimodal literacy activity, the integration of tableaux might be an important avenue to helping immigrants communicate their lived experiences. Tableau is a dramatic structure requiring students to use their bodies whether through gestures, facial expressions or positions to create a scene, then to stay motionless in that particular stance. Individuals capture moments of their memories or (lived experiences) personifying them into a frozen scene when they engage in dramatic activities like tableau. The frozen scenes can then be

interpreted by others. Tableau provided a context for Branscombe and Schneider (2013) to explore pre-service teachers' reflections of their field experiences. As a part of their course work for an education class, pre-service teachers were required to keep journals of their experiences in the field. Tableau provided a context for both participants and interpreters "to externalize mental images of imagined experiences; demonstration of participants' actual lived through experiences and an opportunity to frame meaning within new multimodal discourses" (Branscombe & Schneider, 2013 p. 98). Guided by the researchers, pre-service teachers shared their journal entries in small groups. They then discussed ways to reenact their reflections of important moments of their experiences. They briefly rehearsed the tableau and performed them when prompted. During the first round of tableau, using their body positions, gestures and facial expressions pre-service teachers reenacted their reflections.

Agustin and Susilowaty's (2019) qualitative study examined 25 EFL students' perception of the benefits and concerns of using tableau in EFL classrooms. The participants were engaged in using tableaux for three meetings. After they experienced using tableaux in the classroom, they were instructed to write a reflective journal to highlight their perceptions in terms of the advantages and disadvantages of using tableaux. In addition to the journals, participants were also interviewed. Findings revealed that the use of tableaux is beneficial. They were able to create sensory images, gain more vocabulary knowledge, deepen characters' feeling, and learn collaboratively. Students reported that using tableaux posed some concerns. They felt that it took too much time to use, group work was ineffective in some instances, and some students experienced difficulty interpreting the text in tableaux. In light of the concerns revealed by this study, it is therefore recommended that if institutions of learning are going to implement the use

of the tableaux in their classes, students must receive adequate practice to ensure successful learning outcomes.

Borrowing from Boal's (1995) "Image of Transition," a final round of tableaux required students to reimagine and reenact their ideal image of how they would consider these realities to likely be. Branscombe & Schneider found a dramatic activity like tableau, "an important one because, "it confronts reality while simultaneously seeking to transform reality" (p. 109). With the inclusion of reflective journals, pre-service teachers not only reflected on what happen in the past of their experiences, tableau became a 'conduit' for looking back at the past, but also looking at the future in ways to overcome challenging situations they encountered on the field. Tableau as a multimodal literacy practice makes it ideal for immigrant adolescent girls to express their lived experiences equipping them with the opportunity to engage in multimodal ways to help them express meaning of their lived experiences (Normand, & Savi, 2019).

### **Multimodal Literacy Practices and Immigrant Adolescents**

There is an abundance of researchers who have integrated multimodal literacy practices in their studies to ascertain, question, and to bring attention to how scholars might use multimodal literacy practices in one area or another when it pertains to immigrant adolescents. Yi's (2014) theoretical constructs approach used in multimodal literacy research is an excellent example; she grouped her review of literature in four distinct categories: "exploring identities, multimodal communicative competence, developing critical perspectives and improving academic literacies" (p. 159). Focusing on three categories of Yi's structure, several studies are categorized within this theoretical conceptualization as they relate to the integration of multimodal literacy practices of immigrant adolescents.

## **Multimodal Practices and Identity Exploration of Immigrant Adolescents**

Scholars have integrated a multimodal literacy approach to explore adolescents' identity construction. Researchers found when utilizing multimodal literacy practices, students were provided a space to explore their personal and social identities, by reconstructing, redesigning and repositioning themselves across premise of immigration (Ajayi, 2015; Danzak, 2011; & Kajee, 2011). Ajayi (2015) explored critical multimodal literacy practices of ninth-grade Nigerian girls to examine the representation of meanings identity and social structure within textbooks of an English curriculum. Through the use of multiple literacy practices inclusive of Facebook postings, biographies and students' multimodal drawings, these study participants generated common issues they found across their readings of textbooks. Ajayi compiled and analyzed interviews, observations, classroom videos, social media posts, and artifacts of students' literacies to critique student's personal experiences of Nigeria in relation to what students found in the textbooks.

Looking through a critical literacy practice framework and based on the concepts of New London Group (1996) and Kress (2003), Ajayi found several underlying themes. Four themes emerged across the data, critique of cultural prejudices; alternative reading of texts; representation of self and community; and new literacy practices and social practices. The critical multimodal literacy practices allowed the Nigerian study participants to analyze issues of social injustice they discovered in the textbooks. Integrating multiple literacy practices to explore these themes acted as a conduit for students to explore the social structures of their textbooks. Ajayi utilized multimodal literacy practices from a critical stance to examine the social injustices of textbooks. His objective was to help students understand these inequalities through their own experiences. This study emphasizes the importance of multimodal literacy

practices and how these practices might be integrated in many ways to explore students' identity and learning.

Similarly, scholars like Kajee (2011) and Danzak (2011) integrated the use of multimodal literacy strategies to examine how students integrated a social semiotic framework of multimodal literacy practices that provided students with the creativity and agency they need to construct, reconstruct, design and redesign their identities as black Africans. Students were given the opportunity to convey their identities through various modes or a combination of modes. Such modes consisted of digital texts and performance Kajee categorizes as mediating tools. Likewise, Danzak (2011) examined the integration of EAL (Hispanic) students' multiliteracies as students narrate their immigration experiences through their construction of graphic novels. Danzak posited that when culturally diverse students are engaged in telling their own immigration narratives, this gives a better indication of how they might identify themselves. These findings have the potential to transform literacy pedagogy in the accommodation of immigrant adolescents (Danzak, 2011).

### **Communicative Competence of Immigrant Adolescents**

The introduction of communicative competence in discussions of foreign language proficiency dates back to the early 1970's (Habermas, 1970; Savignon, 2018). Communicative competence in learners requires an understanding of the sociocultural contexts of the use of language. Its underlying concept is that the development of language proficiency should be guided and evaluated by the learner's ability to communicate. To this end, this concept has been a fundamental component of many English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms as a way of improving immigrant students' English language development (Leung, 2005). Several studies investigating communicative competence of immigrant adolescents were conducted and found

that through the integration of immigrant students' cultural experiences through various media, students' language proficiency, both written and verbal, improved significantly. This boost in achievement was accredited for students' positive identities they consequently developed during their learning process.

Wilson, Chavez, and Anders (2012) conducted teacher research which described the implementation of a five-month unit on student identity. This study was conducted in an eighth grade reading and writing class for English language learners (ELL). Upon learning about principles for multimodal design, the students made personal podcasts in response to unit questions such as "Who am I?" and "Where do I come from?" The researchers analyzed six students' podcasts using a multimodal transcription chart. The podcasts were compared to students' unit assignments student interviews about the podcasts. Findings suggest that the podcasts promoted the students' language development and enabled them use multiple cultural and communicative resources to express their identities. Such evidence implies the importance of a tactile-kinesthetic approach to language development; students must be taken beyond simply reading a text but be encouraged to engage with the text – relative text – by making meaningful connections between the text and their real-life experiences.

Through another qualitative case study similar to that of Wilson, Chavez, and Anders, it was discovered that consistent, guided expressions of immigrant students' experiences is effective in developing language skills. In their study including 8 ESL students, Burke and Hardware (2015), integrated multimodal literacy practices to determine students' lived experiences of migration to the United States. The students were invited to listen to the story, *Mick Harte Was Here* to explore their own stories of migration. Once students explored this digital moving collage of the story, they then composed their own photo book report. Through



this activity and the qualitative methods of observations, field notes and interviews, Burke and Hardware found this gave students the agency and space they needed to explore their experiences as ESL learners. Such experiences, as the findings revealed, led to an enrichment of the students' English vocabulary, comprehension, and writing skills.

Sharing similar views as Burke and Hardware (2015) and Wilson, Chavez, and Anders (2012), Darwazeh (2016) defended that students' disciplinary understandings increase with constant reflective writings, connection to students' experiences, and integration of cultural aspects and content to main course information. Darwazeh's exploration of the possible role of using graphic novels to teach social studies revealed that students' learning motivation and engagement increased. The study included ninth grade students in Amman, Jordan. They engaged in a social studies unit on migration that involved students reading and composing graphic novels. The students read a variety of graphic novels which dealt with migration. To connect the text to real life, they visited a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan. They then composed their own graphic novels on migration. This connection between text and real-life experiences made leaning more meaningful for the students.

### **Adolescent Immigrants Developing Critical Perspectives**

Framing their studies to incorporate aspects of critical multimodal literacy practices, scholars continue to advocate for a platform and a space for immigrant adolescents' perceptions of the world in which they live. For example, Honeyford (2014) urged educators to analyze this epistemological and ethical shift as it pertains to the accommodation of immigrant students in particular. She urged for three shifts in the complicating of pedagogy where immigrant students mediate their lived experiences, literacies, and ways of knowing through multimodal practices. Through an ethnographic case study of six Mexican immigrant adolescents, Honeyford sampled

students' photo essays of their ethnic identities. Looking through the lens of transcultural identities inclusive of immigration and immigrant discourses, students were encouraged to collect photos of images that might tell their stories as immigrants. Honeyford observed students' activities as they composed their stories. She also conducted semi-structured interviews with each student. Integrating multimodal literacy practices of written language, images and spoken language, Honeyford found three essential themes. First, multimodal literacy practices allowed students to position themselves as Mexican immigrants. Secondly, the photo essay allowed others to see who the students were and how they defined themselves through these photos. Lastly, the study allowed students the opportunity to create new insights and 'sites' to which they reposition themselves as Mexican American students (Honeyford, 2014). This multimodal study conducted by Honeyford supports the aim of this study's objective to utilize multimodal literacy practices as a conduit for Haitian immigrant adolescents to make meaning of their life experiences of acculturation.

Even though Honeyford's population of Mexican Americans differ from the population of Haitian immigrants of this proposed study, the incorporation of multimodal literacy practice of photo essays might provide pertinent themes about this population's identity as immigrants as well. Honeyford's integration of multimodal literacy practice of photos as a visual method of literacy is important as it provides images of the immigrants' experiences; this is one approach to integrate visual methods. For this proposed study, photos are integrated as well other modes like images of participants gestures in the form of tableaux and writing, different modes all capturing the role of acculturation of their experiences.

## Safe Spaces

Adolescence is a critical period for girls as they transition into adulthood. This is a time when they are negotiating their identities and sense of belonging, compounded by finding themselves in a transnational space, between two countries, can make normal development even more challenging (Rubinstein-Avila, 2007). To this end, the utilization of *safe spaces* or protected places can be integrated for adolescent girls to allow them the freedom to share their experiences freely without fear of ridicule or punishment.

In three distinct empirical studies (Dennis, Muhammed, Womack, McArthur & Haddix, 2017; Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, & Collazo, 2004; and Muhammed, 2015) researchers discussed the need to provide a safe space for adolescent girls to write. Dennis (2017) collaborated on afterschool and summer clubs established just for adolescent girls of color to write about specific themes not only enhancing their writing proficiency, but providing an empowering sense of agency, autonomy and social justice. Moje (2004) maintained the importance of a third space in school curriculum where students and teachers alike can glean from students' complex and important funds of knowledge. Such funds of knowledge hail from students' families, communities, churches and clubs. Muhammad (2015) postulated "when girls participate in a space that honors their histories, and identities, they write across multiple, self-ascribed identities in the categories of ethnicity, gender, communities, intellectual academic, individual, kinship and sexuality" (p. 290). Muhammed (2015) as a part of her dissertation process, integrated a six-week summer writing camp for adolescent girls of color and Muslim adolescent girls to write about their personal experiences; such experiences included family customs, peer interactions and relationships, religious beliefs, and education.

Muhammed (2015) provided strategic instruction in the teaching of writing and ensured students had the opportunity to share their writing based on their lived experiences in a confidential, nurturing and apologetic-free environment. Multimodal literacy practices support the concept of safe spaces for marginalized adolescents, particularly those who need a space to ‘live through’ their experiences that might have otherwise been diminished because of fear of consequences of dominating ideas of cultural discourse of society (Moench, 2018).

Reflection serves as an effective way of promoting self-regulation in marginalized students. In light of much of the discrimination faced, they need to be engaged in productive activities that will assist in developing their self-confidence. Safe spaces have been found to create environments that are conducive to adolescents’ competence and motivation. It is only through revealing one’s areas of weaknesses, emotional and educational frustrations, can the necessary assistance be provided to instigate positive change and produce successful learning outcomes.

## **Summary**

While this literature appears to be a myriad of detached concepts, each ideology adheres to how Haitian immigrant adolescent girls in The Bahamas make meaning of their lived experiences through multimodal literacy practices. It is important to understand the plight of how immigrant adolescents migrate; leaving their home to reside and acclimate within a new country and how this transition might have an emotional, social, educational and psychological impact on how they identify themselves. The stories of Haitian immigrant adolescents’ lived realities are worth exploring. This proposed study aims to explore how immigrant adolescent girls communicate their lived experiences through multimodal practices and how the experiences might influence their identity. It is important to provide safe spaces, or outlets for immigrant

adolescents to share their lived experiences without the fear of stigmatization as our world is constantly evolving reshaping itself as person migrate across countries seeking to find a better way of life for themselves and their families. Multimodal literacy practices like writing, photos and tableaux act as powerful conduits for immigrant adolescents to explore those lived experiences.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

As our world becomes increasingly diverse, and immersed in an era of globalization, a focus on facilitating the development of all children and youth through culturally situated and meaningful opportunities to provide a safe platform for them to engage in rich and authentic learning not only about curricular content, but also about themselves is essential (Moench, 2018; Stewart, 2013; Wearmouth, 2017). Tapping into children's and youth's rich and powerful lived experiences provide them with opportunities to engage in authentic and multiple modes of learning and knowing (Moench, 2018). The shift of literacy research from a cognitive orientation to a more socially oriented one (New London Group, 1996; Rubinstein-Avila, 2007; Ajayi, 2015) provides opportunities for all individuals inclusive of immigrant children and youth to integrate new literacies and multi literacies as an avenue to communicate and describe the experiences they encounter when vacillating in and between a transnational space (Rubinstein-Avila, 2007). As you read this chapter, I will guide you through the stories of the participants, occasionally, integrating elements of storytelling like Rubinstein-Avila's (2007) data presentation, collection, and analysis which were all done through portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1993). She explored the experiences of a recent immigrant girl in a US school, captivating those experiences that allowed her reader, "to see, feel, smell, touch the scene ...and produce a picture or a portrait (to) which the reader (would) feels drawn" (p. 59). Similar to Rubinstein-Avila, drawing from

portraiture, I provide a vehicle or channel through which I can capture the stories of my participants' lived experiences (Guitierrez & Rogoff, 2003).

The purpose of this study was to integrate multimodal literacy practices as a conduit to describe the lived experiences of acculturation of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas. I include three inter-related sub-goals: (a) to explore and describe Haitian immigrant adolescent girls' migration stories and acculturation into The Bahamas, (b) to describe the acculturation process of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls who live in The Bahamas, who participate in the Bahamian educational system, and live within the Bahamian community, and (c) to determine the Haitian immigrant adolescent girls constructed their identities.

To guide my study, I integrated an overarching research question:

*What are the lived experiences of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas as expressed through the multimodal literacy practices of writing, tableaux, and photography?*

The following sub-questions were also valuable to my research:

- How do Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas describe their acculturation process through the multimodal literacy practices of writing, tableaux, and photography?
- How do Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas perceive their identity construction through the multimodal literacy practices of writing, photography, and tableaux?

Further, I collected multimodal literacy data to explore these lived experiences of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls in The Bahamas. I provide an overview of the research design, using an exploratory descriptive qualitative (EDQ) design to encapsulate the experiences of the

participants. This design elaborates on the rationale for qualitative research, the participants and their recruitment, data collection and analysis, tenets of trustworthiness and credibility, and my role as the researcher.

### **Rationale for Qualitative Research Design**

For this study, I integrated the EDQ design (Hunter et al., 2019) over the course of two months where I asked participants to use multimodal literacy practices to explore their lived experiences. The intent was to provide the participants with an opportunity to present their lived experiences as Haitian immigrant adolescent girls from a deeper and more detailed perspective of the participants themselves. In research, exploratory and descriptive qualitative research designs are used separately depending on the intended rationale of the study. However, I incorporated both an exploratory and descriptive approach, because this provided a premise where participants can “explore their attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, motivations, decisions, and experiences in the context on which the phenomenon occurs” (Pemo et al., 2020, p. 378). The use of both research designs together supports explorations of issues, concerns, or phenomena when little about it is known, or is too challenging to be captured by other methods. In this instance, extant literature provided an abundance of research pertaining to multimodal literacy and immigrant adolescents in the United States (Danzak, 2011; Ajayi, 2015; and Honeyford; 2018), but little is known about the population of Haitian immigrant adolescents and how they might express or describe their lived experiences through multimodal literacy practices. Pelzang & Hutchinson (2019) claimed this design helps researchers better conceptualize how participants experience real-life situations and gain a deeper account of the problem under investigation. Similarly, using multimodal literacy practices to describe participants’ lived experiences is



intended in this study to gather a deeper, richer conceptualization of how Haitian adolescents communicate experiences of migration, acculturation, and life in The Bahamas.

Hunter et al. (2019) lamented on some elements essential to EDQ designs, explaining the design approach by combining the works of Stebbins' (2001) exploratory research design and Sandelowski's (2000, 2010) descriptive research designs. When both designs are integrated as one, Brink and Wood (1998) suggested a "step-by-step explication of the sample process, data collection, and techniques for data analysis" (p. 285). The studies within Hunter et al.'s (2019) meta-synthesis examined distinct features indicative to EDQ designs. I considered those features in the design of this study. First, I integrated purposeful sampling where participants were able to describe the phenomena in several ways, benefiting this study as participants explored their lived experiences through multiple ways of knowing (writing, photographs, and tableaux). In terms of sample size, EDQ designs maintain some flexibility, whether the sample is small or large, as long as a clear rationale is provided (Hunter et al., 2019). For this study, the sample size is small, only two participants were a part of this study, but this is justified according to the current EDQ design. Second, data collection for both exploratory and descriptive qualitative designs stipulate semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and observations; for this study, participants engaged in both semi-structured interviews as well as focus group interviews. The interviews were audio-recorded in a place or setting that were both comfortable and convenient for participants. Third, according to Hunter et al.'s (2019) meta-synthesis, some studies integrated content analysis and constant comparative methods to analyze data. The analysis of choice for EDQ designs were thematic analysis, namely Braun and Clark (2006), as this thematic analysis is best suited for these designs where participants can explore and describe the phenomenon in a variety of ways, leading researchers to be able to examine patterns or themes within the data.

## **Gaining Entry and Recruitment**

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I got permission from the Bahamian Ministry of Education to initiate recruitment of participants. First, I sent a letter (see Appendix H) to the Director of Education at the Ministry of Education (MOE) in The Bahamas requesting permission to invite students as study participants from a specific junior high school for this research. This junior high school is nestled in a cul-de-sac, hidden behind several businesses along a busy highway. It is located in one of the lowest socioeconomic class neighborhoods in the southeastern district of the island of New Providence. Preston Jackson Junior High School (PJJH) pseudonym houses 473 students. Demographically, the population of the school is 99% students of color. Most students in PJJH are of Afro-Caribbean descent from The Bahamas, Jamaica, Cuba, Haiti, and other Caribbean countries. I chose this school because it has the highest number of Haitian immigrant students within the four districts on the island. (MOERPC, 2010).

Upon approval from the Ministry of Education in The Bahamas, I contacted PJJH school's administrator by sending her an email (see Appendix I). I informed her that I got approval from MOE to recruit study participants from PJJH. I also wrote to inform her of my purpose for conducting this study. The administrator then emailed me granting me permission to email teachers regarding the purpose of the study. The teachers in this instance served as gatekeepers for each of the participants to "smooth the way" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019, p. 232) for participants for this study. I emailed five teachers from PJJH. In turn, the teachers were asked to send an email reply stating their intention to assist in the recruitment of study participants for the study. Three teachers replied to my email and agreed to meet with me at the school's library the following day. When we met, we discussed the purpose of the study and the selection criteria for

the study participants. During the meeting, the teachers were encouraged to make recommendations of participants who met the criteria for the study (see Appendix I). The inclusion criteria included females born in Haiti and living in The Bahamas for more than one year. Study participants should attend a junior high school and be between the ages of 12 and 16. This is the critical middle adolescence stage where children are still trying to determine who they are and what contributes to their identity, so tapping into participants' lived experiences at this phase of their lives was beneficial to this study. Initially, I hoped to include three immigrant adolescent girls within this study, however, after recruitment through the school, I was only able to secure two study participants to assist me.

**Table 1:** Participant Demographic and Background Information

Pseudonym (Age/Gender)	Age of arrival to The Bahamas	Grade	Background information
Rose (16, F)	13	9	Rosie migrated to The Bahamas. Her father applied for residency for her. She lives in The Bahamas as a documented migrant with her father and stepmother. Her biological mother and two siblings remain in Haiti,
Lilac (13, F)	11	7	Lilac migrated to The Bahamas with her brother. She lives with her aunt and uncle. Both of her parents and two other younger siblings remain in Haiti. Lilac has legal status in The Bahamas.

The teachers provided me with phone numbers for the adolescents' parents. I contacted the adolescents' parent(s) to arrange a specific time to meet with them at the school's library and to share the objective of this study with them. The teachers, parents, two study participants and I met a few days later at the school's library. Before parents and participants signed their respective consent forms, I explained the nature and the purpose of my study to them. I hoped to address any concerns and questions they might have, but no one asked any questions. The parents or guardians of the study participants completed the consent form to acknowledge approval allowing their child to participate in the study (See Appendix D). The students also signed an assent form agreeing to participate in the study, (see Appendix F & G). I then planned to meet with study participants; scheduling times for our semi-structured interviews and focus group interview sessions. I also invited the study participants on an outing with me prior to the start of the study. I wanted to get to know them and to help in establishing a comfortable and safe space to talk freely about their experiences. The girls, Rose and Lilac (pseudonyms) agreed to meet with me at a local Haitian restaurant for lunch. Before we left this meeting, I gave them both my cell phone number. They, in turn, gave me their numbers.

### **Getting Acquainted with Study Participants**

I made my way to the restaurant; I felt a wave of excitement to have lunch with the girls. Meeting them for the first time a few days prior was exhilarating. They were both quiet sitting with parents and guardians during the introductory meeting. From my brief observations of them during this initial meeting, they were both agreeable, shaking their heads and answering back favorably as they agreed to be a part of my study. After meeting with them, I wrote my feelings of excitement in my researcher's journal. By keeping a journal—a "reflexive diary" (Hunter et al., 2019)—I was able to document my thoughts, feelings, and experiences throughout the

process. This allowed for greater self-awareness of my background and values, enhancing the overall rigor of my study.

### **My Researcher's Journal Entry**

*I am excited, I have a mixed of wave emotions. Lilac is quiet, she kept looking at her father. I hope they don't see me as intrusive. I want to learn as much about them as possible. I'm fascinated by them already. To leave their Haiti I know is challenging. Leaving The Bahamas for me was rough and I was already grown. Even though I know it would only be for a while, it was still hard. I look forward to getting to know the girls, and I am especially looking forward to eating Haitian food.*

### **Rose**

Rose looked a little older than she was to me, hair braided up in one, nails painted red, a small black purse that she had strapped around her neck and alongside her waist. She smiled easily often accompanied by a little chuckle. I had come to understand that despite being 16, Rose was precocious, remarkably wise and knowledgeable about her life, Haiti and New Providence. Sixteen-year-old Rose lived in The Bahamas for more three years. She relocated to Nassau with her father and stepmother. She moved from Port-de-Paix, a city in Haiti, consisting of 420,000 people, but not as populated as Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, which has 987,311 (Haiti.org, 2021). She hopped into the car quickly when I pulled up in front of the church.

Rose said, *"I'm glad you find us. It too hot out there!"* she said. *"Come, we going to the lil Haitian restaurant up the street! Tell me what you want, and I will go get it 'cause you can't sit and eat no more."*

We were unable to sit in the restaurant, but we could order food for takeout. The contagion of the global pandemic of Covid-19 impeded much, if not all of how persons gathered

to socialize (Bahamas.gov, 2020). In The Bahamas, from the onset of the first case of Covid-19 on March 16, 2020, emergency orders were quickly put in place to counteract the spread of the virus in an effect to keep everyone safe.

Rose chattered a little about how she and Lilac knew each other. Rose mentioned that she knew Lilac from church they both attended. She informed me that most Haitians in Nassau knew each other mostly through the few Haitian churches on the island or simply through networking. She told me Haitians typically stayed together in small communities within host countries.

### **Lilac**

Lilac was tall, slim and wore her hair in long braids. She was bashful and engaged with Rose and me only when either of us initiated a question. She attended PJJH and was in grade 8. Lilac at the time of this study, was 13 years old. She moved to The Bahamas about two years from Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince. As we talked about Lilac's family, I learned quickly to refer to her uncle, as her father. Her biological parents were in Haiti, she and her older brother relocated to Haiti and lived with her uncle and aunt, her present guardians.

Rose ordered for me. I told her I would like to try anything she liked. Lilac recommended I try 'griot,' fried pork in Haitian spices and 'piklez,' pickled cabbage, peppers and spices. I was excited about trying Haitian food for the first time. We waited for about ten minutes, got our food and drove around the island, eating and chatting. We drove for about an hour and chatted about living in The Bahamas, Haitian food and school. The food was flavorful, but too spicy for my taste. After we ate, I dropped them both home. Both Rose and Lilac lived in populated areas of the inner city of Nassau. Rose lived in a small apartment that had been refurbished from a house to a duplex. It was lodged behind two other similar structures. Lilac's

home was similar, except she lived in small, quaint house located at the back of the property. There was one house on the same property adjacent to Lilac's house. I noticed a woman braiding a little child's hair as they both sat in the doorway of the house. She spoke Haitian Creole to the child. These living arrangements, several houses and building structures nestled together forming small communities are dispersed throughout The Bahamas.

I made plans with the girls to meet with them at a local church hall not far from where they lived. We all agreed to meet on Thursdays at 4:00pm as that was the most convenient time for us all.

### **Preparation Meeting**

I met with the participants at the local church hall on the same stretch of road as the Haitian restaurant, where we had met the week prior. I got permission from the pastor to use the hall because it was a large enough space to accommodate us due to constraints of Covid-19. I adhered to the Competent Authority of the Bahamian government that had closed all schools, restaurants and other places where people might gather and not have sufficient space to socially distance. This hall provided us with the space we needed to be safe. During the preparation meeting, I discussed the purpose of the study with the view of providing further understanding of the intention and expectations of the study participants. I wanted them to know early in the study that they will be invited to share their immigration stories, how they acclimated into The Bahamas, and how this acculturative experience might have shaped their identity. I also advised them that pseudonyms would be used instead of their real names to protect their identities. It was my intent to engage the participants in this conversation to help them feel more comfortable sharing and participating without fear of controversy or discrimination given the nature of the study. I also spoke to any concerns or questions participants had. Copious amount of the

literature found on Haitian nationals and The Bahamas reveal that Bahamians see Haitians living in The Bahamas as a threat to their livelihood in the areas of education, health and living conditions (Fielding et al, 2002; Bertin, 2012; and Perry 2016). As a result of the stigma placed on Haitians, Rose wanted to know if she shared her story, others might read about her life and understand that she was no different from any other adolescent. She wanted to ensure others would get to know her and not stigmatize her because of where she was from.

I provided all of the materials needed for the study. These included journals, pencils, pens, and digital cameras. However, both Rose and Lilac decided to use their phones to take photos. They had no personal financial expenses. They were informed of times for our future meetings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I also discussed the logistics of each meeting with Rose and Lilac. I explained that I would meet and conduct a semi-structured interview (Merriam, 2009) with each of them individually prior to the focus group interviews, and then another interview at the end. I then discussed with Rose and Lilac that they would engage in six focus group interviews, two rounds for each of the multimodal literacy practices of writing, photography and tableaux.

### **Data Collection**

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), as the researcher, I am considered the key data collection instrument with the responsibility of examining materials, observing behaviors, and conducting participant interviews. On this premise, I employed two rounds of semi-structured interviews (approximately 45 minutes each) based on the participants lived experiences. I conducted a total of six rounds of focus group interviews utilizing tenets of multi-modal literacy to capture the lived experiences of the participants. Both semi-structured interviews and six focus group interviews were audio recorded and immediately transcribed both manually and by the use



of TEMI, an electronic transcription service. This aligned with the step-by-step procedures of EDQ designs (Hunter et al., 2019).

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

After the preparation meeting, I conducted a semi-structured interview first with Rose, then with Lilac. Each interview took about forty-five minutes. Merriam (1998) suggests semi-structured interviews are an important approach for the collection of qualitative data. Similarly, Hunter et al suggest the use of semi-structured interviews as a key feature when integrating the EDQ research design. Such an approach assisted me in documenting and collecting data to describe both Rose's and Lilac's backgrounds as Haitian immigrant adolescents living in The Bahamas. I asked open-ended questions remaining conversational and situational. I ensured I used a question guide to assist me, however, I also remained flexible to ask other questions depending on the participants' responses. See Appendix B for semi-structured questions. Some questions included:

1. Why did you relocate to The Bahamas?
2. What was your experience leaving Haiti and traveling to The Bahamas?
3. Do you have other family members living in Haiti? If so, who?

As Rose and Lilac both answered my questions, explaining and describing themselves, I found myself visualizing their homes, their families and even their traveling to The Bahamas. I was particularly mesmerized when I asked Lilac about how she communicated with her family back in Haiti once she entered The Bahamas. Lilac sat up for moment, then took a deep breath. She did not look directly at me, later I realized she had tears in her eyes. I captured that moment in my journal after the interview writing about the pain she experienced due to not seeing her family.

*Researcher: How do you communicate with your family in Haiti?*

*Lilac: I see my mom on WhatsApp video call only when I get money to add minutes to my phone. She always cry when she see me, she miss me and I miss her. I tell her don't cry, I will see her soon. I have not seen her since I left Haiti. I can't travel back like that because it is cost a lot of money."*

*Researcher: How do you get money to buy minutes for your phone?*

*Lilac: I clean houses with my aunt on Saturdays sometimes. Sometimes, she would give me money like \$5 or \$20 when she clean like three house, four house like that.*

When asked who she lives with, Rose disclosed that she lives with her father and stepmother. She argued that the situation is not ideal for her and if she could live somewhere else, she would. She described her living conditions as being subpar. However, she postulated that she and her stepmother did not get along well because Rose disapproved of her relationship with her father. I then discovered that Rose's stepmother was actually her father's girlfriend and his wife, lived in another location.

*Researcher: Who do you live with now? How is that going for you?*

*Rose: That's just my daddy, he like a lot of woman and have a lot of children. He don't really take care of us like that. I mean, he get me straight to live here in Bahamas, but he was never really there for me and now he having another baby with his girlfriend and his wife live in another place and he have children with other women in Haiti too."*

When the semi-structured interviews ended that day. I gave both Rose and Lilac a ride home. We had ended later than anticipated and the buses had stopped running. I wrote my thoughts in my journal after the first semi-structured interview.

### **My researcher's journal entry:**

*I am filled with an overwhelming sense of sympathy for both Rose and Lilac. I am not sure if either of them is truly happy. Lilac understands why she had to leave home, however, how challenging is this for a child to have to endure, leaving the comfort of her family? At 13, it could be challenging just trying to adjust to life as an adolescent, but to be faced with the burden and stress of having to live without being able to see your mother and father every day.*

At the end of all of the focus group sessions, I conducted another semi-structured interview. This interview served as a 'closing out' for both Rose and Lilac. I wanted to see how they might have benefited from engaging in this study. For example, I asked several questions like:

*Researcher: What did you find most rewarding about this experience?*

*Rose: I want people to know my story, I want them know that Haitian people are people too. I know some people might not care, but maybe one might just see this situation different.*

*Lilac: I like that I can talk about my country. I know I shy, but it was good to talk about where I from. One day when I become doctor, I will help my mother and my family.*

### **Focus Group Interview 1—Writing**

At the onset of this first focus group interview, I engaged Rose and Lilac in a conversation about how children and adolescents leave their home countries to relocate to host countries for a plethora of reasons. Some reasons might be to find better job opportunities that might situate them for a better future. Other reasons might be for educational purposes, and others might be to escape poverty, political unrest and natural disasters of their home countries. I

wanted them to understand that migration as postulated by Swann (2012) is a way of life for many persons who are searching for a better life and are unable to find it in their home country. I told them I had relocated to America for almost five years with my children to pursue a degree. I then asked both Lilac and Rose several questions as an incentive to get them conversing about their migration stories. For examples, some questions I asked were:

1. What are your thoughts about immigrant children's experiences of migration?
2. What are your experiences of migrating from Haiti to The Bahamas?
3. Can you describe the day you traveled from Haiti to The Bahamas? What was going through your mind? Take me on that journey.
4. Why did you (and your family) migrate to The Bahamas?

I asked Rose and Lilac about how they traveled from Haiti to The Bahamas. Many Haitians travel to The Bahamas by boat, where many are smuggled into the country illegally. However, both Rose and Lilac traveled to The Bahamas by plane. This first focus group interview served as a preliminary activity to get them talking about their lived experiences as a group to give them an idea of what they might write about during the second focus group interview. I asked study participants to think about the actual day they traveled to The Bahamas, leaving Haiti, their family and friends behind. I invited them to share why they traveled, their goals, expectations, and challenges upon entering a foreign country. I wanted to know how they felt, if they had any apprehensions and if they were excited and why. I encouraged Rose and Lilac to brainstorm ideas, writing short notes on paper about what they would write about when we meet for the second focus group interview. Lilac made some brief notes on her paper. Her notes were a few words and sentences. When asked, what has been your experience traveling from Haiti to The Bahamas? Lilac wrote:

*Plane*

*Leaving parents at home*

*Scary plane ride. I have never been on a plane before*

*I know I had to leave.*

Rose also wrote a few notes on her paper:

*Packing the night before*

*Hair salon*

*Leaving my mother*

*I felt excitement to leave Haiti and find a new place to live.*

This interview lasted thirty minutes. The interview was recorded using my cell phone. When I got home, I transferred the audio recording into word format. This transcription of the interview added to the corpus of data. I listened to the audio and wrote down verbatim what the study participants said during this interview. Even though I transcribed the audio recordings manually, I also uploaded the audio tapes into TEMI, the electronic transcription service I purchased prior to the start of the study. I compared both manual and automatic transcriptions to ensure accuracy. I then deleted the recordings from my cell phone. My transcription of the interview in TEMI's service was secure and can only be accessed by a highly sensitive password.

### **Focus Group Interview 2—Writing.**

During this session, study participants and I reflected on the conversation we had during the first focus group interview. I encouraged Rose and Lilac to refer to their notes as we discussed their lived experiences migrating from Haiti to The Bahamas. Both study participants took out their notes they had created from the first writing focus group interview. Their notes were written in the journals that were provided for them in the preparation meeting. I engaged

them both in conversation about the notes and the writing genre they would use. I suggested that the participants compose a poem or a short story that spoke to their own journey as immigrants, traveling from Haiti to The Bahamas I did not want to give them a definitive structure of writing. I welcomed their freedom of choice in conveying their thoughts and connecting through any type of writing inclusive of poetry, memoir, prose, journal entry, letter, or skit. I wanted them to write in any form they found most suitable to express their own stories of their lived experiences. Both Rose and Lilac decided to write a letter to me about their experience of leaving Haiti and traveling to The Bahamas.

One pew separated Rose and Lilac. Rose sat in the first pew of the church on one end and Lilac sat in the second pew, right behind Rose, however, she sat at the opposite end of that pew. After our initial engagement that lasted a few minutes, Rose and Lilac proceeded to write their letters. They wrote for about twenty minutes. When they completed their letters, they shared their writing with the group. Rose read her letter aloud to the group first. I did not ask any questions as she read her piece. She read with enthusiasm stopping periodically to grin or to make a comment about her writing. After she finished reading, I engaged her in conversation. Lilac listened as we talked. I asked questions for example:

*Researcher: You wrote that you were excited to leave Haiti, why were you excited about traveling to The Bahamas? Did you have any apprehensions about traveling and leaving the home you lived in for so many years? What was your mother's reaction to you leaving?*

*Rose: I was excited about leaving Haiti because I wanted a change in my life. My Dad would tell us about Bahamas this is good and that is good and better jobs and money is*

*there, so I was happy. I was a little sad to leave my mommy, but I know I would see her in the summer again when I got back Haiti.*

After engaging Rose in a dialogue about her writing, I proceeded with Lilac who read her letter aloud. Her letter was not filled with as much excitement as Rose's letter. In fact, it was sad in that she shared the burden of having to leave Haiti. Despite understanding her family's reason for her and her brother to leave, Lilac described the pain her parents felt after losing their four children. Lilac read that her parents did not want to lose any more children due to poverty or poor health conditions of some parts of Haiti, particularly after the catastrophic tsunami that left Haiti in a constant state of disarray and chaos. Lilac shared in her writing that she was filled with a mixture of feelings both excitement, fear and apprehension. I asked Lilac:

*Researcher: What was going through your mind when you walked onto that plane traveling to The Bahamas?*

*Lilac: I was scare. I kept thinking about the movie I watch and plane crash and crash. I thought about my parents too and my mom was so sad and she cry so much. I cry too, but I know this is better for me and my family. I know in my heart that I have to leave Haiti if I want a good life for me and for my family. My brother and me know we had to go and to be a example for our other brothers and sisters and our parents. But it was so hard Ms Tash. Even now, I want to cry about it. But I know that one day, when I get the money save up. I will go back Haiti.*

After both Lilac and Rose read their letters aloud and engaged in a discussion, I took pictures of their letters to be compiled as data source and then to be analyzed along with the audio taping of this focus group interview.

See Figure 1 for an overview of the writing focus group interviews.

<b>Focus Group Interview 1 &amp; 2—Writing</b>	
<b>Step 1</b>	Greeting; introduction to the session; instructions; objectives of the interview
<b>Step 2</b>	Engage in discussion about migration into The Bahamas, adjusting to a new way of life.
<b>Step 3</b>	Participants took notes, then choose which genre to use when to describe their experience traveling from Haiti
<b>Step 4</b>	Participants wrote
<b>Step 5</b>	Participants shared their writing; they read their pieces aloud to the focus group
<b>Step 6</b>	Participants engaged in discussions about their writing and the lived experience of leaving their home country to live in The Bahamas.

**Figure 1:** Overview of Focus Group Interviews 1 & 2—Writing

### **My Researcher’s journal entry**

*Both Lilac’s and Rose’s letters were interesting. Rose was more excited about leaving Haiti, I guess it because she is leaving with a parent unlike Lilac who has left both parents behind. I can only fathom how Lilac’s parents and Rose’s mother must have felt. For me, I had the option of leaving my children with their father, but I couldn’t see it happening. I thought they were too little to leave behind. They were only four and three, and later after arriving in the states I had another child almost three weeks into school.*

### **Focus Group Interview 3—Introduction to Photography Session.**

Qualitative researchers often engage their participants in taking photos to document aspects of their lives. This is known as photovoice explained in Wang and Burris’ (1997) seminal study who sought “to identify, represent, and enhance a community through specific photographic technique” (p. 396). Wang and Burris (1997) prompted this move in their study to assess and promote health care and social education. These authors advocate that photovoice rests on three premises:

- Enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns



- Promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs
- Reach policymakers (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 369.)

In this study, Rose and Lilac were asked to take photos of images that supported their lived experiences of acculturation, migrating into The Bahamas, and images that reminded them of life in Haiti. I specifically explained the procedures and intent of this focus group interview session in photograph. This session was an introduction to photovoice that helped study participants glean a keen understanding of the purpose of taking photos that were meaningful to them with the intent to discuss the photo's significance as it pertained to their lived experience as a Haitian immigrant living in The Bahamas. I engaged them in an initial discussion and explained how photos can provide important information about one's life journey. For example, I shared a photo of one of my daughters at Junkanoo, a Bahamian celebration and parade that highlights the culture, dance and music of the country. By sharing this image, I initiated a discourse about the importance of the parade to Bahamian people, but also to establish and disclose why this photo was meaningful to me and how this photo told the story of my lived experience. For example, I shared:

*Researcher: Here's a photo of my second daughter at Junkanoo. This was her first time attending the parade. She was about six at the time. We love the music of Junkanoo, we are proud of the talent of those who design the costumes and the dancers who choreograph to the music. My daughter was fascinated by the dance. She could not keep her eyes on the dancers but screaming above the music that she wanted to celebrate in the parade. I felt bad not allowing her to attend the parade and not really getting her to learn about her own culture.*

As a result of this discussion and example, Rose in turn, discussed how Haitian Flag Day is celebrated in The Bahamas. Haitian Day is typically celebrated May 18. It is the day where Haitians around the world commemorate the milestone of how their ancestors more than 200 years ago rallied to successfully overthrow the French colonial army to gain independence for themselves as a people. Their guiding principle, “L`Union fait la Force,” which means with unity there is strength (Haitia.org, 2021). I suggested that if she wanted to take images of that event, that helped to describe her experiences celebrating Haitian Flag Day in The Bahamas, and that could be an image she could share with us.

This session only took about thirty minutes. At the end of the session, I advised study participants to take photos and emailed them to me prior to our next focus group interview the following week. I would print the photos Rose and Lilac sent to me in order to have them ready for focus group interview when we meet.

#### **Focus Group Interview 4—Photograph.**

When the participants and I met for the fourth focus group interview, participants looked at the photos they had emailed and discussed each one individually, including why they chose to take that specific image and the meaning behind each photo. The photos were printed on an 8.5 x 11 paper and given to Rose and Lilac. Rose captured five images and Lilac captured four. We all looked at the photos together, then I engaged Rose in a discussion asking questions about each photo, then Lilac. I asked:

*Research: Why did you choose this photo? What is this image?*



**Figure 2:** Rose's Photo of a Haitian Bus

*Rose: This is a jitney (bus) in Haiti. I took a picture of this bus for a couple reasons. I mean the jitney driver does play the music so loud, he can't even hear when you say, "Bus Stop" (which means, that passengers have arrived at destinations and need to be let off the bus). That's the same thing in Haiti, they play loud bus, they sale food on them long rides 'cause you know Haiti much bigger than Nassau and them ride does be long!*

*Researcher: Does this photograph represent how well (or not so well) how you have adjusted to way of life in the Bahamas?*

*Rose: Yes, cause when I first reach Nassau, my daddy wife told me I had to learn how to catch the jitney to get to school and back home. She nor my daddy was coming every, every day to get me. I had to learn to catch the jitney by myself. I so scared at first 'cause I did not know where I was going, the bus driver used to drive so bad and so fast. They take over (pass) other bus drivers to pick up customers and it so dangerous, you could get kill like that. I don't like it at all.*

*Researcher: It seems you had to learn to be independent the moment you arrived here? Did you have to take the bus to get to and from school?*

*Rose: No, my mother used to pay the taxi driver to pick me up and take me to school. She would pay him by the month, because school was far in Port-au-Prince. But it was safe and the taxi driver was my mommy friend too. And even sometimes, my mommy used to go with me. Now, here, I always by myself, trying to handle everything by myself. My daddy never home, and it's just me all the time by myself.*

*Researcher: Lilac, what does it represent about who you are?*



**Figure 3:** Lilac's Photo of an Almond Leaf

While participants took pictures of images that communicated their lived experiences, it is equally important participants engaged in critical discussions about why they chose to capture a particular image. This discussion represented the voice aspect in photovoice (Cooper, 2016). By integrating the art of photography, participants provided a deeper meaning and connection to express their lived experiences (Leavy, 2015). Here, the connection of art and multimodal literacy practice of photography could be further realized (Shenfield, 2015).

See Figure 4 for an overview of the fourth focus group interview.

<b>Focus Group Interview 3 &amp; 4—Photograph</b>	
<b>Step 1</b>	Greeting; introduction to the session; instructions; objectives of the interview
<b>Step 2</b>	Participants engaged in a brief tutorial about taking photos that represented their life stories
<b>Step 3</b>	Participants left first focus group interview session tasked with taking photos, then to email them to me
<b>Step 4</b>	When photos were emailed to me, I printed them on 8.5x11 paper to have them ready for the next focus group interview in photography
<b>Step 5</b>	When participants met for the following interview, they shared their photos
<b>Step 6</b>	Participants engaged in discussion about their photos, the importance of the photos, the symbolism of the photos, and how the photos help them communicate their lived experiences.
<b>Step 7</b>	Throughout this interview, participants engaged in discussions.

**Figure 4:** Overview of Focus Group Interview 4 & 5—Photograph

This focus group interview took an hour. Like the other interviews, this was also audio taped. After the interview, I transferred the audio to TEMI for a written transcription. Similar to the previous interviews, I also manually transcribed this interview and uploaded them to iCloud with the other transcriptions. These interviews were compiled as my data source to be transcribed at the completion of all of the interviews. While there were photos taken, the actual discussions were used as a part of the corpus of data because participants discussed, explained and described their lived experiences through photographs.

#### **Focus Group Interview 5—Tableau**

In this focus group interview, Rose and Lilac engaged in tableaux activities.. Each participant created a tableau of an experience symbolic or meaningful to them. A discussion about each tableau followed between the participants. At this focus group interview, like the first focus group interviews of the multimodal literacy practices of both writing and photography, I engaged Rose and Lilac in an introductory session about tableaux. Tableaux are dramatic activities that refer to a positioning of the body in a stance that might represent a memory or

scent from a participant's life. Tableaux in this instance served as symbolism to support participants in describing and addressing a lived experience. The intent of the creating tableaux assisted initiating any challenging experience they might have encountered adjusting to a new life. After participants performed their tableaux, they were given the opportunity to discuss the tableaux, the challenges they experienced and suggestions on how to rectify that experience as portrayed in the second focus group interview in tableaux.

To help Rose and Lilac better understand, I gave them an example of how to perform a tableau. I demonstrated the frustration I felt when I had to rush one of my children to the hospital in the United States. I felt anxious and frightened because I was living alone with three small children. With my own family living in The Bahamas, I had to ask a classmate of mine to babysit the other children while I attended to the sick child. I stood up, held my sweater in my hand as if it were a baby, closed my eyes and grimaced with the hope that this look expressed and captivated the anguish I experienced that day. After I did this, I froze for about two minutes while both Rose and Lilac guessed how I felt based on my facial expressions and body language. Fortunately, they were observant enough to identify my stance as one of pain, hurt or anger. After they guessed the specific emotion and a scenario considering how I held the sweater, I dropped my stance and proceeded to explain what the position represented.

After we engaged in this activity, I discussed how I would have wanted this situation to have occurred differently. I stood up, used Lilac to help me create a scene where I was taking my baby to the hospital, but that this time, I had some support and company of another individual. I embraced her arm, holding the baby (sweater) and then froze. My face did not convey the extreme anguish it did in the previous tableau. Together Rose and Lilac explained that even though I still had to take a child to the hospital, I had someone to accompany me there.

I discovered that I had to demonstrate tableaux to both Rose and Lilac a few times because they did not fully understand how to engage in the activity, particularly how to recreate a challenging tableau for the first session, then recreate the same tableau as a projection of the future.

After this, I then engaged Rose and Lilac into creating their tableaux. I asked several questions, and provided a few prompts:

Researcher: Think about a difficulty or challenge you experienced when trying to adjust to living in a new country. Think about how I created my tableau, then create one.

Keep in mind that your facial expression and body language are key to creating an effective stance.

Lilac demonstrated a look of fear and frustration on her face. She looked as if she was about to cry. She stood holding a book in her hand. Her eyes were opened wide as she clenched the book. I took a photo of Lilac's stance. Both Rose and I watched Lilac's stance for a moment and then asked if Lilac might be dramatizing some feeling of fear or pain. Lilac then dropped her stance and discussed her tableau. She expressed that she felt afraid when asked to read aloud in her English class knowing that she was still trying to master the English Language. She disclosed that she was not only afraid but humiliated.

*Researcher: Why were you afraid?*

*Lilac: I was more shame I guess. That teacher would always call on me to read aloud, It ain (not) like I don't know the word, I just didn't know all of them, plus the other children would laugh at me, at my accent. I really felt shame, like I couldn't be me there.*

*Researcher: Have you felt like this Haiti?*

*Lilac: Not as much. I mean every student have the same accent so if didn't matter.*



**Figure 5:** Lilac’s Tableau of Reading Aloud

When both Rose and Lilac engaged in a round of tableau each, they discussed the meaning of the tableau and why they chose to ‘relive’ this experience. I took pictures of their stances, uploaded it to my iCloud. I also printed them so that when we met for the following focus group interview in tableaux, we could make reference to them for another round of tableaux. Like the previous focus group interviews, I audiotaped our discussions on my cell phone. Later that evening, I uploaded the audio to TEMI so I might have a written transcription. I also listened closely to the tapes and wrote down what each participant said. I found this to be very tedious but rewarding because I compared both transcriptions to ensure accuracy. I did this after each interview. I then compiled both written transcripts in iCloud along with the transcripts from the other interviews all to be used as a part of my data set.

### **Focus Group Interview 6—Tableau**

Two days later, study participants and I met for a second tableaux activity to create scenes of things they hope to see change, based on the previous tableaux from the previous focus group interview in tableaux. Participants engaged in Boal’s (1995) Imitation of Transition technique, which integrated Branscombe and Schneider’s (2013) method of encouraging study



participants to engage in rounds of tableaux to explore their reflections on experiences in the field as pre-service teachers. In Branscombe and Schneider’s (2013) study, participants created a round of tableaux based on their reflections on what they actually experienced in the field and another round what they hope to see change within their experiences. For this study, participants described how they intended to display their second tableaux with the group and then each was given the opportunity to do so. After each tableau presentation, participants and the researcher discussed the purpose and significance of each tableau. As Rose and Lilac created their tableaux, I took photos of each stance. Finally, I facilitated a conversation about how the tableaux represented the lived experiences of the participants and how they had learned more about themselves as immigrants through this activity. See Figure 6 for an overview of the sixth focus group interview.

<b>Focus Group Interview 5 &amp; 6</b>	
<b>Step 1</b>	Greeting; introduction to the session; instructions; objectives of the interview
<b>Step 2</b>	<i>Round 1 of tableaux.</i> Participants create tableaux of a troubling experience, a memory or a situation in their lives, other participants watch the tableaux.
<b>Step 3</b>	Participants discuss together the tableau each created
<b>Step 4</b>	<i>Round 2 of tableaux.</i> Participants create individual tableaux of a change they hope to see in their lives, based on first round of tableaux.
<b>Step 5</b>	Participants discuss together the tableau each created
<b>Step 6</b>	Throughout this interview, participants are encouraged to continue engaging in discussions.

**Figure 6:** Overview of Focus Group Interview 6—Tableaux

Lilac’s previous tableau demonstrated her apprehension about reading out loud in English class. From the previous focus group interview, she described her feeling of fear and

embarrassment. I gave her the photo of this tableau that I printed. I encouraged her to consider how she might create another tableau and reenact this troubling experience into a more positive one. I also encouraged her to recall the demonstrations and examples we did in the previous session. Lilac waited for a moment. She gathered her thoughts and then proceeded with her tableau. Both Rose and I watched her. This time, she used the same book, gave the book to Rose, who she asked to pretend to read. Lilac stood over rose and placed her hand on Rose's shoulder. Then Lilac paused.



**Figure 7:** Lilac's Tableau of Potential Teacher Interaction

After a brief moment, Rose and I discussed the tableau. I used my cell phone to take a picture of Lilac's stance. I wanted Rose to see it clearly because she was a part of Lilac's tableau. Both Rose and I noticed that Lilac's facial expression did not demonstrate fear, rather it was relaxed and at ease. Rose noted that Lilac's body language was different as well, she leaned closer to Rose and extended a hand on to Rose's shoulder. Rose inquired if she was the student and Lilac was the teacher helping her with reading.

*Researcher: Were we correct in our assumption, that the teacher was providing support to the reader?*

*Lilac: Yes ma'am. If I could change that bad thing in school, I would make the teacher more caring and understanding, not to read loud so everyone could hear you like that.*

*Researcher: have you experienced the kind of thing in Haiti?*

*Lilac: Haiti is just as bad, the teacher beat you, make you remember a whole chapter, or call your parents to tell them you doing bad. But here it just worse 'cause we is Haitian.*

I audiotaped our discussion and took photos to the tableaux. I transcribed the audio recordings and added the transcriptions to my mounting corpus of data. Below, I explain in detail how I analyzed the data set using Braun & Clarke's six-phase analysis process.

### **Member Checking**

After the semi-structured and focus group interviews, I engaged the study participants in the process of member checking. I provided the transcripts from the interviews, which were printed and given to them to read at the end of the final semi-structured interview. Rose and Lilac determined accuracy and ensured that what was said and disclosed during the interviews were captured precisely as they intended. Rose nor Lilac found no inaccurate information within the transcripts.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews and a series of focus groups, I constantly referred to referral to my researcher’s journal, and rich, thick description and analysis of the established modes of literacy practices (writing, photography, and tableaux) created during the focus groups. Each aspect of data analysis is addressed in the next sections. I analyzed the data based on Braun and Clarke’s data six-phase data analysis process. A thorough description of is given below according to each of the six phases.

### Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis is the process of identifying themes and patterns of the qualitative data and using such themes to address the research or indicate a particular issue or trend (Marguire & Delahunt, 2017). I used Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis framework—an important component of EDQ design—to analyze the data. This framework allows for flexibility and is not part of any epistemological or theoretical perspective (Marguire & Delahunt, 2017). However, EDQ-designed studies often use Braun and Clarke’s seminal thematic analysis structure (Hunter et al., 2019). The framework consists of a six-phase process providing a clear path to analyze the data collected for this study (see Figure 7).

<b>Phases</b>	<b>Description</b>
Phase 1	Become familiar with the data.
Phase 2	Generate initial codes.
Phase 3	Search for themes.
Phase 4	Review themes.

Phase 5                      Define themes.

Phase 6                      Write up.

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**Figure 8:** Braun's & Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis Framework

**Phase 1: Becoming Familiar with the Data**

Each of the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews was audio recorded using a cell phone. The recordings were secured using a two-way authentication password requiring my fingerprint and a uniquely generated, six-number access code. Immediately after each interview, the recordings were uploaded to my iCloud and then deleted from my cell phone. I accessed the recordings via my personal laptop. The laptop was secured and entrance to both iCloud and the laptop was secured by a highly sensitive password.

When the interviews were completed, I listened to the audiotapes and transcribed the verbal data into written format. The data were arranged by interview and organized chronologically. I also uploaded the audiotapes to TEMI.com, an electronic transcription service for deeper accuracy. The data were secured in TEMI portal under a sensitive password. TEMI then transcribed the verbal data into written form. To transcribe the audio version of the data using TEMI, the process took less than an hour. Some of the words were lost, inaudible, and inaccurate in TEMI translation. As a backup, I often referred to the original audio recordings when there were some challenges understanding TEMI. It was important to cross check the manually written transcripts against the transcripts from TEMI a few times. Despite time-consuming and tedious nature of this task, I became more and more familiar with the data. This was an important step in the data analysis. I read the entire data set a few times from beginning

to end. The data set were the transcriptions from all of the interviews. I wanted to be “true” to the original nature of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

I created a table with three columns, labeled Data, Initial Codes, and Candidate Themes (See Figure 8). At the top of the table, I wrote the research questions in bold and kept referring to it to ensure any data extracted as a potential code aligned with the questions. I read through the data and highlighted any words or phrases attempting to make some “inchoate sense” (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 88) of what emerged. I highlighted words and phrases that were meaningful and significant to study participants’ lived experiences, acculturation, and multimodal literacy practices. I also highlighted words and phrases that were repetitious. According to Ryan and Bernard (2000), repetitious concepts in the data might be considered as potential themes. I indicated analogies used by the study participants and also created initial codes from similarities and differences between study participants’ semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions. Lastly, I included initial theory-related codes (Ryan & Bernard, 2000) that emphasized the importance of multimodal literacy practices and their connection to understanding participants’ lived experiences. Using an inductive approach (Patton, 1999), I created an initial string of 289 codes. Each code was numbered along with the data extract. I did not want to lose the context of transcript, so highlighting and numbering the data extracts were important. See Figure 8 as an example of the data coding process.

Data	Initial Codes	Candidate Themes
Rosie:  My last school where I did my grade seven through nine, (1) it wasn't only black people to that school. It was like, uh, cause it was like an American school where we had plenty white people to that school	1. Racial divide	Separation

---

because

(2) it was like most of the school where you have to

be an American money because they did not accept

the Gourde. (3) And then that's where I learned little

English before I came to The Bahamas

2. Only American money accepted.

3. learned little English at

the American school

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**Figure 9:** Example of Data Coding Process

### Phase 3: Searching for Themes

For this phase, I looked closely at the data, codes, and extracts. I looked to determine how similar codes might combine to form overarching themes. I read through the data and highlighted sections of that stood out to me. For example, if I noticed repetitious information in the data, I highlighted it and gave it a code or a name. In a focus group interview, Rose discussed how she attended, “white people school.” Throughout the focus group interview, she recounted her experience of attending this school as being more advantageous than her previous experience attending school in Haiti where most of the students at that particular school were Haitians. This repetition became a code from the corpus of data according to Ryan & Bernard, who posit that repetition, are those topics that ‘occur and reoccur’ (p. 89). Further in, I looked for similarities and differences across the corpus of data from both Rose and Lilac. I highlighted and pulled data extracts that were similar. For example, both Lilac and Rose discussed how they felt when they had to separate from their families in Haiti, even though Lilac’s discussion was more emotive, they both expressed the sadness they felt when they left Haiti. This this became a code. I also thoroughly scrutinized the data based on the identification of indigenous themes, that provided specific information ‘that characterized the experience of informants’ as suggested by Ryan and Bernard. I kept the research questions in mind and searched for any data that substantiated these questions. I made codes whenever I discovered this. I simultaneously compiled similar codes

along with their respective data extracts on a separate piece of paper creating thematic piles (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I considered these piles candidate themes. For this phase, I gathered and collated codes into five candidate themes.

#### **Phase 4: Reviewing Themes**

I reviewed each of the candidate theme piles to ensure alignment with the research questions. I searched for patterns within the themes, read the data extracts, and identified any overlap or potential sub-themes across the data set. I looked at outlier themes that did not fit within other themes. I also checked the extracts for any potential problems, for example, inaccurate parts of the transcription, or missing parts. It was an iterative process, and in some instances, I had to go back, re-read, and re-code the data. In other instances, I had to disregard some of the initial candidate themes and compile them into overarching themes to uncover the connections. At this stage, I ended with three overarching themes that told the story of the study participants' lived experiences, inclusive of their migration stories, their acculturation, and their identity formation—all through the integration of multimodal literacy practices.

#### **Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes.**

I read through the three themes generated from the previous phase, “defining and refining” them. Braun and Clarke (2006) contend this is a phase where researchers are encouraged to look for the “essence” (p. 92) of what each theme is about. I then wrote a detailed analysis of each of the themes, considering each in relation to each other. I ensured no overlap existed and that each theme was not too diverse or complex. I then gave the themes names that captured the true essence of the study participants' lived experiences. Those three themes were



‘separation,’ ‘stress’ and ‘sacrifice.’ Separation is defined as moving, leaving or being a part. The theme of separation became evident to me when both Rose and Lilac had to leave their homes in Haiti. This leaving or separating was not only a physical event in both of their lives, but it was an emotional one as well. Both of them discussed the challenge of having to leave their parent(s) and siblings behind. The theme of stress was manifested when study participants discussed their challenges of adjusting to a new life in a different country. With that adjustment, came challenges with religious freedom, stigmatization and inequality at school. Rose and Lilac expressed feeling stress and anxiety in varying degrees, when faced with adjusting to The Bahamas.

The theme of sacrifice is also filtered through the corpus of data when the study participants expressed their desire for establishing a life for themselves and eventually their families in Haiti. The definition of sacrifice means to give up something meaningful, Lilac for example, emphasized vehemently she understood, despite the pain she felt leaving her family in Haiti, she accepted that she had to make the ultimate sacrifice. If that meant sacrificing the comfort and security of her life in Haiti to live in The Bahamas in search of an optimistic future, then she would have to persevere and sacrifice. An example of some of the data extract under the theme of sacrifice is provided in Figure 8.

<b>Candidate: Theme Pile: Separation</b>
<p><b>Rosie:</b>  (10) And then for January, I come here, January 3rd, 2014. <i>(Rose left Haiti)</i></p> <p><b>Researcher:</b>  (15) So, your father lives here. <i>(Rose and father are separated; they both live in different countries)</i></p> <p><b>Rosie:</b>  (17) So, your father is a citizen here. So, he put in the documents for you to come here.  (18) Where's your mom, is she?  (19) My mom in Haiti. No, my mom and I my father they doesn't have like, cause my dad has other kids too beside me with my mom <i>(Rose is now separated from her mom who lives back in Haiti)</i>  (37), I mean, I didn't grow up with my father, when I first came here, I met a lady. She just did, like,  (38) she told my daddy that I like daughter can she live with me? And my daddy was like. She didn't have no kids</p>

at that time. (*Separation continues even after Rose is in The Bahamas living with her father, she leaves to live with her father's friend*)

**Lilac:** (90) I think that about it. Um, the day I was traveling came on the Bahamas this day, my mom was crying because your mom was crying. She say, I didn't know when I can meet you again, like face to face. So I listened the plane (*Effects of leaving Haiti on Lilac*)

(111) I miss my mom and my dad, I live with my uncle and my brother, my mom and dad still live in Haiti.

**Figure 10:** Example of Theme Extraction

### Phase 6: Producing the Report.

This is the final phase of the Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, which includes the final write of the data collected. The report or write up is chapter 4, that illustrated data extracts, embedded within an analytic narration that told the story of data collection all supported by the research question.

**Table 2:** Data Sources and Theme Matrix

Themes	Data Sources				
	<i>Multimodal Literacy Practices</i>				
	Semi-Structured Interviews	Writings	Photography	Tableaux	Researcher's Journal
Separation	X	X	X	X	X
Stress	X	X	X		X
Sacrifice	X	X		X	X

### Researcher's Journal

I made journal entries before and after the semi-structured interviews with the study participants. These entries were dispersed throughout this chapter. I kept a researcher's journal

because I identified with the study participants having to relocate to the United States to pursue a degree in higher education. Additionally, I wrote about my lived experiences. I also made journal entries after interviewing study participants. I wrote about similarities, differences, and anything meaningful about the interviews as they related to the research questions. My researcher's journal also served as a platform for bracketing to "suspend any preconceived notions or personal experiences that may unduly influence" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019, p. 233) what was heard from the participants' responses.

### **Trustworthiness, Credibility, Transparency, and Transferability**

I wanted to ensure this study adhered to trustworthiness and credibility, that Creswell (2014) suggested by incorporating multiple validation approaches to enhance my ability to determine validity of the findings and successfully gain trust of the reader. Such approaches include, but are not limited to, clarification of my bias and engaging in reflexivity, keeping a researcher's journal, seeking participant feedback and collaboration, and generating rich, thick description of the findings, followed by a peer review of the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hesse-Biber, 2017). In addition to these approaches, I also triangulated the data with evidence from peer reviewed research articles that supported the emergent themes (Creswell, 2014).

The following tenets of quality academic research were also established throughout the research design:

- *Authenticity*—I ensured the participants could speak freely with voices heard. My role was to record accurately their perceptions, descriptions, and explorations (Hunter et al., 2019).

- *Trustworthiness*—I kept copious notes before, during, and after the observations and interviews.
- *Member checking*—I provided the study participants with transcripts of the data to establish “truthfulness” and accuracy of their contributions to the study (Merriam, 2009).
- *Credibility*—I focused on my role and experience as a researcher, setting aside potential impediments to credibility such as personal opinions, biases, and thoughts.
- *Triangulation*—I organized the triangulation of the data from the individual semi-structured interviews, focus group session interviews, and my researcher’s journal. (Denzin, 1978).
- *Transferability*—I secured transferability through the integration of rich, thick description of the participants verbal and non-verbal communication and detailed descriptions of data emerging from the participants’ artifacts and interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
- *Transparency*—I obtained transparency by explaining step-by-step the research process, from the first meeting with the study participants, through the data collection and analysis phases, to the confidentiality of the stored data (Leavy, 2015).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations must be made for the lived experiences of immigrant adolescents. These experiences are pertinent to the significance of this study. Full awareness of the student participants minority group status within The Bahamas requires well-established precautions to protect this population of children (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). I obtained approval for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study and obtained permission from The Bahamian Ministry of Education, the parents, and the teachers of the under-aged and marginalized study participants.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to describe the lived experiences of two Haitian immigrant adolescent girls in The Bahamas. Within this chapter, I integrated an exploratory-descriptive design to capture the lived experiences of Haitian immigrant adolescents living in The Bahamas. To support the research method, purpose sampling, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were utilized. Within each focus group session, the use of multimodal literacy practices of writing, photography and tableaux were used as a conduit to encapsulate the lived experiences of acculturation for the adolescents. This chapter provided an explanation of the specific method of this study and how data was collected and analyzed.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

When immigrant adolescents relocate from their home country to a host country, adjusting to a new way of life can be met with a range of challenges such as interruption in school attendance, lack of social network, racial discrimination, and difficulties with the dominant language of that country (Veum et al., 2020). Providing an outlet for immigrant adolescents to discuss and describe their lived experiences might help to make this journey an easier one for them. In interviews with the study participants, I integrated the use of multimodal literacy practices as a conduit for these lived experiences, an implementation which were shown to be useful by other scholars (Danzak, 2011; Stewart, 2013; Ajayi, 2015; Honeyford, 2018; Veum et al., 2020.) My purpose for this study was (a) to explore and describe Haitian immigrant adolescent girls' migration stories and acculturation into The Bahamas, (b) to describe the acculturation process of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas to the Bahamian educational system and the Bahamian community, and (c) to determine how identity construction of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas was influenced by their acculturation process. I generated an overarching research question that guided this study: :

*What are the lived experiences of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas as expressed through the multimodal literacy practices of writing, tableaux, and photography?*

The following sub-questions were also valuable to this research:

- How do Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas describe their acculturation process through the multimodal literacy practices of writing, tableaux, and photography within the Bahamian educational system and the Bahamian community?
- How do Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas perceive their identity construction through the multimodal literacy practices of writing, photography, and tableaux?

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with research findings and an analysis of the data resulting from semi-structured interviews and focus groups conducted with two Haitian adolescent girls, Rose and Lilac (pseudonyms) who migrated from Haiti to The Bahamas. I posed open-ended questions during the semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions that provided an opportunity for in-depth responses of their lived experiences migrating from Haiti and relocating to The Bahamas, sharing their experiences of acculturation and adaptation to a new country.

I drew on several data sources to explain the lived experiences of Rose and Lilac. First, I conducted two semi-structured interviews individually with the participants. The first semi-structured interview was conducted at the onset of the focus group interview sessions. This interview provided information about Rose's and Lilac's demographics, how they entered The Bahamas and how they adapted to living in a foreign country. I conducted the second semi-structured interviews at the end of the focus group sessions. Next, I focused on six focus interviews sessions, two specific to writing; two to photography and the other two focused on tableaux. I explored these various literacy modes (writing, photography, and tableaux) as vehicles to support the explanation and description of Rose's and Lilac's lived experiences. Third, I kept a reflective researcher's journal that contained my reflections, thoughts and

opinions about throughout the interviewing process. The interviews were all audiotaped, then transcribed manually and electronically to ensure accuracy. These transcriptions from the interviews were compiled as my data sources.

I integrated Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis to analyze the data I generated from the semi-structured interviews and the focus group interviews. The data analysis generated three major themes: *separation (from)*; *stress (of)* and *sacrifice (for)*. I compiled codes and data extracts under these three themes. I then carefully analyzed each of three themes, the data extracts of each theme and how Rose and Lilac analyzed each theme according to the study participants. I provide my findings on each theme accompanied by data extracts substantiating the theme.

### **Separation (from)**

For years, Haitian nationals have left their homes, families, and the chaos of Haiti to seek refuge in countries like the United States and The Bahamas. Many of them leave with only clothes on their backs to crowd small ill-equipped boats unable to support the large amount of people desperate to leave this country. In June 2021, a Haitian vessel capsized in the waters of Grand Bahama where a mother and her small son drowned (Eyewitness News, 2021). The Royal Bahamas Defense Force reported rescuing seven individuals aboard the 24-foot vessel. Other Haitian nationals like Rose and Lilac left Haiti via plane opting to obtain legal documents to live in The Bahamas. Whether they left via boat or plane, legally or illegally, they chose to leave in search of better living and working conditions in The Bahamas, or to use The Bahamas as transit to Canada or the United States, (Bertin, 2012). For many Haitian nationals, there is no option to stay in Haiti (Bertin, 2012). Yet, while leaving their home, separating from family, friends and the familiarity of their country might take an emotional toll on them. (Veum et al 2020). This act



of separation is compounded by the stress of adjusting, fitting in, and finding a sense of normalcy is difficult particularly for children and adolescents.

### **Physical separation**

The overarching theme of separation became apparent after continuous scrutiny of the entire corpus of data of the lived experiences of study participants. The theme filtered through the conversations from the semi-structured interviews, focus group sessions and also through the multimodal literacy practices of writing, photography, and tableaux. The definition of separation which was defined as ‘the action or state of moving or being moved apart’ and in this instance, having to leave the comforts of home to seek a better way of life within another country, coincided with this overarching theme. I created a theme pile, called ‘separation.’ I copied and pasted any codes and their accompanying data extracts that pertained to separation across the entire data set and placed it under this theme pile. As I read over and over, I highlighted the word ‘leave’ as it was repetitious throughout the corpus of data. The letters written by Rose, Lilac, and my researcher’s journal, reflected the physical act of leaving one’s home to relocate to another with the intent of pursuing an optimal life, one that could not be attained in our home countries. .

### **Emotional separation**

I noticed, as I continued to read and make notes within the data extract, I found that the theme of separation was not only about physical separation, but emotional separation , where participants experienced the act of separation in several ways. For example, Rose experienced both physical and emotional separation.

### **Rose**

Rose endured separation from her father years before she relocated to The Bahamas. To gain some background information about Rose’s life in Haiti, she explained how most of her

childhood was spent without her father. Here, the manifestation of theme of emotional separation began to eminent and took some definitive shape for Rosie as she talked about her early life. Rose's parents lived together for a short time in Haiti. A few years after Rose was born, her parents separated. Her father relocated to The Bahamas and Rose stayed with her mother until she about 14 years old. In the excerpt below, taken from the data extract, Rose explained her separation from her father:

*I mean, I didn't grow up with my father. He was there a short time. My mom and dad are not together. No, my mom and my father they doesn't have like, cause my dad has other kids too beside me with my mom.*

Rose further explained that her father not only relocated to Nassau and established a life for himself, but later got married and had another child. The interweaving of the theme of emotional separation is further evidenced when Rose's father married another woman, which indicated that perhaps Rose's parents might not reunite. I can imagine the toll and stress Rose experienced as a young child when her father left for The Bahamas. The emotional separation was further compounded when Rose's father remarried and started a life with another person.

Later, after Rose's father obtained permanent residency, he applied for permanent residency for her to live in The Bahamas as well. Here, Rose is now reunited with her father after so many years, but now separated from her mother which substantiated another aspect of separation. In the following excerpt, Rose discussed how her father assisted in helping her to move to The Bahamas.

*My father lives here in Nassau. But he put in the documents for me to come here because he straight here [legal status]. It's supposed to come out with, from summer so I could have come here to start the school year here, but it didn't come. So I started my*

*grade nine in Haiti, but didn't finish it. I stopped at it. Stopped at December cause when I went, when I went to summer break, I mean Christmas break at my grandmother house. And that's when I saw my father was in Haiti and that's when he said, Oh I got your document and we will be gone, and I said okay, Cool.*

When Rose left Haiti, Rose then had to separate from her mother and siblings who stayed behind. Her father applied for her and not her other siblings because they were not his biological children. He wanted Rose to leave her home to pursue a more stable and rewarding life that he presently experienced in the Bahamas.

Further, I also noted that the theme of separation was manifested as Rose wrote a letter describing her lived experience when she traveled from Haiti to The Bahamas. I included an excerpt from her letter.

*When I were getting on the plane, I had my number in my hand and then I see this other woman sitting in my seat and so I tell my dad. He say it's ok because we all going to Nassau and so I had to set [sit] in another seat. No one on my right, and no one on my left so I just close my eyes and sleep cause it didn't make no sense crying about it, the woman did look like she was not moving and so...I end up sitting on a char [chair] where it was a seat no one would be by your side.*

Finally, when Rose arrived in Nassau to begin her new life, she found herself living with her father and his new wife for a little over a week when a friend of her father asked her to move in with her. Her father, after a while agreed and Rose found herself separating from some level of comfort again to find another in a stranger's house. Data collected from the semi-structured interview explained Rose's feeling. I extracted an excerpt from that interview:

*I didn't know her, but dad say she was nice and that she didn't have no kids. I meet her when I first come to Bahamas and she took me to KFC. I didn't like that food and I didn't know what to get because that was my first time there. She then take me to the Chinese restaurant which was even worse 'cause the smell was funny to me. But the lady was nice, plus she was keeping another boy who lived there too. It was okay, I guess. She try to make me feel like I was home and comfy....but that was not my home....after a while, the lady move to the States and I went back to live with my dad and his wife...*

Another, yet important aspect of the theme of separation is pre-eminent in the data collected from semi-structured interviews with Rose. Rose shared her experience of life in Haiti before moving to The Bahamas. She discussed how life was challenging after she endured a tragic accident that resulted in a head injury in Haiti. Doctors had to shave most of her hair to attend to and stitch the wound. On her return to school, Rose was bullied by her classmates. Her mother was very upset about this and removed Rose from her school and placed her in a private school. Here, Rose's separation from one school to another contributed to the theme of separation. During her performance of tableaux, Rose discussed how her 'frozen stance' painted the picture of her frustration and anger toward her bullies.

She expressed that life got better when she relocated to a small private school where "the white people" attended. Here, the phrase, "the white people" is mentioned more than ten times, as Rose emphasized that life was better for her because of the interaction with "the white people" at her new school. The theme of separation which emphasized a racial divide is highlighted from a different perspective and has a latent undertone (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, the term, 'the white people' suggest a distinction between races, a separation of sorts. In the conversation with Rose, she suggested

the day I was come to the Bahamas.  
This I was excited, and scary, because  
it was my first time in a ~~home~~, Plaine  
my mom was crying cause she don't know  
when we gonna see each other again  
I was in ~~the~~ the Plaine so sad, and  
scary, cause everytime I watchin movies  
of Plaine accident, I was thinking about  
I only came in this contry to be something  
in life ~~cause~~ cause I know everyone who  
done with school Haiti can realize there  
dreams, only finist school, ~~stay~~ stay  
home cause no work for them to be  
something. I was thinking if my parents  
~~sent~~ sent me in a contry I can be  
something, so why I have to act  
with no brain, I was thinking  
about I want to done with school  
and become a doctor to help ~~my~~  
my family, and I was thinking about  
all that tell a reach in this contry  
and I was very focus to what I  
want to be to help my family  
and I still want to focus on what  
I want to be cause if my

Figure 11: Rose's letter

that there was a distinction, and that the white race is more ‘classy’ than the students at the previous school she attended. While this aspect of the theme is not as explicit or obvious as the aspects of physical separation discussed earlier, it is important to note that the perspective of race and separation is latent in meaning, and ‘goes beyond the semantic content of the data examining underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84).



**Figure 12:** Rose’s Tableau, “Frustration from Being Bullied.”

*It wasn't only black people to that school. It was like, uh, cause it was like an American school where we had plenty white people to that school. You had to pay US dollar. If you pay Gourde (Haitian money) there, they didn't take that. You had to pay US money. But you know, we had white kids, white kids, and then we all on the same grade. And then*

*yes, and then they, of course I will be cool with them (white people) too. So of course she (Rose's mother) found a school where white kids you know are more classy than white kids anyway.*

Consequently, in conversations with Rose, this ideology of the emphasis of supremacy placed on the white race was also revealed when Rose talked about the differences in Bahamian lower-class neighborhoods and Haiti's. She referred to them as the 'ghetto.' She explained that whenever she went to the ghetto in The Bahamas, if she did not greet a passerby with a hello or a 'good afternoon' she would be scolded for having a lack of manners or respect. However, if a white person did the same according to Rose, not greeting people on the street who lived in the ghetto, they would not be treated the same. In other words, the latent aspect of this theme suggested that white people are treated differently and according to Rose, white people are classier, and because they are white, then they would be treated differently whether they greeted persons on the street or not. These findings align with the theme of separation because there is a demarcation or delineation between the two races.

*Mostly, they, if they see a black and they don't come from another country because they see white you come from, they won't to say that.*

Throughout the study's findings, the theme of separation can be found in the entire data set among all participants. Multimodal literacy practices of writing, photography and tableaux are integrated as conduits to convey the lived experiences of adjusting and acculturation to a host country.

These findings suggested that Rose experienced several aspects of separation. Not only did she have to physically leave her mother and siblings, but she had to leave the country of her birth. To add, Rose experienced the separation of her father and mother due to the dissolving of

that relationship. Further, Rose experienced separation away from her father on her plane ride to the Bahamas, and then moving to The Bahamas for only a week before she was separated again from her father to live with one of his friends. These lived experiences told the struggle of separation Rose endured.

### **Lilac**

Lilac expressed the pain of having to leave her mother and father in Haiti to relocate to The Bahamas. Family separation is crucial concern as many immigrant children and adolescents face this challenge (Dreby, 2015; Suarez-Orozco, Bang & Kim, 2011). In the data extract below collected from the semi-structured interview and the focus group interview discussion, Lilac explained the struggle of having to leave her family to live in The Bahamas.

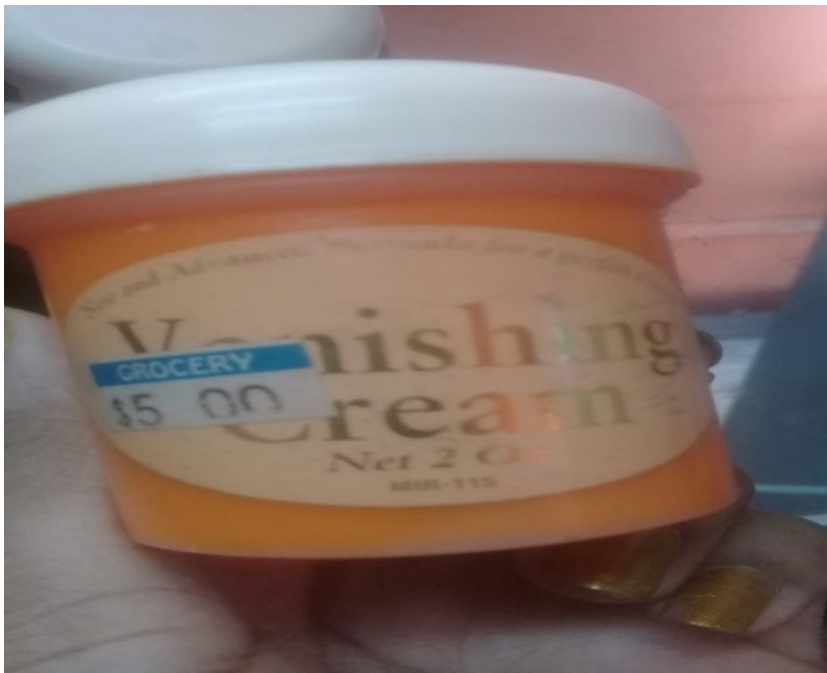
*I think about it. Um, the day I was traveling come on the Bahamas this day, my mom was crying. She say I didn't know when I can meet you again, like face-to-face. I miss my mom and dad. I live with my uncle and brother. My mom and Dad still live in Haiti. I did not see them from when I left Haiti.*

Lilac's pain resonated with me and other immigrant researchers who have investigated the challenge of children and adolescent leaving their parents behind in their host countries (Stewart, 2013) or parents having to leave their children behind (Muller, Brewer, Patel & Desai, 2020). This behavior is not uncommon, as immigrant families from around the world experience this challenge, it is most critical when adolescents are impacted often left with caregivers or relocated to host countries to live with caregivers (Muller, Brewer, Patel & Desai, 2020). Lilac, who understood the need for separation given her age, wrestled with her emotions and tried to get a full grasp of the situation. She left both parents and two younger siblings behind. Even though she relocated to The Bahamas with her brother, she knew would not be able to travel



back and forth to see her parents because of her family's financial constraints. Further, Lilac was challenged with living with caregivers she did not know well. To this end, adjusting not only to a new home and family dynamics, but Lilac was also faced with adapting to a new school, community and country that in many aspects differed from her own. Through the multimodal literacy practice of photography, Lilac took photos of images found in The Bahamas that reminded her of Haiti. One photo, a facial cream her mother used reminded her of life in Haiti with her mom.

*When I was in a Haitian store, I see this cream and then I was so scared because I never see this cream in Bahamas only in Haiti and that is the only cream my mommy use for me and for her on our face. We like it because it keep up umm shiny and nice and no bumps. It remind me of her and I buy it so fast.*



**Figure 13:** Lilac's Reminder of Her Mother's Cream

The toll of physically separating from her parents and siblings was manifested in Lilac's reminiscences in her informal discussions with me. However, the need to separate, or leave the

comforts of her home and family to establish some sense of normalcy and future for her and her brother is far greater. In the data extract below, taken from Lilac's semi-structured interview, she discussed the dire need to leave Haiti.

*My dad was crying. He say he had four childs [children] died and he did not want anymore of his children to die. So, he send me and my brother here to live with our uncle and aunt. I have a brother and a sister younger than me who stay in Haiti. My dad and my mom said I need to leave to get a future.*

I found in both the data extracts as well as in the actual writing artifact below, Lilac explained that the need to leave Haiti was paramount. Lilac expressed excitement and fear upon leaving Haiti and entering a plane to come to The Bahamas. She wrote that she wanted to be 'something in life' and not suffer because of the hardships, impoverishment and political unrest of her country. She described the pain of having to go to school, graduate only to be left not doing anything because her country did not have enough resources to outfit its citizens with work. She admitted that while she has a desire to help her country because she loved her country, there was nothing much she can do without being able to work and make money to support her family and by extension her country. Within the data extract, Lilac admonished that her government is unable to help her, and this made her angry. She further explained that the devastation of the January 2010 earthquake further compounded an already challenged nation. The January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, measuring seven on the Richter scale, rocked the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. The effect of the earthquake left more than 316, 000 dead or missing and more than one million homeless. According to the Government of the Republic of Haiti (GOH), 2010, the earthquake left Haiti reeling with more than 60% of the nation's administrative economic infrastructure completely lost and damaged and more than 80% of

schools and 50% of hospitals damaged and destroyed. Lilac explained what she felt on the day she left Haiti and traveled to The Bahamas in the excerpt below:

*The day I was come to The Bahamas this I was excited and so scary because I was it was my first time in a plane. I was thinking about the only come in this country to do something in life....I was thinking of my parents sent me in a country I can be something....I really want to help my country grow and being something with no pain...Cause how you think a country you pay for our child to be something good in life this child done with all types of education and stay home nothing to do no work...that's what the country offer you to do no work, nothing to live, you live with angry....my country don't living offer you nothing you live that cuz [because] we poor and government can't help us. We are poor, the earthquake leave us even more poor and we can't find no job, no money, no nothing.*

Comparatively, separation among the study participants, though difficult, varied. For example, Rose left Haiti, but returned to visit often. However, Lilac has left Haiti and has never returned. She has not seen her mother nor father since she embarked on the shores of Nassau, which was more than two years ago. In the excerpt below, Lilac explained why she is unable to return to Haiti.

*I haven't been back to see them. I don't know when, it's money and we don't have the money to travel to Haiti like that.*

### **Rose's and Lilac's Connection**

Although Rose and Lilac shared stories of separating both physically and emotionally from Haiti and relocating to The Bahamas, I observed that they began to establish more of a bond during our sessions. I witness Rose often translated what Lilac said when Lilac spoke Haitian Creole. I learned that when speaking casually in an informal setting, Lilac would resort to speaking Haitian Creole because it was easier. Rose would code switch, speaking to me in English, to Lilac in Haitian Creole and then translating occasionally for Lilac. I also noticed that Rose seemed to take on a 'big sister' or maternal role with Lilac. For example, if our sessions went longer than we anticipated, I would drop them home because it was late and the buses would have stopped transporting people from place to place. I found that Rose suggested that I take Lilac home first. Rose would then walk Lilac to her door and exchanged pleasantries with her family. This solidified the literature that most Haitian immigrants form close networking ties within their communities (Nicolas & Smith, 2013) even though they might come from different parts of Haiti. Their experiences allowed both Rose and Lilac to deeply connect with each other.

### **Stress (of)**

The transitioning from one geographic space to another in order to have a future of optimal living does not exclude the challenges and stresses of that new geographic space. Findings within this study revealed both Rose and Lilac experienced some level of stress acculturating into their host countries. They described through multiple modes of writing, photography and tableaux the difficulty they experienced from racial divide to differences of the two cultures acclimating into their host countries. I integrated four sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis: a) stress of racism, b) stress of finding a job, c) stress of a lack of religious freedom, and d) stress of pressure of the educational system.

## Stress of Racism

### Rose

For many immigrants, racism is a present and common reality. Rose discussed how she experienced racial discrimination when she enrolled in school in The Bahamas. She explained that her ninth-grade teacher told her, she was ‘taking up space’ or occupying a space that others might have given to a Bahamian student. In other words, the teacher did not want Rose in her class simply because Rose is Haitian. The teacher made this known to Rose throughout her time in the ninth grade. Rose disclosed that the teacher said this:

*You is Haitian, this is not your country, what are you doing here? You're taking my space, when I was in grade ten, she does make her comments about I'm taking up space from the Bahamian children.*

In another incident, Rose explained her lived experience of racial stigmatization at an extracurricular event. She joined a club, the Bahamian National Trust (BNT) to gain community hours, a fulfillment for high school. Rose explained that at the event, food was sold. She ordered her food but left it on the table to run a short errand. She reminded a friend to watch over her food, and to ensure that no one tampered with it. Upon her arrival, Rose was met with unwarranted comments from a teacher at the event who thought the food Rose had left on the table was for purchase. When the teacher learned that the food was not for sale, she berated Rose. This is noted in the data extract below from the focus group interview on tableaux:.

*She is the only one that did make a comment like the others. She wasn't my teacher, but because I was a part of navigators, which is the BNT program. And then there was a day we have different presentations, we had different foods and so on, and me and my friend, you know, we kids we doesn't have money to afford every kind of food. So what I did, I*

*took my lunch money and then say, I'm going to buy foods. So it could make, you know when do the BNT thing, they took pictures that we'll go in your book for BNT Bahamas National Trust. She came by. So I told them that's my money. Don't let nobody touch the food. They will just come back to look and see different food. Because we was talking about with having healthy lunch at school and then she came by and touch the food. I told her, no, you cannot touch the food. Every teacher will come by. They just look and go because that's my money. That's going to be my lunch. Then she (the teacher) goes by saying,*

*"Oh these Haitian people, I don't know who they think they is, they in people country and come and tell people what to do.*

Throughout the of corpus data, I compiled extracts that reflected this sub-theme of racism. Participants discussed their lived experiences and the stress of unwanted racial slurs made towards them. Many were blatant, others were subtle.

Rose exclaimed vehemently, that she would at first cry because of the hurt and ridicule she felt. Often, she would not speak so people would not recognize her accent and give them a reason to say something negative to her about her race. However, as time passed, Rose began to 'toughen up' and not let the racial slurs bother as much. Having experienced the sting of bullying, the racial slurs reminded her that she was stronger than she thought. She also expressed that she was not indebted to The Bahamas and was not living in the country illegally.

*I used to cry a lot about the comment. I used to be sad too. Sometime the teacher would say it, but not so much in your face, but behind your back. My friend would say it to me that the teacher say the bad comment but I didn't hear her say it loud. I was mad too. That is not right, they talk to you like that and no one say anything to them. I think too,*

*one day when I was here and I remember that I get bully in Haiti and I stand up for myself. I say I will stand up for myself because I pay for my documents to be here in Bahamas and that I pay for every day I live here. I get my documents renew every year.*

It is interesting to note Rose's growth and maturity. At such a young age, faced with the barrage of racial slurs and intolerance, Rose learned how to ignore the comments and not let them affect her like she did in the past. Her experience of being bullied in Haiti gave her the strength she needed to face other situations of taunting. She refused to allow the negative comments to affect her. I found Rose to be brave and mature. I also found that when she ignored this type of situation she walked away, she showed the offender that their words were valueless and had no effect on her.

### **Lilac**

Lilac explained, though briefly, that she would occasionally hear racial slurs, but chose to ignore them. She explained:

*I hear it too. You is Haitian, go back to Haiti, blah, blah, blah. I don't listen so much, I don't care.*

In addition, information collected from focus group interviews, tableaux and photography, provided data that expressed the stress study participants experienced adjusting to their new host countries. Despite the close proximity to Haiti and The Bahamas, and both countries sharing similar cultural activities, participants emphasized that their differences made life challenging for them. Such differences included the finding jobs, religion, and education.

### **Stress of Finding Jobs**

Rose discussed, that even though it is challenging finding work in Haiti, it is equally challenging finding jobs for Haitians who live in The Bahamas.

*Jobs here in Nassau, but you don't have no document [immigration status] you can't work. Even when you have document you don't find no good job; just working in people house or cleaning people yard. My daddy wife clean house, but she smart, she can't find no good job 'cause she Haitian and she can't get no good, good work like that.*

### **Lilac**

Lilac expressed in her writing, that it was important to find jobs in The Bahamas in order to be able to send money back home for her struggling parents in Haiti. One difference as it pertains to finding jobs in The Bahamas is that in Haiti, finding jobs is very difficult. One has to know someone in the Haitian government who might be able to assist with a job. This has not been the case for Lilac and her family.

*Jobs is something that is different in Haiti. Hard to find any job. You need to know someone who works there in the government.*

### **Stress of Lack of Religious Freedom**

The stress of stigmatization because of one's religion has also played a significant role in how study participants adjusted to living in The Bahamas.

### **Rose**

Rose's explanation of her tableau, 'frozen dramatic stance' provides a clear picture of her frustration. In her explanation she admonished that while Voodoo or Haitian Vodou is a part of her culture, it has been stigmatized as a religion of doom and that Haitians practice Voodoo to hurt people. The major religions in Haiti are Catholicism and Vodou (Voodoo). Vodou developed in Haiti between 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century as an African diasporic religion that combined



various beliefs and schools of thoughts from West and Central African and the Roman Catholic religion. It is practiced throughout Haiti and New Orleans in America. Voodoo practices are taboo in The Bahamas and are considered sacrilegious because it opposes the dominant religion of Christianity. Voodoo is associated with harm and misfortune (Bertin, 2019). Rose emphasized that Voodoo is black culture and while Bahamians are stigmatizing her, she expressed that some Bahamians are equally engaged in the practicing of Voodoo. She discussed how more emphasis has been placed on Christianity which she considered, to be a 'white person's' religion, than it has been placed on Voodoo. The stress of not being able to freely worship has been challenging for Rosie. Rose explained in the excerpt below:

*Sometimes, they will often times, like, I mean to me, I feel like voodoo is black culture though and Bahamians does that. If you talk to any Haitian, they will often tell you Cat Island (a Bahamian island) if you don't, if you scared of Voodoo, don't go to Cat Island nor Abaco (another Bahamian island). Ya'll (Bahamians) do Voodoo harder than us. Okay, like I don't know, for some reasons Haitian is known for Voodoo because probably because you know, our culture on how we got independence. And so if you look at our independence, Voodoo did take place in our independence. So I don't know if it's because of that, Haitian is known for Voodoo. But, Voodoo is not something only does in Haiti.*

In essence and to bring some clarification to Rose's statement above. She argued that even though Christianity is the main religion in The Bahamas, there are some Bahamians who practice Voodoo frequently. While Haitians are discredited for practicing Voodoo, some Bahamians secretly engaged in the same practices particularly in some islands of The Bahamas like Cat Island and Abaco. Rose further argued that Voodoo, coming from Africa in a 'black religion'

and emphasis should be placed on this in The Bahamas a predominately black populace as opposed to Christianity, which is considered a ‘white religion.’



**Figure 14:** Rose’s Tableau, “Stress of a Lack of Religious Freedom”

### **Lilac**

Lilac expressed during a focus group interview she does not practice Voodoo, but believes it is powerful. In other words, she mentioned that certain practices of Voodooism might actually harm people.

*Uh, I don’t do that, but I know it’s powerful. If, if you’re talking it’s powerful. Cause you see Haiti people can go crazy just if they want to send you crazy, they could.*

The stress of Bahamians not fully accepting their religion and being discriminated for it has been difficult for both Lilac and Rose. Rose sought to draw some clarification on her

religion. She claimed that if persons understood the religion, there might not be this ‘taboo’ placed on how she worships. She compared Voodooism to Christianity.

### **Stress of Obtaining an Education.**

The stress of relocating to another country to obtain an education has been a challenge for the study participants. They both expressed that the process to register and enroll in public schools was a long and arduous task. For Rose, her father had to show proof of school enrollment as a step toward obtaining residency in The Bahamas. However, the most challenging aspect of enrolling in public schools, according to both Rose and Lilac was the language barrier.

#### **Rose**

Rose’s parents opted for her to go to Haitian-run school in The Bahamas where she had to learn to speak English to some degree of proficiency prior to enrolling in a public school in The Bahamas. She expressed that the school was strict and the emphasis on learning English was a paramount for students at that school. Rose explained:

*When I was at Betty School, it’s called the Orian School, you had to study hard, like you had to learn your vocabulary, you had to read many chapter, you had to say what you know in front of the class. It was everyday you do this or you get in trouble. It was not. Then when you learn English good, Betty thought you was good enough to go to normal school (Bahamian public school), then they send you there. They keep a report on you and the school would send back a report too, to say you good, you bad whatever. It was hard.*

Further, Rose explained after moving from the Orian School, she enrolled in a senior high school. It was at that school that the stress of learning and aspiring to do well academically, was

not only a burden, but at times she felt that she was treated unfairly. Rose explained that the lack of English proficiency resulted in her being placed in a lower stream of the tenth grade. In most public schools in The Bahamas, students are homogeneously grouped according to their academic ability. Rose explained in the focus interview in tableau:

*I went to that school in grade ten. I did not have no BJC so they put me in a low stream, you know high stream, low stream? They put me in a low stream. The children there in that class, did not check for that they was in a low grade. They didn't do homework and schoolwork and so every lunch time they had to stay in to finish their work. I did my work, but I was trying to figure out why they put me in a low grade because in Haiti, I get good grades, good math, good vocabulary. I was trying to figure this out and I was like, I mad and I sad and wonder if they thought I was not smart or did not work hard enough.*

While Rose did not fully understand how the process of enrollment went at that particular school; she was not comfortable discussing that she felt it unfair to be placed in a low stream because of a language barrier. She felt, it was important to remain quiet because she did not want to be racially stigmatized. Rose argued:

*If you say something, I say something. I was just shy and quiet. I never talk. Them other students would say, 'See the girl there, she don't speak any English.' So I keep quiet and I do my work, but it was still in my heart they put me in this grade.*

The following term, Rose expressed that the only way she could make it to a higher stream was to work harder and show that being placed in a low stream because of the language barrier should not have been condition to be placed in a lower stream of that grade. Rose's homeroom teacher encouraged her students to strive for better grades. She told them about the importance of working diligently and how such perseverance would ultimately pan out favorably

for them. Rose exclaimed how her teacher's words and support gave her that added boost to push. Rose explained:

*I tried so hard. That term I made a 2.9 GPA. I get some B's and of course I get an A in French, but that accounting was so hard, with that big book and all them words, no pictures no nothing. I get a D in that subject. My teacher was like, I proud of you! I see you work hard. When I tell my mom, she said, "I proud a you!" New country and try to adapt, you do good. But not my dad, he was like, 'You think that's a GPA, you think that's good? Well sweetie, you need to work harder at that!' I still tryin, but I feel so bad about that that. It was like my head start hurting.*



**Figure 15:** Rose's Tableau, "Stress of the Pressure of Education"

## **Stress of Corporal Punishment in Education.**

### **Lilac**

Lilac's discussion of her tableau revealed her frustration with corporal punishment in school both in Haiti and The Bahamas. She expressed that if she did not perform well in school, she would be physically beaten. For Lilac, the threat of being beaten was something that she hated. Relocating to The Bahamas and watching children being physically reprimanded weighed heavily on Lilac. Her tableau stance in Figure 15 exhibited her attitude to do well in school so that she did not have to get punished at school or from her aunt in The Bahamas.

Lilac explained:

*They (Teachers) so hard with kids. In Haiti, they beat children when they don't do well in school. Like the teacher made me stand up and read and knowing that I am not good at it because I speak Haitian creole. Um, I chose this position because this is like something like, I very hate it. I hate it because when I was Haiti, like my, my auntie always like did it to me when I don't do good in school and I hate it make me scared or something like that like always make me scare and dislike it. In Bahamas, I always scare too like I will get beatin' if I don't do good in school too. I really hate it, so I work so hard I don't have to get any beating. I hate it here and I hate in Haiti too. Why we have to beat to make children learn. I really, really hate it. I very hate it. My aunt used to go like she is going to beat me when I do something wrong. It use to scare me too. I don't think that's the way to go for kids, you want them learn, but have a better way. You want them to listen, well have a better way to do it 'cause beating ain it. I will not beat my childs.*



**Figure 16:** Lilac’s Tableau “Stress of Corporal Punishment”

*This could be changed because when you did that to your children, this is I, need like this, um change, because when you like that, I did that to your children, or child whatever, this is very terrible. This is very terrible. And it gave me, you think done something, I guess, that’s what I think. Like it make you frustrated, like you are afraid of your own parents and teachers.*

To spank or not to spank has been a contention in Bahamian schools for years. Corporal Punishment has been a practice in Bahamian schools for years. Fielding & Balance (2020) noted in their research presentation that The Bahamas is the leading country on corporal punishment

throughout the Caribbean country. However, in more recent years, administrators were given the task of reprimanding students and not teachers. Nonetheless, to date, this practice still occurs. Lilac had to contend with relocating to a foreign country without her parents, trying to adjust to the way of life in The Bahamas, and learn the language of this country all at once. The fear of being punished physically should not be an option for an immigrant adolescent, in fact, it should never be an option for any child. All of this added to the overall psychological stress Lilac faced.

### **Sacrifice (for)**

Sacrifice was an overarching theme found throughout the corpus of data. Artifacts from multimodal literacy practices of writing and tableaux reveal that participants sacrificed familiarity and comfort of their lives in their host country to benefit their future endeavors. This theme was also manifested from the data collected from semi-structured interviews of participants. While it was challenging to leave family in particular, the opportunity to seek a better way of life warranted the sacrifice. Simply put, Rose and Lilac wanted a better future for themselves and their family, relocating to advance oneself was paramount and for participants, the only option. For them, the greatest sacrifice was leaving their families.

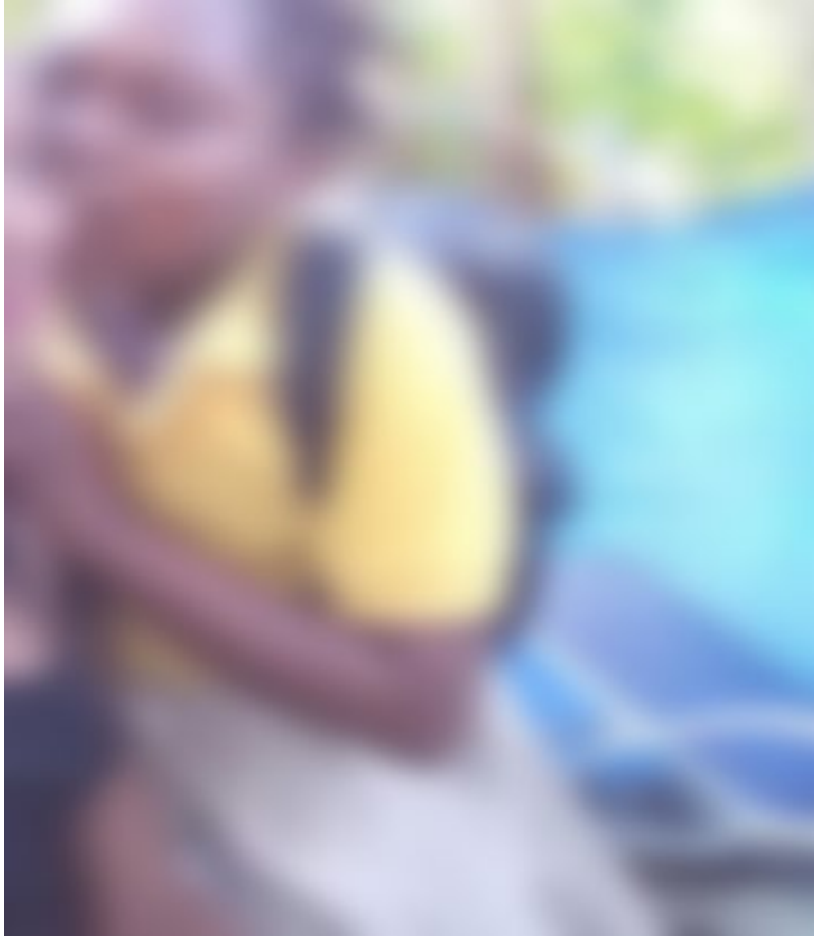
### **Lilac**

In data extract below, Lilac discussed how painful life was in Haiti. She explained that despite having an education in Haiti, it was challenging for many Haitians to find jobs or the careers they dream of because of the pervasive poverty, joblessness, and political unrest in the country. Further, Lilac said that she wanted to be a doctor to be in a position to help her parents and family. Lilac exhorted that despite the difficult life in Haiti, she loved her country and one day she wanted to be able to help those in need in Haiti. In order to do that, she would have to sacrifice leaving her family behind. Lilac posited:



*I was thinking the day I come to this country (The Bahamas) to do something in life. Cuz I know everyone who done with school Haiti can't realize their dreams. Only finish school stay home cus no work for them to be something. I was thinking I wanted done with school and become a doctor. I want to help my family and I was thinking about all that. And I still want to focus on what I want to because if my parents didn't like me now Haiti became hard with pain everywhere, everything is hard no work, no food, no nothing. I love my country, even though it hard, that's my country, but I leave for my future.*

Lilac sacrificed the comfort of family, leaving behind her parents and siblings. In Figure 16, Lilac's little cousin is hugging and kissing her as a sign of acknowledgement and respect for older family members. She expressed that the photo was meaningful to her particularly because that was the last time, she might see her cousin face-to-face. However, Lilac admitted that despite the sadness she felt, she understood her purpose for leaving Haiti was to one day establish herself as a doctor and be able to provide financially for her family.



**Figure 17:** Lilac’s Photo, “The Kiss and Missing Her Family”

### **Rose**

The theme of sacrifice became more evident after reviewing the data set repeatedly. Through multimodal practices of photography and through informal conversations from the focus groups, data extracts from Rose manifested the theme of sacrifice. For example, in the data extract below, Rose discussed how she was invited to move into a Bahamian woman’s house a week after arriving in The Bahamas. Despite, her limited English, she was encouraged to move in the lady’s house and help with the lady’s adopted son, both of whom spoke English. As a result of this, Rose’s English improved. This was a sacrifice for Rose because after being separated from her father for so many years, she did not have the benefit of living with him right

after moving to a land she did not know. Further, because of the emphasis placed on learning English in order to function optimally in a country where English was spoken most of the time. Rose had to embrace every opportunity afforded her to learn the language of the host country.

Rose explained:

*And she asked my daddy at that time I couldn't speak much English then, asked me dad, if she could take me out, and my dad said, okay fine. Then my dad said, but you know, she don't speak English. Right. And she's like cool. I could teach her, and my dad said, that is good. The next week, I moved in with her, um she set up, um, out of 24 inch TV. She set that up where everything, every movie where the woes come on the screen too. And then the laptop, they would have told me to go to Google, anything I don't know. Okay. So Google was my best friend at the time.*

*Yes, she had a boy there too. He was like three, I think. I help him with school, he help me more with my English. I was live there for a long time too, until the lady when to the US to live.*

Further, because of Rose was not fluent in English, she was not sent to a public school. Instead, she had to go the Orian School for Haitian children. She mentioned that she did not go to 'normal' school, but she really wanted to. However, because of the importance of learning English, her father opted for her to attend this school because learning how to read, write and speak English was a primary objective of the school. After some substantive progress of learning the English language, students were then enrolled in public schools. Rose explained:

*The teacher at the Orian school after some time, she say, 'If you continue like this and continue reading and do your vocabulary and so on, I think that Betty will. You should, you should be cool to go to the other school, to proper school' (public school).*

When Rose entered a public school in The Bahamas. She learned she was disadvantaged because even though she spoke some English, it was not enough to have her placed in a higher stream as mentioned before. However, another challenge for Rosie was that if she did not get her GPA up to at least a 3.0 she could not apply for school prefect, a position she really wanted. Another aspect of the theme of sacrifice is made evident here. Becoming school prefect was important because of the prestige associated with it according to Rose. When you did well in school, you were presented with awards, annual luncheons and the responsibility of assisting teachers with their classes. Rose had to work hard and not have any breaks, nor lunches for a least a full year to pick up her grade and to improve her English. Often, this meant not hanging out with friends or and staying up late at night. This was a sacrifice for her. She understood the importance of perseverance and hard work. Rose lamented:

*Then I got mad, I said next year I gotta be a prefect. I have to learn English more and push up my grade. I told my homeroom teacher that, and she said ok then, you need to work hard and push up your GPA for a better grade. Then I think now, because you know, always on the low homeroom, some teachers don't really check once you're in the low homeroom, they will be like, whey you used to go to school, you never used to work. So I push myself, every day at break time and lunchtime, I read books, and do my assignments and stay up late and do my homework so I would get a high GPA and that year, I got a high one. I was so hard because I was like slave working with no break.*

In addition, Rose had to learn how to be independent. Here, another aspect of sacrifice was seen. Despite relocating to The Bahamas where both her father and stepmother own a vehicle, Rose learned quickly , if she wanted to go to school, church or hangout with her friends, she had to 'catch the jitney' in other words, use public transportation. Through the multimodal

literacy practice of photography, Rose provides photos of buses from Haiti. She explained that the buses both in Haiti and The Bahamas were driven recklessly in her opinion. Many buses would travel the same route to pick up passengers and as a result buses sped past each other making travel dangerous for passengers on the bus, pedestrians and other vehicles on the street. Through data extract below shown below, Rose explained she found it difficult to travel to and from school.

*Oh instead of taking over one another, I mean, I would rather like they put a timely just say for instance. If this bus leave the bus station 20 minutes before the other one leave because we are going in the same way. Instead of just, if not, for instance if there are two seven at the bus stop, I would rather want like somebody to control and say, this one was seven. We'll go 20 minutes before this one go. Give them a timely sometime because sometimes this one will see this one just leave and still want to go behind them, just to cause trouble along the way. Of course, you feel frustrated and scare for your life. This one is speeding, people on the bus scare, people on the road scare, only for \$1.50 you get kill 'cause you trying to get to school. It's very scary and frustrating to me and the same thing does happen in Haiti.*

It was a challenge to find three study participants for this study, not many parents volunteered to have their children be a part of this study. Given the nature of this study, they might have thought they would be in some danger if they were not living in The Bahamas legally. Both study participants live in The Bahamas legally, yet despite their status, they have faced the same challenges of other Haitians living in The Bahamas illegally. One thing that I found most rewarding was that while Rose and Lilac understood that their lived experiences might not appeal to, or change the mindset of others, they still sacrificed the time and effort to

tell of their lived experiences through multimodal literacy practices. While they understood that pseudonyms would be used, and their engagement as study participants would be strictly confidential, they wanted to explore their lived experiences. Rose explained that she wanted her story to be heard. She expressed that she is not ashamed of where she has come from, yet despite the challenges she has faced, her identity as being Haitian in a foreign land has been strengthened and confirmed. She expressed that while she understood that some person's attitudes about immigrants might never change, she still found it important to tell her story, here the theme of sacrifice, risking how others might feel to speak one's truth can be seen in the data extract below:

*I asked you (referring to me, the researchers) if this story going to be reading by other people and you told me yes. Then I said um, and I said yea, I would like to do that because oftentimes people will look down at Haitian and don't know the real story. So probably some people have been reading and they mindset will change the orientations. But you know like some people, nothing will change their mindset and nothing will change. Nothing will affect them. But I mean some kids, I know if they know our story, they will, I fell out and said, sorry about what you said. And they probably will react better in the future and so on. This is my story. I have to tell my story so many other people when they know Haitian is not bad or this or that they will look different. I know when I come here, I don't come here illegal, but some people still say bad things, I know, but I had to tell my story.*

## **Summary**

In summary, a comprehensive data analysis of the corpus of data was provided through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, writings, tableaux images and photography. The data

were gathered through the integration of multimodal literacy practices to support study participants' lived experiences. Such practices helped to channel their lived experiences in multiple ways. Utilizing Braun's and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis, I became familiar with the data through several rounds of intense reading, coding, identifying, re-identifying themes and then writing an analysis of each theme found. As a result, three overarching themes were established. Such themes included separation (from); stress (of); and sacrifice (for) which all explored and told the stories of the lived experiences of the two study participants.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

Within this chapter I provide a summary of the exploratory-descriptive research study and the conclusions drawn from the semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions as provided by the study participants. The chapter provides an alignment of findings to the research questions and the theoretical framework of multimodal literacy practices that contributed to the body of knowledge. In addition, the chapter includes a discussion and concludes with recommendations for future research.

#### **Summary of the Study**

All over the world, people are migrating from one country to another for a myriad of reasons. Most migrants relocate from their home country for the economic opportunities afforded by a host country. In this way, within the nations of the Caribbean, people are migrating to other Caribbean countries for the improved way of life provided by new job opportunities, proper health care, and education (Fielding et al., 2008). Children and adolescents are included among those who are migrating, and many risk their lives seeking a chance for a better life. Children and adolescents who migrate alone or with an adult not related to them are most vulnerable (Stewart, 2013). Faced with the challenges of relocating, many children find adjusting to a new home and a new life to be difficult as they are often faced with acculturation stressors. Immigrant children and adolescents are not only developing as all children do at their age, but their adjustment to a new country is also compounded by the impact of acculturation.



In The Bahamas, among the many migrants seeking to find a home, the Haitian population is the largest among all immigrants in the region (MOERPC, 2015). Many Haitian nationals in the Bahamas are children and adolescents. This population, like other children and adolescents around the world, are faced with the same challenges of acculturation. Providing a space or a platform where immigrant adolescents can discuss and explore their lived experiences of acculturation might help in their transition from their home country to the host country. By providing them with an outlet to explore their self of sense and their identities, and to challenge the negative rhetoric of immigrants, might improve their adjustment at this critical stage in their life (Ajaya, 2015; Honeyford, 2014). Among the many ways this can be done is through the integration of multimodal literacy strategies, where the use multiple modes of literacy like writing, photography, and tableaux can help them in communicating their lived experiences.

Many studies have investigated the lived experiences of immigrants' multimodal practices (Ajaya, 2015; Danzak, 2011; Honeyford, 2018). However, no studies have explored the lived experiences of Haitian immigrants living in The Bahamas as expressed through multimodal literacy practices. This study helped to fill this gap in the literature. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative research was tri-fold: (a) to explore and describe Haitian immigrant adolescent girls' migration stories and acculturation into The Bahamas, (b) to describe the acculturation process of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas to the Bahamian educational system and the Bahamian community, and (c) to determine how identity construction of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas was influenced by their acculturation process.

An exploratory-descriptive research design was used for this study. According to Hunter et al. (2019), when little is known about a particular phenomenon, a study design like this provides a platform to study the phenomenon under investigation so it might be explored and

then described. Over the course of six weeks, two semi-structured interviews and six focus group interviews, each lasting forty-five to sixty minutes, were conducted with two Haitian immigrant adolescent girls. Two study participants were recruited from a junior high school from the southeastern district in Nassau, Bahamas. Manual coding aligned with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis was integrated to analyze the corpus of data. Upon completion of the semi-structured and focus group interviews, the design process included transcribing the interviews and member checking the data as strategies to ensure an accurate account of participant responses to the interview questions. Three themes emerged: separation (from), stress (of), and sacrifice (for).

## **Conclusions**

The conclusions related to this study emerged from the research questions and the researcher's experience while conducting the study. The overarching research question and the two sub-questions guided the research design. All three questions are discussed below.

Research Question: *What are the lived experiences of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas as expressed through the multimodal literacy practices of writing, photography, and tableaux?*

Sub-Question 1: *How do Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas describe their acculturation process through the multimodal literacy practices of writing, tableaux, and photography within the Bahamian educational system and the Bahamian community?*

Sub-Question 2: *How do Haitian immigrant adolescent girls living in The Bahamas perceive their identity construction through the multimodal literacy practices of writing, photography, and tableaux?*

## **Overarching Research Question**

Findings of this study indicated that through the use of multimodal literacy practices, both study participants were able to use their writing, photographs, and tableaux to construct and convey meaning of their lived experiences. Through writing, both study participants described their journeys from Haiti to The Bahamas as frightening, but exciting as well. They expressed how they felt before they left and what they encountered when they arrived in The Bahamas. Both Lilac and Rosie wrote about their reasons for leaving Haiti. Lilac wrote that due to the deaths of several of her siblings, her parents decided it would be better for her and her brother to relocate to The Bahamas, because living there would give them a better opportunity in terms of education, healthcare, and jobs. Lilac wrote about the difficulty of leaving her family but understood the importance of such a move. She understood the decision that leaving the comfort of her home would enable her to get an education in The Bahamas. Then, she might be able to help her family get out of poverty. Similarly, Rose expressed excitement that she was moving from Haiti. She wrote about her preparation to move and some experiences on her journey she hoped would not be the same in Haiti. While Rose expressed some apprehensions about relocating to The Bahamas, this process was not as challenging for her because she returned to Haiti on several visits to her family. This made her relocation bearable.

Through multimodal literacy practices of both photography and tableaux, study participants further described their lived experiences and the challenges they encountered adapting to a new country, including racial discrimination of their religious freedom. Through the mode of tableaux, Rose described her lived experience about the fear and intimidation she felt by not being able to fully practice Voodooism. Meanwhile, through the mode of photography, Lilac described a photo of her and a sibling and the challenges of leaving home and

how much she misses the affection of her immediate family—both represented in the photograph.

### **Sub-Research Question 1**

By integrating multimodal literacy practices, both research participants expressed challenges adjusting to living in The Bahamas. They both described challenges adapting to the educational system in The Bahamas. Rose, in particular, discussed the difficulties she had enrolling in school. She was not fluent in English which resulted in her placement in a lower stream in the ninth grade. Among the many challenges were being stigmatized and discriminated against because she was not Bahamian. She also expressed the challenges of racial profiling within the school and in after-school extracurricular activities.

Lilac emphasized her fear of corporal punishment in schools, both in Haiti and The Bahamas. Both Lilac and Rose emphasized the need to excel in school. In focus group sessions, they expressed that for them to make something of themselves and to help their families in Haiti, they had to do well in school and eventually get good jobs. Both study participants emphasized the difficulty of “juggling” the two cultures, both the country they considered their own and the country in which they live. While acculturation was difficult, learning the language of the dominant country, trying to vacillate between the two cultures, and being ostracized within the host country compounded any efforts of adaptation.

Additionally, both study participants shared their experiences of racial profiling, threats, negative comments, and being ostracized within their local Bahamian communities. Rose the taunting she received from Bahamians when she walked through the low socioeconomic class neighborhood. She was careful not to reply but found the experience traumatic. She expressed

that trying to adjust to a new home, a new school, new people, and a new society with different rules and regulations were further compounded by the racial discrimination she had experienced.

Through multimodal literacy practices of using photographs, study participants shared photos of images that reminded them of life in Haiti. One such image was a cream that reminded Lilac of her mother. For Lilac, trying to adapt to the differences of life in Haiti and The Bahamas was even more challenging because she had moved to The Bahamas without a parent. She explained that while she was able to speak to her parents on the phone, it did not compare to seeing them face-to-face. Learning to adjust to the way of life in The Bahamas proved challenging for both study participants.

### **Sub-Research Question 2**

Rose and Lilac both expressed the need to share their lived experiences and to be a part of this study. They both explained the importance of being represented accurately in the study. In the final semi-structured interview, Rose mentioned that these experiences are hers and that she makes no apologies for being Haitian: This is how she self-identifies. Both participants emphasized their love for their home country of Haiti and how one day they would make contributions to its recovery and development. They also expressed that they are not ashamed of who they are, despite the challenges they experienced. Despite the racial remarks and the social injustices experienced in school, being Haitian is who they are. Rose declared, “This is me! This is my story!” Using multimodal literacy practices, the girls confirmed their identity by using their lived experiences to strengthen who they are as Haitians.

The literature on acculturation and identity (De Las Fuentes & Vasquez, 2006; Berry, 2008; Choi et al, 2016; Umana-Taylor & Marsiglia, 2017; & Osman et al, 2020) indicate that the stronger the cultural tie to a host country, the less sociocultural cultural adjustment issues

immigrants might experience. While Rose and Lilac are keenly aware of the stigma attached to being Haitian in The Bahamas, they both express a deep devotion to their country. They aspired to affect some change in their country in the future. They understood the dire need to support their fellow Haitian nationals, and it would take years to get their country the support it needs. As a result, their sense of self and identity are not reconstructed rather, it is reinforced.

Further, to reinforce Umana-Taylor et al (2012) proposed definition of “ethnic and racial identity (ERI),” she posits that this definition might capture the experiences that reflect racialized events of immigrants as members of a particular group, and in this instance The Bahamas. ERI is considered, “a multidimensional, psychological construct that reflects the beliefs and attitudes that individuals have about their ethnic-racial group membership as well as the processes by which these beliefs and attitudes develop over time (Umana-Taylor et al, 2012, p.23). Reflecting on this definition, based on the experiences Rose and Lilac have had within the Bahamian society, they have made meaningful decisions about their lives and their identities. They both understand that their home country (at the moment) cannot provide them with the necessary tools to live, but that while they live in The Bahamas legally, they see The Bahamas as a transit to better their lives than to go back to Haiti. They continue to achieve a sense of ethnic identity as they continue to explore and make negotiations of who they are as they vacillate in and out of this transnational space.

I too shared the same experiences. I never waived in my ethnic and racial identity. I understood, accepted and embraced my ethnicity. In fact, I am proud of it and I see my time in the United States as advantageous and beneficial to my life both professionally and personally. I gain a new and important perspective and conceptualization of life outside of the door of my

country. My hope, like Rose and Lilac is to return to The Bahamas, and provide whatever support I can within the Bahamian education system.

## **Discussion**

People from all over the world are migrating in search of a more optimal life for themselves. They may be facing economic hardships, lacking any effective education, or even experiencing debilitating natural disasters that impede their optimal living. The phenomenon will remain an inescapable aspect of living in the twenty-first century. And when vulnerable children and adolescents face these challenges, measures need to be in place to accommodate them in multiple ways. Providing a space for Haitian immigrant adolescents to discuss these experiences in a safe and comfortable place provides a platform to explore their identities, to challenge the status quo, and to share with others who are facing similar circumstances. This study provided insight into the lived experiences of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls as conveyed through multimodal literacy practices. The study also explored their acculturation into the Bahamian educational system and how these experiences have strengthened the way they self-identify in the world. Additionally, the study both raised awareness and raised the need for greater awareness of the many experiences of racial profiling they have had to face in their host country.

These findings build on extant research of multimodal literacy practices of immigrant adolescents. It provided a foundation to further examine the multimodal literacy practices of immigrant adolescents in The Bahamas, in particular. The findings suggest the need to explore further the lived experiences of immigrant adolescents, as many in this population have not been given the opportunity to do so in safe non-threatening environments. Furthermore, the findings indicate the need to better incorporate tenets of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) within the Bahamian educational system (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Following the best practices of CRT, the

cultural backgrounds of all students can be explored in ways that include a deeper understanding of each student's culture, provide academic support, and encourage all students to examine social injustices.

The result of this study support existing research of immigrant adolescents stating that this population needs more support when leaving their home countries and entering into a new one. As immigrant children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable when relocating, the need for support is substantial. Educators and school administrators should be more deliberate in ensuring an easier transition for immigrant adolescents.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was supported through the lens of multimodal literacy practices (Jewitt, 2005; Jewitt & Kress, 2002; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), as people construct meaning that can be represented through multiple modes. Within this exploratory-descriptive research design, Haitian immigrant adolescents were able to write, dramatize (tableau), and take images of their experiences of adjusting to life in The Bahamas. Further, while study participants participated in describing, writing, and performing activities that enabled them to share their lived experiences, the semi-structured interview and focus group responses provided them the opportunity to examine such experiences in authentic ways.

My selection of multimodal literacy practices captured Lilac's and Rose's lived experiences of acculturation and they reinforced the theory that literacy can provide an important avenue of communication especially as the geographic and cultural landscape of our world changes. Multimodal literacy tools provided me with the necessary access I needed to allow the study participants to express, explore and describe their lived experiences of acculturation in multiple ways. Although my study participants focused on the broad issue of acculturation, I



used particular multimodal literacy practices to captivate specific aspects of their lived experiences. For example, I invited Rose and Lilac to write about their journeys from Haiti to The Bahamas. I wanted to them to describe their initial thoughts and feelings about their first journey to The Bahamas. I wanted to better understand how life was in Haiti prior to them coming to The Bahamas as well. While both Rose and Lilac opted to write letters, they could have written a story, or an essay or even a poem. The use of types of writing they chose spoke to the efficacy and power of writing as a literacy practice.

Further, the integration of photography also captured the lived experiences of acculturation. Rose and Lilac used photography as a literacy practice to compare and contrast images that resonated with them from Haiti and The Bahamas. This was a powerful and effective way to explore their lived experiences. In addition, the multimodal literacy practice of tableaux heightened their communicative options because they could freely explore their acculturation experiences through movement and photos without having to depend solely on discussion or written language. The application of multimodal literacy practices reinforced the New London Group's advocacy for the need to include multiple ways and modes of communication particularly for those whose have cultural and language differences.

The study participants were able to freely and safely communicate their lived experiences because they found a safe space to do so. As a result, authentic, rich and robust descriptions added to the data and resulted in themes that told the story of Haitian immigrant adolescent girls. This study not only demonstrated the power of using various modes to elaborate on a phenomenon of lived experiences, thereby aligning with the theoretical framework of multimodal literacy practices, it also adds to the body of knowledge pertaining to immigrant adolescents living the Caribbean and throughout the world.

This study adds to the existing body of knowledge related to the multimodal literacy practices of immigrant adolescents as they navigate their lives, vacillating from one culture to the other, while developing as adolescents and compounded by the challenges of acculturation. The findings supported the research questions, which provided themes and gave robust descriptions and explorations of the phenomena being studied. As a result of this study, a deeper understanding of the Haitian immigrant adolescents' lived experiences and the value of implementing multimodal literacy practices. To this end, this study also provided a foundation for more studies to investigate these phenomena.

### **Recommendations**

The constantly changing geographical landscape continues to fuel migration patterns around the world. Awareness of the effects of such migration on these affected people, especially children and adolescent, must be raised across all aspects of society. While abundant literature exists on provided safe spaces for immigrant adolescents to explore these experiences, integrating multiple modes of literacy to do so, it is important to look closely at the many immigrant adolescents in The Bahamas who might not yet have been provided a safe space or avenue to explore, describe, and discuss their challenges of acculturation. Hence, the following considerations and recommendations are provided:

- *A focus on the benefits of multiple modes of literacy.* In the Bahamas, the government mandates that all children and adolescents must attend school. Educators make an important contribution to how immigrant children are accommodated. By providing learning opportunities supported by the theory of multimodal literacy practices, and engaging immigrants' cultures and lived experiences, this population is provided an opportunity to share their lives with others without the fear of stigmatization or

discrimination. The ideology of multimodal literacy practices conveys meaning through two or more modes used for communication purposes. When immigrant adolescents are provided with opportunities to engage in meaningful learning utilizing these various modes to communicate their lived experiences, they are provided with an opportunity to describe, discuss and explore their acculturation and self-identity. The benefits of multimodal literacy integration can be beneficial to this population of students, as seen in this research. Such benefits have allowed the study participants Rose and Lilac the opportunity to share, explain and describe how they adjusted to life in The Bahamas. They were able to successfully channel these experiences in multiple ways. This can be an important component in the Bahamian classroom for the many foreign students who attend.

- *Inclusion of cultures.* It is important that all children learn about their heritage and culture. Adhering only to the dominant discourse of Bahamian culture without providing opportunities to include the cultures and life stories of all students is not only unfair and inequitable, but it might also result in catastrophic effects on the lives of immigrant adolescents affecting self-esteem, insecurity, and doubt.
- *Safe spaces.* When children are safe, they learn better. When children feel comfortable sharing their experiences, they are better able to learn, develop, grow, and improve their sense of the world around them. It incumbent upon educators to provide a safe platform for immigrant adolescents.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The study provided a foundation for more research, and there are multiple research opportunities related to Haitian children and adolescents living in The Bahamas. The

recommendations for further research include suggestions for expansion of the population and the research design.

- *Conduct qualitative research on the lived experiences of undocumented Haitian immigrant adolescents in The Bahamas integrating multimodal literacy practices.* The population for this study were documented immigrants living in The Bahamas legally. Examining the perspectives of undocumented Haitian immigrant adolescents could contribute a different perception of lived experiences from this population.
- *Conduct qualitative research on the lived experiences of Haitian immigrant adolescents in The Bahamas integrating multimodal literacy practices from a critical literacy perspective.* This could provide a space for immigrants to challenge social injustices in the educational system, providing immigrants equitable learning opportunities to their Bahamian adolescent counterparts.
- *Conduct a mixed-methods research study of the interaction between Bahamian teachers and educators and Haitian immigrant adolescents.* Looking through the lens of Bahamian teachers, including their attitude and implicit biases towards Haitian immigrant adolescents, could provide a foundation for new insight into this area.
- *Conduct an ethnographic, qualitative study on lived experiences of Haitian immigrant adolescents migrating from Haiti and relocating to The Bahamas.* This could further contribute to the body of literature describing the challenges many Haitian-nationals face when leaving their homes and entering the host countries. Ethnographic researchers might find this particularly useful living with participants as they travel, traversing from one country to the next. These researchers not only get the opportunity to observe study participants, but they get to live with them and experience their way of life first-hand.

## Conclusion

A framework of multimodal literacy practices provided a conduit allowing Haitian immigrant adolescents to describe their lived experiences in The Bahamas. Two semi-structured interviews and six focus group sessions were conducted where participants were encouraged to use writing, photos, and tableaux to communicate their lived experiences. A comprehensive analysis of the data was then conducted integrating Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. Several themes emerged providing robust descriptions supporting the exploratory-descriptive research design choice. The emergent themes were

- separation (from),
- stress (of), and
- sacrifice (for).

The themes all related to lived experiences offered by the Haitian immigrant adolescents, which included challenges of acclimating to a new country, coping with issues of acculturation—compounded by racism and discrimination. Providing a safe outlet for the participants to share their experiences was shown to be a critical support in building coping mechanisms for the immigrant adolescents transitioning from one country to another. Schools and educators need to establish these safe spaces for immigrant adolescents to describe, explore, and discuss their lived experiences without the fear of stigmatization. Such safe spaces that capture the tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy might prove fruitful for immigrant adolescents living in The Bahamas. Multimodal literacy practices also afforded the immigrant adolescents an opportunity to communicate their lived experiences in multiple ways.

## **The Role and Background of the Researcher**

I was an immigrant female student who resided in the United States for just over four years. Even though I am an adult, I understand first-hand challenges of acclimating into a country not my original country. My arrival into the United States, despite being a fluent English and understanding my proximity to The Bahamas, my adjustment to this new country was marked with frustration, loneliness, and a sense of not belonging. I expected a seamless adjustment period. I lived in New Jersey as I pursued an undergraduate degree. This later experience was quite different for me, though, because I relocated to the United States with my children. From driving issues (Bahamians drive on the left side of the road) to missing a space where I felt comfortable and safe, it took considerably longer to adjust than I expected.

Fortunately, as I was acclimating to my host country, I found myself in classes where professors embraced my culture, my dialect—all of me. In fact, many of the class assignments allowed me to integrate my cultural voice. Further, I found therapy in the arts, including poetry, dance, drama, and story writing. Some professors allowed me to include Bahamian vernacular, drama, folktale, and dance in some of my assignments. This integration of culture made the transition of leaving my home country not only a smoother one, but a meaningful one.

As I begin to become more acquainted with life as a student in the United States, I reflected on my experience as a Bahamian teacher. While my professors made learning culturally relevant for me, I realized, in retrospect, I did not do the same for immigrant students in my earlier years in the classroom. With feelings of guilt that I might have underserved many of my immigrant students, I opted to look more closely at how I might integrate their lived stories in the ways I teach. I wanted to know how their stories of immigration and acculturation might enhance their lived experiences as immigrant adolescents living in The Bahamas.

As a Bahamian teacher, my views and ideologies of Haitian immigrants living in The Bahamas do not coincide with the status quo of discrimination and stigmatization discussed earlier. I began this research project believing strongly that I would encounter experiences and situations during this process I would relate to and share with the participants. As planned, I kept a research journal to record my observations throughout the data collection and analysis, keeping a keen eye for any implicit bias I noticed based on my lived experiences and expectations. I took seriously my role as the researcher—to be supportive, nonintrusive, and professional as I conducted each phase of the project.

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## Appendices

## **Appendix A: Introductory Meeting**

1. Before I met with students, I invited them out for ice cream to become more acquainted with them. This was our initial meeting.
2. I met with study participants to discuss the purpose of the study. I explained that the purpose of this study is to provide a platform for Haitian immigrant adolescent girls to describe and communicate their lived experience in The Bahamas through multimodal literacy practices.
3. I discussed that the nature of this study might be sensitive for them, however, I reassured participants that their names will be all pseudonyms to protect their identities.
4. I also discussed any concerns or questions participants might have.
5. I provided journals, pens and pencils for participants at the first introductory meeting.

## **Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

### **Semi-Structured Interview 1**

#### **Question Guide:**

4. Tell me about yourself?
5. Why did you relocate to The Bahamas?
6. What was your experience leaving Haiti and traveling to The Bahamas?
7. Do you have other family members living in Haiti? If so, who?
8. Who do you leave with in The Bahamas?
9. Do you have family members living in The Bahamas?
10. How do you communicate with your family in Haiti?
11. Do you go back for visits?
12. Was it challenging relocating to The Bahamas? If so, how?

### **Semi-structured Interview 2**

#### **Question Guide:**

1. What did you find most rewarding about this experience?
2. What did you find most unproductive about this experience? Through the multimodal literacy practice of writing, photos and tableaux, which one was most effective (ineffective) for you? Why? Why not?
3. Do you think you were able to effectively communicate your lived experiences through these practices?
4. Were your descriptions of your experiences when integrating these practices accurate?
5. After this engagement of this study has your identity been reconstructed? How? Why?

## **Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Guide**

1. Focus Group Interview 1 & 2—Writing
2. Focus Group Interview 3 & 4—Photo
3. Focus Group Interview 5 & 6--Tableaux

### **Focus Group Interview Guide**

Study participants met for six focus group sessions. I conducted two focus group interviews for each multimodal literacy practice of writing, photos and tableaux.

#### **Focus Group Interview 1 & 2—Writing**

##### **Writing Question Guide:**

5. What are your thoughts about the immigrant children's experiences of migration?
6. Are you able to make any connections to the narratives? How?
7. What are your experiences of migrating from Haiti to The Bahamas?
8. Why did you (and your family) migrate to The Bahamas?
9. Was it challenging adjusting to way of life in The Bahamas?
10. Was it rewarding adjusting to the way of life in The Bahamas? Explain.
11. What similarities have you found in The Bahamas and in Haiti?
12. How are the two countries different?
13. How would you identify yourself?
14. What do you think your story or poem tells us about who you are and how you identify yourself?
15. Do you write about your cultural histories or lived experiences at school?
16. How have you family adjusted to life in The Bahamas?

## **Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Guide (continued)**

17. Explain some trials you might have faced.
18. Explain some triumphs you might have faced?
19. Was this writing a rewarding, challenging or indifferent experience for you?

### **Focus Group Interviews 3 & 4—Photo**

#### **Photo Question Guide:**

1. Why did you choose to take this photo?
2. What does it represent about who you are?
3. Why are these photos important to you?
4. What does this photo suggest about your lived experience as an immigrant?
5. Do you think this photo presents a true likeness of your identity as an immigrant adolescent? Explain.

### **Focus Group Interviews 5 & 6—Tableau**

#### **Tableau Question Guide**

1. How did you feel reenacting this memory or lived experience? What emotion do you feel when you created and performed your tableau?
2. Why did you decide on this particular tableau (frozen dramatic stance)?
3. Through your demonstration of your tableau, what do you hope to change, or what would you like your reality to be?
4. Do you feel a sense of agency or autonomy in these literacy activities? How? Why?





APPROVAL

July 31, 2020

Natasha Swann  
 8801 Hunters Lake Drive  
 Apt 524  
 Tamapa, FL 33647

Dear Mrs. Natasha Swann:

On 7/31/2020, the IRB reviewed and approved the following protocol:

Application Type:	Initial Study
IRB ID:	STUDY001187
Review Type:	Expedited 6, 7
Title:	A Multimodal Literacy Exploration: Lived Experiences of Haitian Immigrant Adolescent Girls in The Bahamas
Funding:	None
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Approved Protocol and Consent(s)/Assent(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natasha Swann IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• Assent Form for Children;</li> <li>• Parent Consent Form;</li> </ul> <p>Approved study documents can be found under the 'Documents' tab in the main study workspace. Use the stamped consent found under the 'Last Finalized' column under the 'Documents' tab.</p>

This study involving child participants falls under the minimal risk category 45 CFR 46.404: Research not involving greater than minimal risk.

Requirements for Assent and/or Permission by Parents or Guardians: 45 CFR 46.408 Permission of one parent is sufficient. Assent will be obtained as outlined in the IRB application.

Within 30 days of the anniversary date of study approval, confirm your research is ongoing by clicking Confirm Ongoing Research in BullsIRB, or if your research is complete, submit a study closure request in BullsIRB by clicking Create Modification/CR.

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**Institutional Review Boards / Research Integrity & Compliance**

FWA No. 00001669

University of South Florida / 3702 Spectrum Blvd., Suite 165 / Tampa, FL 33612 / 813-974-5638