Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology; Vol. 6, No. 1; 2016
ISSN 1927-0526 E-ISSN 1927-0534
Published by Canadian Center of Science and Education

# Betwixt and between Cultural Milieus: African Female Refugee Adolescents Striving for Scholastic Success in USA

Vincent M. Mugisha[1]

[1] College of Education and Social Services, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT, USA

Correspondence: Vincent M. Mugisha, College of Education and Social Services, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT, USA. E-mail: vincent.mugisha@gmail.com

Received: November 1, 2015 Accepted: November 13, 2015 Online Published: November 16, 2015

doi:10.5539/jedp.v6n1p1 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jedp.v6n1p1

**Abstract**

In this article I investigate how three ethnically diverse African refugee female adolescents navigated the intercultural complexity that contextualized their schooling in a small Northeast American city. Using ethnographically contextualized case study methodology, this article explores the participants' perceptions of the African and American cultural milieus that they straddled as refugee adolescents. Additionally, the article examines the strategies these refugee youth had to develop in order to transcend intercultural complexity and remain academically engaged. The findings suggested that the refugee adolescents demonstrated *agency* and a considerable degree of *intercultural competency*, which I conceptually juxtaposed here as *Agentic Intercultural Competency in Schooling* (AGICS). The findings further suggested that the AGICS concept was critical for these socially disadvantaged female adolescents to maintain high levels of scholastic engagement in the face of intercultural complexity.

**Keywords:** refugee adolescents, agency, intercultural competence, scholastic engagement

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1 Defining the Research Problem*

African refugee students in the U.S. often experience a triple disadvantage of being black, poor, and having had limited pre-resettlement literacy development opportunities in refugee camps (Rong & Brown, 2001, 2002; Roy & Roxas, 2011). As juveniles from minority racial groups, they often face racial prejudice and discrimination in American schools (Bigelow, 2009; Roy & Roxas, 2011). As youth from low Social-Economic Status (SES) families, they may not have the privilege of living in a neighborhood with an adequately resourced school (Rong & Brown, 2002). Without a firm foundation in literacy, they often struggle with academic English literacy in poorly equipped urban schools (Roxas & Roy, 2012).

In addition to the triple disadvantage, many African refugee students (e.g., Somali and Somali-Bantu) are Muslim, a religion that is eschewed by some Americans, and which many Americans associate with violence and terrorism especially since the September 11, 2001 events (McBrien, 2003). Similarly, many Muslim African refugee parents require their daughters to wear a hijab, i.e., a headscarf and conservative clothing covering the entire body. Refugee schoolgirls that observe this religious tradition often experience rejection from their American peers, which sometimes leads refugee students to shunning and mentally disengaging from schooling (McBrien, 2003, 2005; Roy & Roxas, 2011).

Additionally, many young African refugee women in the U.S. have come from sub-Saharan countries that are still pervaded by a culture of inequitable gender relations that are considered incongruous with engaged schooling, such as early marriages and girls' expectation to execute multiple household chores (Tuwor & Sossou, 2008). Yet, at the same time research on schooling experiences of African refugees in the U.S. indicates how refugee youth and their parents arrive with a sense of optimism towards the potential advantages of American schooling (McBrien, 2005; Roy & Roxas, 2011).

These cultural realities portend a complex intercultural schooling environment for young African refugee women in the U.S. In this article, I argue that these African refugee youth straddle betwixt and between macro-cultural milieus. They live in an African macro-cultural milieu that is mediated by their home environment in which

parents serve as the custodians and transmission agents of African culture. At the same time these young women formally operate intellectually in an American macro-cultural milieu that is mediated by their school environment in which the curriculum, and American teachers and students are the transmission agents of American cultural values. Finally, being juveniles, they navigate the African and American macro-cultural milieus from a perspective that is constructed within a youth micro-cultural milieu. I ultimately argue that juvenile refugees in the U.S., particularly females, need to develop high levels of intercultural competence in order to successfully navigate this constellation of intercultural complexity and remain scholastically engaged.

### *1.2. Purpose of the Inquiry and Research Questions*

This inquiry investigated participants' perceptions and understanding of the cultural milieus that they straddled as female refugee adolescents representing minority cultural and racial identities, and how these participants transcended intercultural complexity to maintain contextually high levels of scholastic engagement. Two research questions were central to this inquiry:

1) How did the participants describe the cultural milieus that they crisscrossed as African refugee high schoolgirls in the U.S.?

2) How did they transcend intercultural complexity and maintain contextually high levels of scholastic engagement in the U.S.?

### *1.3 Setting the Socio-Cultural Context of the Inquiry*

A cultural milieu is an environmental pattern of beliefs, values, norms, self-definitions, categorizations, role definitions, and attitudes of a given identity group (Carnevale, Cha, Wan, & Fraidin, 2004). Therefore African and American cultural milieus would be environmental patterns of cultural beliefs, values, norms, etc., that are reasonably attributed to American and African people respectively. Similarly, a youth cultural milieu would be the beliefs, values, norms, self-definitions, attitudes, etc. that are reasonably attributed to adolescents or young people.

Regarding the concept of an African cultural milieu, anthropologist Lassiter (2000) argued that sub-Saharan Africans displayed common pan-African cultural values and processes of adaptation in society. In the same vein, Makgoba (as cited in Lassiter, 2000) observed that peoples of African descent were linked by shared cultural traits such as hospitality, respect, friendliness, the consensus and common framework-seeking principle of ubuntu, and the emphasis on community rather than on the individual. Similarly, Nyasani (as cited in Lassiter, 2000) argued that Africans generally exhibited a common cultural and behavioral trait that could be described as a natural benign docility generally brought about by years of blind submission and unquestioning compliance to the mystique of higher authority. Furthermore, Nyasani (as cited in Lassiter, 2000) maintained that this "natural docility was generally regarded as positive, legitimate and virtuous" (p. 7). From these arguments, one would expect African refugee students and their families in the U.S to exhibit some of these cultural values in their intercultural as well as general social relations.

Regarding the concept of American cultural milieu, according to Bellah (1998) and Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler and Tipton (1986), America had an exceptionally powerful social and institutional order and such a powerful institutional order would always carry a powerful common culture, i.e., a macro-culture that transcended ethnic, racial, and social class identities. In this regard, American macro-cultural values would include individualism (i.e., self-reliance and autonomy), freedom (i.e., personal, intellectual and political rights), equality, justice, competition (i.e., success is achieved on individual achievement), and diversity (i.e., protection of and full participation of diverse groups) (Adams, 1988; Hollins, as cited in Sheets, 2005). Sheets, however, argued that equitable application of these American cultural values were often influenced by factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, and social class, amongst others.

Regarding the youth cultural milieu, two relevant concepts, peer group identity and youth culture need elucidation in this inquiry. According to deMarrais and LeCompte (1999), the sociological concept of peer group refers to groups of people who share special characteristics such as age, race, ethnicity, or gender, etc. The related anthropological concept of youth culture, according to the same scholars, encompasses the way of life, behavior, entire body of attitudes, values, beliefs, language, and style of youth groups. Additionally, an important aspect of youth culture is how it is often "defined by those distinctive behavior patterns that children and adolescents develop, often in opposition to the power of adults and their institutions" (p. 99). The next subsection presents a conceptual context and discusses a few perspectives from extant literature that are relevant to refugee student engagement.

### *1.4 Conceptualizing the Scholastic Experiences of African Refugee Adolescents in USA*

African refugee adolescents are part of the large group of racial minority immigrant students in the U.S. whose schooling experiences are shaped by different socio-cultural processes worth engaging in this article. To better understand the context within which African refugee students negotiate their schooling in the U.S., it is important to elucidate the concept of refugee in this article. According to the guidelines in the U.S.. Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), and the U.S. Refugee Act of 1980, a refugee is "a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion" (Martin & Yankay, 2012, p. 1).

In this inquiry, it is important to point out that the words *refugee* and *immigrant* have often been used interchangeably both in ordinary parlance and academic circles. Yet there is a meaningful distinction between these two concepts that is worth our attention. In his contentious Cultural-Ecological (CE) model of minority school performance, which posited that minority students' academic achievement was shaped by institutionalized societal factors or systemic forces as well as how minority groups responded to those factors (or community forces), Ogbu (1999) presented a dichotomous typology of *voluntary-involuntary immigrants* that is relevant to this inquiry. For him, voluntary immigrants were those that more or less chose to relocate to the U.S. for personal reasons whereas the *involuntary immigrants* were those forced into the U.S. through colonialism (i.e., African slaves) or conquest (i.e., native Americans).

McBrien (2005) argued that in Ogbu's typology, refugees would be *semi-voluntary immigrants* because by international law and according to the U.S. Refugee Act of 1980, refugees are consensually resettled from refugee camps in third countries to the U.S. or elsewhere by the UN refugee agency due to protracted political strife in their countries of national origin (Martin & Yankay, 2012). While Ogbu's immigrant typology has been criticized as not particularly helpful in the study of minority student's school performance (Foster, 2004), this inquiry acknowledges the importance of distinguishing refugees from other immigrant categories. This is because the phenomenon of refugee students representing diverse national/ethnic identities in U.S. public schooling is growing by leaps and bounds (Martin & Yankay, 2012, p. 1), yet it remains relatively understudied thereby warranting focused scholarship on the educational experiences of these new diverse social groups.

Scholarship by McBrien (2005) confirmed that most refugee arrivals from sub-Saharan Africa fall into the acute refugee category (i.e., the financially poor that fled acute violence and settled in refugee camps before being relocated to the U.S.) as opposed to the anticipatory immigrant category (i.e., those with capacity of any sort to plan their flight to the U.S.). In the same vein, research by Portes (1995) revealed that most refugees of this nature were incorporated upon their arrival into urban concentrations of socio-economically and intellectually marginalized native-born racial minorities. This exposed refugee adolescents to the subcultures that are developed by marginalized youth in the host community to cope with their difficult situations (Rong & Brown, 2001, 2002). Among many characteristics, these subcultures have been associated with identities that oppose the institutional inequities in the schooling structure, thereby discounting schooling as a means of upward social mobility (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1982). Therefore, it is argued that when refugee youth from racial minority groups such as African refugees assimilate to inner-city underclass subcultures, they may grow to resent and disengage from schooling (Portes, 1995; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). In the next section I discuss the theoretical perspectives that most specifically framed my line of inquiry and particularly informed the theory that emerged from this study.

### *1.5 Theoretical Framework*

Theoretical perspectives from cultural anthropology, e.g., *acculturation theory* (Berry, 2005) and *modern perspectives on liminality theory* (Weber, 1995), as well as theory from cultural psychology, i.e., the *interplay between agency and culture* (Ratner, 2000) framed this inquiry. According to Berry, *acculturation* is "a dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (p. 698). During this process, Berry observed that individuals or social groups engage in intercultural contact, thereby producing a potential for conflict and a need for strategies to achieve adaptive outcomes for involved parties. Among such acculturation strategies, Berry enumerated and discussed *integration, separation, assimilation*, and *marginalization*.

Integration was a viable strategy when there was "an interest in both maintaining one's heritage culture while in daily interactions with other groups" (Berry, 2005, p. 705). On the other hand Berry observed separation was the option where individuals placed value on holding onto their original culture. According to Berry, assimilation is

the strategy when individuals prefer to shed their cultural identity in order to become absorbed into the dominant society. On the extreme end Berry described marginalization as a strategy where minority individuals show little interest in relations with others often due to discrimination.

Berry's conceptualization of the acculturation process, to a certain extent, connects with *liminality theory* (Turner as cited in Weber, 1995). According to Turner, liminality refers to the notion of being between situations and conditions that are brought about by changes in social processes such as refugee resettlement/immigration as a case in point. The in-between-situation individuals (e.g., refugee adolescents) become liminal figures that straddle "betwixt and between" (Weber, 1995, p. 527) cultural positions and identities. Liminality was initially conceptualized as a mere rite of passage or a temporary period. However, in certain social processes such as immigration, the notion of liminality appeared to be a permanent state (Turner, as cited in Weber, 1995) akin to a conscious acculturation strategy that individuals must adopt when they find themselves situated in in-between cultural circumstances.

A strategy of this ilk alludes to the significance of the concept of Intercultural Competence (IC), i.e., "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts" (Bennett, 2001, p. 4). It is important to note that extant research on the IC concept (Bennett, 2001; Cooper, He, & Levin, 2011; Diller & Moule, 2005) has exclusively focused on the need for teachers and other professionals to develop IC as if the concept was irrelevant to foreign-born adolescents in the U.S. However, in this inquiry, as refugee adolescents navigate the two macro-cultural milieus, the IC concept implies that these juveniles would need to develop a cognitive cultural tool kit that includes a variety of mental scripts (Giddens, Duneier, & Appelbaum, 2003) on which to draw in order to operate culturally and scholastically appropriately in different social settings.

IC in this respect would be enhanced by the concept of *agency* and how it interacts with culture. Agency refers to the intentional capacity of an individual (in this case a refuge youth) to act as an agent and purposefully influence cultural processes in his or her favor (Ratner, 2000). In cultural psychology, where the interplay of agency and culture is conceptually ubiquitous, a leading observation according to Ratner is that people are not passive recipients of a reified entity called culture; rather they play an active role in making and remaking culture. Additionally, Ratner observed that agency makes and remakes culture "through creating personal meanings about the significance of things and through acts such as choosing particular kinds friendships, jobs, or consumer products" (p. 413). In other words, agentic individuals (arguably such as the refugee adolescents in this study) can engage culture appropriately and competently as instrumental means for achieving personal scholastic goals (Valsiner, as cited in Ratner, 2000).

## 2. Methodology

### *2.1 Research Design and Tecnique*

I chose a qualitative design for this study as it enabled me to explore and gain an in-depth understanding (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002) of the intercultural complexity within which the participants'schooling was situated. Furthermore, I employed the ethnographically contextualized case study method, ECCSM (Gone & Alcántara, 2010) in order to apply ethnographic techniques to the inquiry and interpret participants' actions in the light of extant cultural knowledge. According to Gone and Alcántara, ECCSM is a form of case study inquiry, which systematically juxtaposes primary data (e.g., interview material) with extant cultural knowledge (e.g., the theoretical characteristics of the American and African cultural milieus described earlier), thereby furnishing the details of the historical and cultural context from which primary research data was expressed.

### *2.2 Research Setting, Participants, and Recruitment Procedures*

For the most past, this inquiry took place at a high school with the pseudonym of Creighton High School (CHS). CHS is a public school located in Creighton, a small city that is federally designated a refugee resettlement center in a predominantly white Northeastern U.S. state. CHS has an enrollment of over 1000 students. The principal and diversity officer stated that CHS was the largest and among the most racially diverse high school in the state with 32% of the students of minority races, while 29.7% were non-native born racial minorities with a home language other English. Due to the Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP), the school administrators stated that racial diversity at CHS had increased in the last 10-15 years with over 35 home languages represented in the student population. For this reason, CHS offered English Language Learning (ELL) classes to Limited English Proficient students (LEPs) to help them acquire the necessary academic English literacy before they were fully integrated into mainstream classes. Similarly, CHS ensured refugee/immigrant parents' involvement in children's

schooling by hiring a full-time team of Multilingual Home-School Liaison Staff (MLHSL) that translated and facilitated communication between refugee families and school agents.

I spent one year working as a substitute teacher at CHS on average one-two days a fortnight. This helped me first get to know the setting in order to better plan my research design. Following ethical guidelines of my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I worked through two MLHSLs using Patton's (2002) criterion sampling approach to select three ethnically diverse and academically engaged African refugee female students. According to the selection criteria, participants had to have:

- Been born in Africa and lived in a refugee camp prior to resettlement in U.S.;
- Attended CHS for at least three years; and
- Graduated from ELL classes and been fully integrated into the mainstream classes.

The resulting purposeful sample included three 11th grade female refugee students whose demographic characteristics and academic standing are presented in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

Table 1. Participant profiles and demographic characteristics

| Name | Age | Place of birth/Host Country of refugee camp | Year of, and Age at Arrival in US | Years of schooling in refugee camp | Parents' Ethnic and Religious Identity | Home language | Family size | Parents' Education | Parent's English proficiency/literacy | Parent's Occupation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Amani** | 16 | Tanzania | 2007(10 years) | 5 | Burundian, Christian | Kirundi | 2 parents, a grandmother, & 6 children | High school diploma (father); some high school class (mother), None (grandmother) | Functional (father and mother), zero (grandmother) | Mother (housekeeper) & father (factory worker) |
| **Bahiya** | 16 | Kenya | 2004(7 years) | 2 | Somali-Bantu, Muslim | Maay Maay | 2 parents, 5 children | Some high school classes (father), None (mother) | Good (father), basic (mother) | Mother (housekeeper) & father (asbestos remover) |
| **Fauziya** | 16 | Kenya | 2004(7 years) | 2 | Somali-Somali, Muslim | Somali | Single mother, 5 children | Koran school | Functional | House cleaner |

Table 2. Participant academic standing

| Name | Cumulative GPA | Days absent August-December 2013 | Best Subject-Last Quarter | Grade-Last Quarter's Math Course | Grade-Last Quarter's English Course (s) | Desired Post-High school Course of Study |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Amani** | 3.51 | 0 | Honors world history (A) | Algebra II (A-) | Honors American literature (B+) | International Affairs or Economics |
| **Bahiya** | 3.08 | 1 | Honors world history (A+) | Algebra II (B) | Honors American literature (B-) | Biology, pre-medicine, and medicine |
| **Fauzia** | 3.10 | 1 | Honors world history (B-) | Algebra II (C-) | American literary traditions (B) | Biology, pre-medicine, and medicine |

### *2.3 Data Collection Procedures*

My formal data collection activities lasted five months. I initially held conversational interviews with the CHS principal, diversity officer and central office ELL services director to get demographic information and official perspectives on school climate and culture. Next, I held and audio-recorded 90-100 minute-long semi-structured in-depth interviews with each of the participants. Patton's (2002) interview guide approach helped me follow the same basic lines of inquiry with each participant. In keeping with ECCSM techniques (Gone & Alcántara, 2010), I used themes from extant literature on African, American, and youth cultural knowledge to probe into participants' experiences with schooling in America. I held two participant-observations of the relations and interactions between primary participants and parents and other relatives in their homes. I also held conversational interviews with parents about their experiences as African parents in America, and their expectations and involvement in their children's schooling.

Furthermore, I conducted one non-obtrusive observation of a class in which the participant had at least two other African refugee classmates. Following this observation, I also reviewed the participants' notebooks and classwork (Chapman, 2003) to assess the extent to which the data from students' work sample analysis corresponded to the data from interviews. I then held 30-minute semi-structured conversational interviews with the teachers to obtain their perspectives on participants' academic engagement. During two months, I also formally observed both as a non-participant and participant observer three sessions of after-school homework help activities to understand the extent to which the three participants were utilizing these opportunities. Lastly, the school cafeteria being an important space for students, especially black students who consistently sat at separate 'black' tables for various reasons (Tatum, 1997), I also conducted participant observations at select tables where my study participants were sitting on 10 different occasions throughout the five months of data collection. Lastly I transcribed the in-depth interviews and the multiple observational field notes to produce the data, which I analyzed according to the procedures described in the following subsection.

### *2.4 Analysis Procedures*

I employed an iterative inductive data analysis approach including both informal and formal processes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Throughout the data collection, I practiced analytical memoing, i.e., by conducting preliminary syntheses of the data in the form of notes to self in order to inform the next data collection steps and document emerging ideas, concepts, and their relationships with theory (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). For formal analysis, I coded the data (transcripts) corresponding to individual participants, and generated a list of inductively emergent codes. I then entered the initial coded themes into three separated excel charts corresponding to the three participants. I grouped the themes together to form broad emergent analytical themes.

Under each broad theme I derived and wrote an emergent general observation statement. From these broad analytical themes and general observation statements, I finally generated the following three categorical findings themes: *characterizing the African cultural milieu*; *making sense of the American cultural milieu*; *and contending with intercultural complexity and engaged schooling*. I used the three charts to return to the three key participants for member-checking (Merriam, 1998). Using these excel sheets made the member-checking activity less burdensome for my participants. I was able to use the analyzed data excel sheets to explain the process of deriving finding statements, and asked the participants if these observations accurately represented their views. As part of the member-checking process, I also held two debriefing sessions with the CHS diversity officer to triangulate participants' views, especially those about school climate. The three excel data analysis charts also facilitated my effort to conduct a cross-case analysis of themes and findings about participants.

## 3. Findings

Based on my data analysis, I found that the young refugee women displayed solid knowledge and understanding of the cultural milieus between which they straddled as high school youth in the U.S. They experienced conflict and dissonance stemming from divergent cultural expectations. Rather than disengaging from schooling, which they needed in order to attain their post-high school career goals, they developed strategies and scholastic behaviors that enabled them to effectively operate at the midpoint of cultural milieus. Below I represent the aforementioned three categorical findings in form of themes to describe the participants' understanding of the cultural milieus and how these participants transcended intercultural complexity to maintain contextually high levels of scholastic engagement.

### *3.1 Characterizing the African Cultural Milieu*

Amani was born of Burundian parents in a refugee camp in Tanzania where she attended school until her resettlement in the U.S. in 2007. After living in Creighton as an African schoolgirl for seven years, Amani appeared culturally well adjusted and anchored in her identity as a young African refugee woman. In her experience, African culture, as handed down to her by her parents and *Nyogokuru* (the Kirundi term for grandmother), emphasized the requirement for children to respect and obey adults in authority such as parents, relatives, teachers and others in decision-making roles. She also spoke of how inequitable gender relations were pervasive in the African cultural milieu, a reality to which she was opposed in her observation:

> *I don't agree with the way African parents put down girls, and make girls work more than boys. [Smiling] for example, I have a grandmother at home who I love much, but she is so traditional. For her, girls are just responsible for housework. She sees no problem when boys can relax at home or do their homework, while girls are bearing the burden of domestic work.*

Amani also perceived the father as being the leading authority in the African cultural milieu, and that his values were regarded as the values of the family. She however felt her father's actions were sometimes antithetical to his values. For instance, she reported that her father valued education as a first priority for his children. However, she observed:

> *But when I come back home tired from school wanting to relax so I can do my schoolwork later, my parents and grandmother want me to first do domestic work, relax and then do my schoolwork. But by the time I finish doing domestic work, I am tired and cannot do much for school.*

Asked how she responded to these cultural expectations, Amani stated that she consciously made an effort to respect her parents and teachers at school. Regarding obedience, she stated that for the most part she obeyed her teachers, and parents (especially her father) and grandmother because Christianity, the family's religion, also fostered the notion of filial respect and obedience, i.e., the expectation that children should respect and obey elders. In my follow-up observational visit at Amani's home, I wanted to witness and confirm her self-reported cultural ways of behaving. On a warm fall Thursday afternoon, I was having a conversation using my broken Kirundi with Nyogokuru and my solid French proficiency with Amani's father, when she returned from school. Humbly Amani greeted everyone present, and then headed to the kitchen for something to eat. After eating, I then witnessed her doing the dishes that she had found in the kitchen for about 15 minutes without being asked to do so by anyone. She then came and sat down with us for about five minutes before she went to her room where she remained until I had to leave 40 minutes later. My observation confirmed her self-reported conformity to her cultural expectation to be a disciplined girl that comes from school, does some shores, relaxes and then embarks on her schoolwork. In my follow-up conservations with Amani the next morning at her school, I learnt that she remained in her room for a one-hour nap and then got up to prepare dinner for the family after which she completed most of her homework for the next school day.

Another participant, Bahiya, a Somali-Bantu born in a refugee camp in Kenya where her parents had fled from violent conflict in Somalia, was resettled with her family to Creighton in 2004. Bahiya, like Amani, characterized the African cultural milieu as where parents emphasized the values of respect and obedience. Bahiya observed, "My father is really big on respect and discipline. My mother usually follows what my father says", and that she made a deliberate effort to obey her parents most of the times. Bahiya's father reflected this characterization in his statement:

> *My children spend more time outside my house. I tell them that when they come back home, they must follow the rules from my culture, and respect and obey us their parents. Bahiya tries to follow our rules, not 100%, but about 65% or 75%. In the beginning, this was not acceptable to me, but these days, I can accept this. In this country, I see you can't have too many rules for children like in my culture.*

Bahiya also characterized an African cultural milieu as one where traditions that emphasize gender differences and conservative religious beliefs are widespread. For example, she stated: "As a Muslim girl I must dress like women do in my culture and religion. I must cover my body, but my brothers don't do this".

The third participant, Fauzia, a Somali, was also born and partly raised in a refugee camp in Kenya. She and her family first resettled and lived in two other American cities for six years since 2004 before they finally arrived in Creighton in 2010. To describe the African cultural milieu, Fauzia reflected many of the same values presented above. She observed:

> *Africans believe in their religions, which teach respecting and obeying parents. In our Muslim religion, we also have to dress differently because our religion tells us a woman must cover herself to respect her body. But unfortunately many students at my school take this negatively, and some have even arrogantly asked me if I feel comfortable in my dress.*

Furthermore, Fauzia stated that African culture and religion were inseparable sometimes. She reported how in her religion and culture premarital sexual intercourse was taboo and how parents do all it takes to prevent this among their children especially their daughters. She observed:

> *In the Somali community, culture and religion is one thing. Many Somalis care more about culture and religion than the education of their daughters. Many Somali parents are happy to see their daughters get engaged to be married at 15, 16, 17, or 18 when still in high school. But how can I be engaged to be married at this age and still succeed at school? It is just hard.*

As an ethnic cultural-religious outsider, I needed a better understanding of this "engagement-to-be-married at 15, 16, 17, or 18" phenomenon. Fauzia explained to me that the tendency of Somali, and Somali-Bantu parents to push high school girls to get engaged in a traditional ceremony to the future husband was widespread. According to her, the engagement helped avoid the American concept of dating that often involved inappropriate premarital sexual intercourse, and that this engagement was a de facto marriage relationship in which sexual intercourse was culturally appropriate.

To confirm Fauzia's account of this phenomenon, I reached out to her mother during one of my observational visits. In a conversation with me, her mother did confirm the widespread nature of this phenomenon in the Somali/Somali-Bantu communities in Creighton. However she firmly stated that she did not want Fauzia to get involved in either American dating or the Somali traditional engagement (defacto marriage) until after college graduation. Additionally, her mother mentioned that her daughter (Fauzia) would be an expensive woman to marry in the long run because she will have invested a lot into her daughter's intellectual development. On the same note a week later, in my participant-observations at the 'black table' with Fauzia and Bahiya in the cafeteria, I sat next to an 11$^{th}$ grader who had just become engaged the previous weekend. Although the newly engaged Somali woman was a close friend of Bahiya and Fauzia, they both did not agree with either the American dating concept because it went against their culture, or the Somali traditional engagement because of the risks involved such as teen pregnancy. Bahiya and Fauzia also expressed their discontent with this traditional engagement/de facto marriage practice because it was also associated with dropping out of school as was the case with two other Somali girls that they knew. The participants described the events they encountered in the African cultural milieu. Next is their account on how they made sense of the American cultural milieu as African female refugee schoolgirls.

### *3.2 Making Sense of the American Cultural Milieu*

Through the prisms of adolescence and youth cultural identity, the participants operated intellectually in, and made sense of, the American cultural milieu as mediated by an American social institution, i.e., CHS. According to Amani, the central theme in the American cultural milieu was the American dream, (which refers to the notion that life will be better for everyone regardless of social class or circumstances of birth if they are willing to work hard (Rhodes, 2010) and that students at CHS were taught how they could become successful through education. She also perceived fellow students, both American and foreign-born, as desiring to own good cars and homes, good electronic devices, and wear good clothes and how all these ideals were like a race for her:

> *I think in America, you can see people both adults and young people like us like material things. Young people want to look and feel good. They are free to buy or do anything that can make them happy. But there are times when I feel the pressure to catch up with these American culture things, but then I remember my situation as a refugee girl from Africa.*

In my follow-up conversations with Amani, it became more evident that she perceived the American cultural milieu as one where the notion of freedom was pervasive and where individuals sometimes misused it. She stated that "many students, both American and foreigners, sometimes misuse their freedom to ignore academics and focus more on sports or music because many sports and music stars are rich". However, Amani stated how she chose to focus on academics as her means of achieving success in America because that is what she and her parents believed was the best success strategy for African refugees.

Similarly, Bahiya's perceptions of the American cultural milieu reiterated Amani's notions of the American dream and freedom. Below she opined how these themes shaped students' engagement with schooling:

> *I think at CHS, when children have other opportunities like family wealth that will make them well off, they sometimes don't take education seriously. Many children have the freedom to choose between working hard at school, or doing something fun. But those children who come from a down family take education seriously because they think education will help them become better off in future. Me too, I think because of my family situation, I take school seriously.*

Fauzia's perception emphasized the freedom and choice themes, which she also thought many young people often abused, and the way young people tended to think adults such as teachers and youths were equals in society. She observed:

> *At CHS I mostly see how American children choose to disrespect teachers. In my classes, sometimes you won't believe how inappropriate they can be, some swearing to teachers, talking back to them, walking away from teachers as if they were equals. In my heart I just say to these children … dude, seriously? You have such an opportunity, and you are blowing it just like that?*

The participants also perceived of the American cultural milieu as mediated by CHS as where people in authority encourage tolerance and respect of people representing different identities and cultures. However, the participants felt the tolerance and respect expectations often implied that Africans should respect identities in America and not necessarily the contrary, and that certain American students acted in ways that were insensitive to and ignorant about African culture, and social historical events. Amani, for instance, came a long way to respect the gay and lesbian identity group at CHS, but she reported being often offended when students would speak ignorantly of the Tutsi and Hutu ethnic dynamics in Burundi and Rwanda arguably without making an effort to read about it. She observed:

> *[Smiling] I am from Africa, and you know the gay and lesbian thing, I used to think these people shouldn't be here or whatever. But my English teacher talked to me about it and gave me books to read about it, and now I know gay people exist in all societies, and no one should put them down. But, why can't American children do the same and also get facts right by reading about how Hutu and Tutsi problems started?*

Bahiya and Fauzia also observed that ethnocentric tendencies were characteristic of the American cultural milieu. Bahiya, for instance stated:

> *If you dress like American people at school, you can fit well into American student groups; that is why many Asian students hang out easily with Americans. But if you are like us who wear our traditional Somali clothes, then you see the facial gestures they make at us. They give us those attitudes showing us that they don't like our clothes. Some of these American children are so full of themselves.*

In unison with Bahiya, Fauzia observed:

> *American youth like dressing swag, and if you do not dress swag the same way, you cannot fit well in their groups. That's why we Somali kids dress swag in our own way, and we keep in our own groups.*

As an outsider to the youth identity group in the U.S., I was not familiar with the American youth cultural term "dressing swag", so I asked Fauzia to explain it to me. She explained that dressing swag generally meant "dressing well, wearing fashionable things, wearing clothes that give you the right attitude, and make you comfortable in your body". This was a good lesson for me about American youth culture which Bahiya, Fauzia and African female peers (especially the Somali and Somali-Bantu) appeared to have adapted to their own African culture. Although, the *hijab* is a conservative form of dress, these students converted it into something they enjoyed. On Halloween day, the day I observed Bahiya's class, she wore a *hijab*-style black costume, which in my view appeared even more conservative than their usual swag-style *hijab* because the only part of her body that was visible were her eyes. However, she appeared to be happily going along with the flow of the Halloween spirit. In the same vein, on regular school days I watched Bahiya and Fauzia walk around wearing their *hijab* consisting of head, top and bottom pieces of beautiful bright colors and elegant high-heeled shoes. Sometimes, they appeared to be competing with each other in terms of who was wearing the best colors and most elegant shoes. It is not surprising that on several occasions I heard African refugee boys comment positively, especially on Bahiya's style. In summary, these participants appeared to be fairly well versed with the basic characteristics of the African and American cultural milieus. Next I represent how they contended with their goals of scholastic achievement within the context of intercultural complexity.

### *3.3 Contending with Intercultural Complexity and Engaged Schooling*

As Table 2 suggests, the three participants demonstrated relatively high levels of scholastic engagement contextualized in the face of intercultural complexity. Their parents believed in their schooling and expected them to excel academically beyond high school and go to college to study for different careers. The participants, too, had clear scholastic and post-high school academic ambitions. I observed the three participants sitting in the library four times a week to utilize the opportunity of after-school homework help, which CHS provided free of charge to students who needed it. It so happened that the overwhelming majority of students in this extra-curricular activity were ELLs and other refugee students that were already integrated into the regular/mainstream classes.

The three participants appeared to have adopted the culturally founded classroom behaviors that their teachers valued. In my conversational interviews with their teachers, I learned of teachers' observations about the participants. Amani's algebra-II teacher observed:

> *She is an active participant in class, culturally well adjusted, and obviously not shy. In fact I should say, there are more shy American students than her. She is very engaged, finishes all her homework and turns it in on time. She speaks up in class, and asks smart questions. She is friendly, respectful, and highly motivated. She has a sense of purpose, and you can tell she is doing this required course on purpose to go to college.*

Amani's academic engagement as described by her math teacher was not an automatic phenomenon unconstrained by events in the African cultural milieu as mediated by her home environment. The African cultural milieu is also an informal educational setting for her to learn by doing domestic tasks that she will need when she grows up as her father observed. Amani described the complexity that she contended with in order to remain academically engaged:

> *My father and mother work a lot. They want us to grow up in America knowing our culture, so they let our grandmother play a role at home. She makes me freak out sometimes when she is like, Amani is wasting her time at school, after all she will be getting married in future. So when I tell her I have this school assignment to do. She says: "You need to do this and that for me first. This is also good education for you". So I get conflicted between doing my schoolwork, and obeying my grandmother. So I end up doing a little of both, and this is why many times I end up finishing my homework at the last minute especially on weekends. But during the week, I try to finish most of the work during after-school homework help.*

Amani evidently struggled with the complexity of operating in more than one cultural milieu. Asked if she felt angry about this situation, she responded laughing: "not really because I know this is the way it is. I can just try to influence it, but I cannot change it totally". Realizing that both the African and American cultural milieus as mediated by home and school environments are legitimate realities, Amani developed cultural competences that would enable her to meet her scholastic goals. She adopted a compromising strategy, i.e., obeying her grandmother by doing the chores to the extent that she had sometime left to also respond to her scholastic expectations.

Amani also reported other occasions where she attempted to downplay the African cultural value of African filial obedience. She stated how her father had always been pushing her to study pharmacy whenever she got to college, and that she had kept silent all the time as if she acquiesced. Her father argued that with pharmacy studies she could choose to return to Africa and seamlessly use her American education there. When Amani got to 11$^{th}$ grade, she reported that the discussion about pharmacy studies resumed. Asked how she reacted, Amani observed:

> *Living in America, I now value freedom of choice, and these days I know my parents are not always right. Some of the things they advise me to do are not right for me, but I also know the importance of not ignoring them totally. So I politely told him off by saying that I was not good at chemistry and physics. I also told him that if I did international studies, I could still work in Africa, and he finally chilled about the pharmacy idea.*

Amani demonstrated intercultural competence in the way she approached her father, a symbol of authority in the home environment of the African cultural milieu. She indirectly expressed to her father her cherished value of freedom to choose what she wanted to be professionally without entirely disempowering the father who preferred a career that was also applicable in Africa. In the end, Amani's approach was a win-win for both her

father and herself.

Bahiya's English teacher described how Bahiya had also learned how to assert her rights and freedoms when it came to getting the help she needed in order to succeed academically. Her teacher observed:

> *She is respectful and well behaved. She is clearly smart, and her English language skills are solid. She calls on me perhaps more often than any other student. When she likes the book, she does extremely well, and when she doesn't like the book, she does not do well on her assignment. Her best book was "To Kill a Mockingbird". She wrote an excellent essay on that book. But recently, her extended essay on "The Catcher in the Rye" was both late and weak content-wise. When I asked her why it was late, the response was what I had suspected: "I did not enjoy the book." I should say these are some of the challenges we have with modern American students. They have to like the material in order to excel in the subject.*

Bahiya evidently applied in her classroom relations some values from her culture (i.e., respect for those in authority), and some of those from the host culture such as freedom to follow one's passion and take responsibility for the outcomes. In the home environment Bahiya contended with the expectation to do several domestic chores, which sometimes she chose to disobey for the sake of meeting her scholastic expectations. She observed:

> *I am not always a goody-goody girl to my parents, for example sometimes when my parents tell me to come straight home right after school and do domestic work; I sometimes choose not to listen to them because I need to stay at school to get my homework done. So I stay at school for the right reason and take the yelling when I get home. But when they calm down, I explain to them why I needed to stay at school and even show them the work that I completed, and also do the domestic work they asked me to do. Because my parents don't always understand how school functions in America, I know what is the right thing to do, and I try to do it and explain to them what I did and why I did it.*

Here, Bahiya like Amani, strived to come up with a compromising strategy to address expectations from both the African and American cultural milieus as mediated by home and school environments. Furthermore, Bahiya described how she relentlessly endeavored to influence her parents' excessive cultural expectation for her to take on several domestic responsibilities that on several occasions got in the way of her schooling. She observed:

> *Sometimes it is a lot of pressure to be going to school in America and still be a woman of my age in my culture. But because I politely resist some of the pressure from my parents, my parents especially my mother recently become more lenient with me, and in fact these days I no longer have to do a lot of stuff for my little sisters on weekends. This gives me times to both relax and complete my schoolwork.*

Bahiya's observation above is evidence that she demonstrated some ability to reshape and influence the home culture in favor of her personal and scholastic preferences.

Like I did with Amani and Bahiya, I also interacted with one of Fauzia's teachers to gain a varied perspective on Fauzia's academic engagement. Fauzia's math (algebra-II) teacher observed:

> *Fauzia is respectful, and motivated. Her class participation is good, and she comes in with a high degree of motivation because her mother apparently pushes her to do well at school so as to go to college later. Fauzia is quite attentive in class and occasionally asks questions, but mostly after the quiz. She completes her homework most of the times, but sometimes she turns in incomplete work. And when this happens she tells me that she could not find adequate time both during after-school homework help and at home due to multiple domestic duties.*

The teacher's perspective on Fauzia's academic engagement dovetails with her personal observation:

> *When I compare myself to American children, it's different a situation. For me I need to go back and forth as a student in America, and an African girl who must also find time to cook and clean the house for the family. I end up not having enough time for my schoolwork. But now that I am in 11$^{th}$ grade, I told my mother that I needed to focus more on school if she wants me to become a doctor as she keeps singing it to me. But of course you know she expects me to do well both at school, and at home. Now my brother is back home for a year off college. He will also help out. But also I am now using the after-school homework help more than before.*

Here also, Fauzia was not only contending with the intercultural complexity, but she also came to accept that the

cultural expectations were an inescapable reality for her; therefore she needed to find a compromise strategy. She made her scholastic intentions known to her mother who understood that in order to possibly become a doctor one day, Fatou needed to find time for her schoolwork. Her mother relented when she influenced her son's (Fauzia's older brother) decision to take a gap year so he could become more supportive to the family. In summary, the participants faced intercultural complexity, which they deliberately made an effort to mitigate via several strategies that enabled them to remain scholastically engaged.

## 4. Discussion and Implications

This inquiry provided further confirming evidence that African refugee adolescents (particularly females) experience considerable disadvantage (Rong & Brown, 2001, 2002; Roy & Roxas, 2011) in American schooling. Similarly this research provided evidence that this disadvantage partly stems from the American cultural milieu where, despite the social ideals of diversity, equality, and justice (Adams, 1988; Hollins, 1996 as cited in Sheets, 2005), ethnocentrism and racial prejudice persist potentially contributing to a degree of scholastic disengagement among African Muslim refugee students (Bigelow, 2009). This institutionalized social disadvantage is akin to the countervailing institutionalized societal forces in Ogbu's (1999) cultural-ecological theory of minority students'school performance. There is also evidence in this inquiry that the disadvantage for female refugee students partly inheres in the African cultural milieu within the host society where inequitable gender relations that are considered incongruous with engaged schooling (Tuwor & Sossou, 2008) persist even after refugee families' arrival in the U.S. This aspect of the African refugee students' disadvantaged status is akin to what Ogbu (1999) referred to as community forces in his cultural-ecological theory of minority students'school performance.

From this inquiry, it is evident that due to the optimism about the potential benefits of accelerated acculturation with which the African refugee youth and their families come to the U.S. (McBrien, 2005), the African refugee adolescents may quickly decipher American cultural values, i.e., individualism and the American Dream, freedom and assertiveness, and competition (Bellah, 1998; Bellah et al., 1986). However, some African refugee adolescents may not easily assimilate into the American cultural milieu for two evident explanations in this inquiry: (1) if they are Muslim and female, they cannot easily blend in with their American peers; and (2) the influence of their parents who do not want them to give up their African cultural identity is a community force to be reckoned with. To deal with this reality, these youth must adopt appropriate acculturation strategies.

In terms of Berry's (2005) acculturation theory, the female youth in this study attempted the *integration acculturation strategy*, i.e., maintaining their African culture while deliberately seeking the necessary interactions with agents in the American cultural milieu as mediated by their school environment. At the same time, I contend that the participants (particularly the two Muslim youth) experienced a degree of *marginalized acculturation* where, to some extent, they demonstrated little interest to co-mingle with their peers who arguably showed them ethnocentric attitudes. In the language of Turner (as cited in Weber, 2005), the participants in this study perhaps initially saw themselves as liminal figures (Weber) that considered their initial acculturative stressful experiences temporary liminal periods. However, they soon came to discover that the reality of living in the midpoint, i.e., betwixt and between cultural milieus, would be a relatively permanent state, and therefore they needed to develop strategies that would enable them to deal with this cultural complexity and remain scholastically engaged.

To begin with their strategy of addressing the youth cultural expectations and peer pressure of "dressing with swag", the two Muslim participants countered their American peers' ethnocentric views about their *hijab* by what I coin here as "dressing with Afriswag". By "dressing with Afriswag", the two Muslim participants reclaimed their *hijab* as a symbolic artifact of pride in their cultural identity, the opportunity to be in school, and their relatively high scholastic engagement. Regarding the strategy to deal with countervailing community forces in the African cultural milieu as mediated by their home environments, the three participants demonstrated the phenomenon of *agency,* the intentional capacity of an individual to act as an agent and purposefully influence cultural processes in his or her favor (Ratner, 2000). It is evident in this inquiry that the participants were not mere minions of benign acquiescent docility, a value that is regarded as positive and virtuous in sub-Saharan African cultures (Lassiter, 2000). Rather as agentic individuals, the three participants appropriately strategized to influence their home cultural norms. It is evident in the inquiry that the participants' agentic approaches led to a considerable lessening of their parents'/relatives' domestic expectations, thereby enhancing their scholastic engagement.

Finally, it is evident that the three participants demonstrated a considerable degree of Intercultural Competence

(IC), i.e., a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that supported effective and appropriate interaction in the different cultural milieus (Bennett, 2001). Extant research on the IC concept in education (Bennett; Cooper et al., 2011; Diller & Moule, 2005) has largely, if not exclusively, focused on educators and adult professionals' need to effectively operate in various cultural contexts. However, this inquiry demonstrates the importance of the IC concept among school youth from racial minority groups who do not often come to develop the necessary skills to navigate intercultural complexity in America and remain scholastically engaged.

In this inquiry I juxtaposed the concepts of *agency* and *intercultural competency* which seamlessly fit together to describe and characterize the attitudes, appropriateness, creativity, skillfulness, and savvy with which the three participants strategically navigated intercultural complexity in order to remain scholastically engaged. I therefore conceptualized these participants' characteristics and skills as *Agentic Intercultural Competence In Schooling* (AGICS). Consequently, I define the emergent AGICS concept as a set of interculturally appropriate, creative, and scholastically intentional skills with which refugee youth from racial minority groups navigate intercultural complexity and remain academically engaged. Unlike Foster (2004), this inquiry did not primarily seek to critique or come to terms with Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory (1982, 1999), which largely focused on the schooling of involuntary minority immigrants (e.g., African Americans). The article however intended to contribute to the ongoing constructive scholarly discourse about Ogbu's arguments by focusing on one case of semi-voluntary minority immigrants i.e., African refugee female youth due to their relative social disadvantage stemming from what Ogbu termed as societal or systemic and community forces. This research has contributed to the exisiting literature the strategic AGICS conceptual perspective on the schooling of semi-voluntary minority immigrants such as African refugee adolescents. I contend that the AGICS concept holds promise in the study of models of scholastic engagement amongst refugee adolescents from minority racial groups. I therefore recommend further research in urban American schools that documents and disseminates cases of academically engaged refugee high school adolescents from racial minority groups. This will create a body of scholarship to inform the actions of educators, counselors, and mentors that intervene in the lives of refugee youths at risk of scholastic failure.

Finally, this research argues that a positive school racial climate can positively shape the scholastic engagement of African refugee students. Many schools like CHS excel at articulating a school culture of high academic expectations for all children. However, they do not always excel at having a positive culturally inclusive climate that would enhance the scholastic engagement of minority-culture students. While it was important for these female refugee adolescents to develop strategies for navigating intercultural complexity in schooling, American schools also needed to enhance the inclusiveness of their campus climates and organizational cultures. This research recommends to American schools serving refugee students to adopt what Mugisha (2013) conceptualized as *Culturally Responsive Instructional Leadership* (CRIL), i.e., "those purposeful, well-intentioned, creative, and collaborative actions that a principal takes to enhance the academic engagement and achievement of minority-culture students" (p. 15). In this regard, the refugee adolescents-based AGICS concept together with the school-based CRIL concept (Mugisha, 2013) hold much promise of enhancing the scholastic engagement of the study participants and other female refugee adolescents from racial minority backgrounds.

**References**

Adam, D. W. (1998). Fundamental considerations: The deep meaning of Native American schooling, 1880-1900. *Harvard Educational Review*, *58*(1), 1-28. http://dx.doi.org/10.17763/haer.58.1.h57152110517nm65

Bellah, R. N. (1998). Is there a common American culture? *The Journal for the American Academy of Religion*, *66*(3), 613-625. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/66.3.613

Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swindler, A., & Tipton, S. M. (1986). *Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life*. New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers.

Bennett, J. (2001). *Developing intercultural competence for international education and staff*. Paper presented at the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA), San Francisco, CA. Retrieved from http://www.intercultural.org/documents/competence_handouts.pdf

Berry, J. W. (2005). Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *29*(1), 697-712. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.013

Bigelow, M. (2009). Somali adolescents' negotiation of religious and racial bias in and out of school. *Theory into*

*Practice*, *47*(1), 27-34. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00405840701764706

Carnevale, P. J., Cha, Y. S., Wan, C., & Fraidin, S. (2004). Adaptive third parties in the cultural milieu. In M. J. Gelfand, & J. M. Brett (Eds.), *The Handbook of Negotiation and Culture* (pp. 280-294). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Chapman, E. (2003). Alternative approaches to assessing student engagement rates. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, *8*(13), 1-11.

Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Cooper, J. E., He, Y., & Levin, B. B. (2011). *Developing critical cultural competence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

deMarrais, B. K., & LeCompte, D. M. (1999). *The way schools work: A sociological analysis of education* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Longman.

Diller, J., & Moule, J. (2005). *Cultural competence: A primer for educators*. Belmont, CA: Thomas/Wadsworth.

Fordham, S., & Ogbu, J. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the burden of "acting white". *Urban Review*, *18*, 176-206. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF01112192

Foster, K. M. (2004). Coming to terms: A Discussion of John Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of minority academic achievement. *Intercultural Education*, *15*(4), 369-384. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1467598042000313403

Giddens, A., Duneier, M., & Appelbaum, P. R. (2003). *Introduction to Sociology* (4th ed.). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Gone, J. P., & Alcántara, C. (2010). The ethnographically contextualized case study method: Exploring ambitious achievement in an American Indian Community. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *16*(2), 159-168. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0013873

Hollins, E. (1996). *Culture in school learning: Revealing the deep meaning*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Lassiter, J. E. (2000). African culture and personality: Bad science, effective social activism, or a call to reinvent ethnology? *African Studies Quarterly, The Online Journal for African Studies*, *3*(3), 1-21.

Martin, D. C., & Yankay, J. E. (2012). *Refugees and Asylees: 2011 Annual Flow Report* (pp. 1-7). Washington, DC: Department of Human Services (DHS).

Marshall, C., & Rossman, B. G. (2011). *Designing qualitative research*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

McBrien, J. L. (2003). A second chance for refugee students. *Educational Leadership*, *61*(2), 76-79.

McBrien, J. L. (2005). Educational needs and barriers for the refugee students in the United States: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, *75*(3), 329-364. http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/00346543075003329

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Mugisha, M. V. (2013). Culturally responsive instructional leadership: A conceptual exploration with principals of three New Zealand mainstream schools. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, *15*(2), 1-20.

Ogbu, J. U. (1982). Cultural discontinuities and schooling. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, *13*(4), 290-307. http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/aeq.1982.13.4.05x1505w

Ogbu, J. (1999). Beyond language: Ebonics, proper English, and identity in a Black-American speech community. *America Educational Research Journal*, *36*(2), 147-184. http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/00028312036002147

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Portes, A. (1995). Segmented assimilation among new immigrant youth: A conceptual framework. In R. G. Rumbault, & W. A. Cornelius (Eds.), *California's Immigrant Children* (pp. 71-76). San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies.

Portes, A., & Rumbaut, R. G. (2001). *Legacies: The story of the immigrant and second generation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ratner, C. (2000). Agency and culture. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, *30*(4), 413-434. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1468-5914.00138

Rhodes, L. D. (2010). *The ethnic press: Shaping the American dream*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

Rong, X. L., & Brown, F. (2001). The effects of immigrant generation and ethnicity on educational attainment among young African and Caribbean Blacks in the United States. *Harvard Educational Review*, *71*(3), 536-565. http://dx.doi.org/10.17763/haer.71.3.464r24p1k6v1n43t

Rong, X. L., & Brown, F. (2002). Socialization, culture, and identities of black immigrant children. *Education and Urban Society*, *34*(2), 247-273. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0013124502342008

Roxas, K., & Roy, L. (2012). "That's how we roll": A case study of a recently arrived refugee student in an urban high school. *Urban Review*, *44*(1), 468-486. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11256-012-0203-8

Roy, L., & Roxas, K. C. (2011). Whose deficit is this anyhow? Exploring counter-stories of Somali Bantu refugees' experiences in "doing school". *Harvard Educational Review*, *81*(3), 521-541. http://dx.doi.org/10.17763/haer.81.3.w441553876k24413

Sheets, H. R. (2005). *Diversity pedagogy: Examining the role of culture in the teaching-learning process*. New York, NY: Pearson.

Tatum, D. B. (1997). *Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria*? New York, NY: Basic Books.

Turner, V. (1975). *Forewords to Benetta Jules-Rosette, African apostles: Ritual and conversation in the Church of John Maranke*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.

Tuwor, T., & Sossou, M. (2008). Gender discrimination and education in West Africa: Strategies for maintaining girls in school. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *12*(4), 363-379. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13603110601183115

Weber, D. (1995). From limen to border: A meditation on the legacy of Victor Turner for American cultural studies. *American Quarterly*, *43*(3), 525-536. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2713299

**Copyrights**

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/).