Introduction

> [West Indian], but hyphenated; viewed by Anglos as perhaps exotic, perhaps inferior, definitely different; viewed by [West Indians] as alien; their eyes say, "You speak [patois], but yuh not like me;" an American to [West Indians], a [West Indian] to Americans; a handy token sliding back and forth between the fringes of both worlds by smiling, by masking the discomfort of being pre-judged bi-laterally.

This except from a poem titled *Legal Alien* by Pam Mora (altered by Kamille Gentles-Peart) vividly describes the experience of being multicultural. It illustrates the duality of a culturally hybrid existence, the feelings of belonging to two worlds without being able to claim any as home, the negotiations one has to engage in to maneuver both spaces, and the anxieties that accompany such hyphenated positions. It is these themes of uneasy hybridization and culture-making that I address in this dissertation. Through the ethnographic data garnered from three discrete research studies and 29 total participants, I explore how first and second-generation West Indian immigrant women construct their diasporic identity in the United States (U.S.), and how their interactions with mainstream media impact this self-image.

The term "West Indian"[1] refers to people of the Anglophone Caribbean (Foner, 2001), which includes the nations of Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica,

[1] Though an obviously problematic term that has its origin in a geographical error committed by Christopher Columbus, I use the term "West Indian" in this dissertation because the vast majority of people from the Anglophone Caribbean refer to themselves as such. I should also point out that by using the broad term "West Indian" I am in no way claiming the existence of a homogenous West Indian culture; I realize that the term brings together a group of islands of diverse histories and cultures that have inter-island conflicts and power differences. My intention is therefore not to erase difference, but to highlight some similarities that exist among peoples of the Anglophone Caribbean.

Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Trinidad and Tobago. Their significant communities in the U.S., particularly New York City, have made West Indians the subject of several scholarly inquiries, notably the works of Mary Waters, Philip Kasinitz, and Nancy Foner. However, these scholars only make cursory references to media in their discussion of West Indian identity, suggestive of the relative insignificance of media to their studies, and the undervaluing of established relationship between media and identities.

Furthermore, West Indians in general, and women in particular, have been misrepresented by the media industry, and overlooked as an interpretive community by mass communication research. First, they are relegated to stereotypical images in the commercial media. They are often depicted as violent and criminal (as in *Marked For Death* (1990)); as exotic and life-giving (as in the movie *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* (1998)); as having a propensity for dread-locks and bright colors (exemplified by the characters of *Cool Runnings* (1993)); and as self-sacrificing, loving nurses or nannies (as Whoopi Goldberg's character in *Clara's Heart* (1988) (Du Bois, 2004; Vickerman, 1999). This "symbolic annihilation" (Tuchman, 1978) perpetrated by the commercial media is indicative of West Indian's exclusion from cultural (and legal) citizenship in the U.S. (Rosaldo, 1997).

Secondly, in spite of significant development of the field, critical cultural media studies have largely overlooked West Indian women.[2] Black women in general have been the subject of several media-related inquires, including Tricia Rose's (1994) study of black female rappers, Berretta Smith-Shomade's (2002) genealogical analysis of the

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[2] As stated before, there are a number of scholarly texts that examine West Indians in the U.S. My statement is thus not meant to dismiss the works of other scholars, but to highlight the lack of research on West Indian peoples, particularly women, in media-related studies.

representation of black women on television, and Hazel Carby's (1986) study of the songs of black female blues singers. Black women have also been specifically addressed as an interpretive community by Jacqueline Bobo (1995) who examined the textual reading patterns of black women.[3] While doing the important work of presenting black women as sophisticated cultural agents, Bobo focused on African American[4] women, and did not specifically address the experiences of women from other ethnic and cultural groups within the black community, including women from the West Indies.

Christine Du Bois (2004) sought to enrich the literature on West Indians with audience studies research when she examined the responses of West Indians to their unfavorable treatment in the media of the Chesapeake area. She concluded that West Indians in her study contended with negative representations of themselves in the media through distancing: Non-Jamaicans tried to distinguish themselves from the mediated images and from Jamaicans, who were the stigmatized nationality of the community, while Jamaicans tended to engage in intra-group distancing, which included hiding their heritage, and separating themselves from the lower class Jamaicans. Her study represents the first attempt to study West Indians as an audience, but did not do in-depth analysis of West Indians' negotiation of media texts in relation to their identities. Studies that examine such meaning-making among audiences have thus overlooked West Indian immigrants, forfeiting an opportunity to examine the manner in which they engage with

[3] There are studies of various theoretical and methodological approaches that explore effects of media texts on black women, and thus address them as media audiences (for example, studies on body image by Renee Botta (2000), Berrin Beasley (2000), and Melissa Milkie (1999)). However, I am limiting my review to studies that come from the critical cultural studies tradition in media studies that examine interpretations and meaning-making among black women.

[4] I use the term "African American" throughout this dissertation in reference to non-West Indian, native-born black Americans who have a long history in the U.S., or who have several native-born generations in the U.S. While an imprecise and problematic demarcation, I use this definition because it is consistent with my participants' own characterization of African Americans.

media as well as how media help to construct their gendered, raced, and *diasporic* identities.

My dissertation addresses this gap in media theory and West Indian literature by examining the role of dominant U.S. media in the development of West Indian women's diasporic identity. More precisely, my dissertation is concerned with the hybridized cultural subjectivities that West Indian immigrant women develop in New York City; the forms of agency that they negotiate and claim in their diasporic space; and the manner in which these factors inform, and are informed by, their engagement with television texts. Based on information gathered from three distinct studies, I argue that their engagement with dominant television reflected as well as fostered their particular diasporic identity. Such engagements with television engendered strategic selection of elements from West Indian and American culture, and fostered purposeful, rather than fortuitous, hybridization.

The Case for Studying West Indian Women as an Interpretive Community

Examining West Indian women as an audience has several implications for theorizing about the relationship between media and identity formation. Identity construction is most conspicuous at points of rupture in identity, when it is challenged, threatened or changed, and has to be consciously maintained (Homi Bhabha in Papastergiads, 1997). Dislocation and resettlement, as experienced by immigrants such as West Indian women, create such a rupture, making the reconstruction of their identity necessary, and very evident. In other words, West Indian women's reinvention of their

subjectivities in the U.S. represents overt moments of identity construction. Given the significance of media in this process, their identity construction in the U.S. presents an excellent opportunity to examine how media engagement is used to define and create such self-representations.

Studying West Indian women also enriches our understanding of how their particular position in U.S. society, as well as the cultural heritage they bring to their new home, inform their engagement with mainstream media texts. As argued by feminist epistemologists, social groups occupy specific locations that are determined by the groups' relationships to "a network of elements involving others, the objective economic conditions, [and] cultural and political institutions and ideologies" (Alcoff, 1988, pp. 433). These positions provide the groups with distinctive vantage points or "prosthetics" that they use to interpret, and construct meaning in, their environment. They are inherently partial, as these "view[s] from somewhere" are limited by their location (Haraway, 1991; Narayan, 2003). In addition, each vantage point is unique, and is not fixed, as at different historical moments and with changes in material conditions (such as education and income) the groups' relationships to the social networks shift.[5] Given these arguments, the way in which race, gender, nation and diaspora intersect in West Indian women's experiences in the U.S. places them in a peculiar position in society, and creates distinctive interactions with its institutions.

More precisely, their unique social location allows them to interact with media in a manner that is distinct from (though not better than (Haraway, 1991)) other constituents

[5] It is important to note that the idea of positionality is not the same as making claims on the basis of one's race or gender; the former evades the essentialism that usually threatens when making claims based on social markers (Alcoff, 1988). Rather than saying, for example, that black women "see" in particular ways, politics of location implies that persons who occupy a particular position (shaped by race and gender) tends to have a certain vantage point.

in society. For example, West Indian women might not have the same responses to American media texts as their African American counterparts. Their positions might make them think differently about media fare, such as *The Color Purple,* so that, unlike the women in Bobo's study who "…have formed a strong attachment to it" (Bobo, 2003, pp. 311), West Indian women may "disidentify" (Alarcon, 1990) with the characters and situations that present a culture with which they are unfamiliar.

West Indian women's distinct ways of "seeing" or unique "visions" (Haraway, 1991) are also fostered by their West Indian heritage. In her essay "Difference, Diversity, and Differentiation," Avtar Brah (2001) asserted that "how a person perceives *or* conceives an event would vary according to how 'she' is culturally constructed…and, invariably, upon the political repertoire of cultural discourses available to her" (italics in the original) (pp. 467). In other words, a person's conception and interpretation of social events are informed by her/his cultural and political heritage. Dorothy Louise Zinn (1994) substantiated Brah's assertion in her study of Senegalese men in southern Italy. She found that the importance of freedom to Senegalese masculinity made street peddling, a low status job in Italian society, preferable to her respondents. They viewed it as affording a sense of autonomy, the freedom to decide when, where, and how to work, and, subsequently, was not a threat to their masculinity (Louise Zinn, 1994).

Scholars have also found this phenomenon among West Indians in the U.S. Because the social and political environment in the West Indies fostered a hierarchical system based predominantly (but not completely) on class, and not one built on the racial classifications produced in the U.S. (Henke, 2001; Kasinitz, 1992; Vickerman, 1999), many West Indians in the U.S. categorize themselves by nationality (as Jamaican or

Barbadian or Kittian), and not as "black" (Waters, 1999). Their historical and political legacies therefore influenced their perception of, and subscription to, the U.S. racial system. As products of the particular cultures that have developed in the Anglophone Caribbean then, West Indian women necessarily maintain values, traditions and signifying practices that cause them to view and interpret U.S. society, including its mainstream media, in ways that differ from other groups in the U.S.

In sum, studying West Indian women - with their unique positionalities, their embodiment of West Indian culture, and obvious reconstruction of identity - will help to create a more sophisticated and comprehensive theory of the dialogic relationship between identity and media.

West Indian Migration to the U.S.

In order to historicize and contextualize the diasporic identity of contemporary West Indian immigrant women in the U.S., I will outline the major moments in the migration of West Indians, specifically West Indian women, to the U.S. In this section, I show how the social and political environment of the U.S. influences the type of women who emigrated as well as the nature of the communities in which they settled. I also highlight the similarities between contemporary West Indian immigrant women and their émigré counterparts of the past, showing how the formers' diasporic identity is necessarily shaped by the communities and cultural actions of their predecessors. Finally, I point out the ways in which the current generation of immigrant women differ from

their precursors, indicating their unique diasporic identity, and, thus, their particular engagement with U.S. media.

Migration has been a perennial feature of the Caribbean existence, and one that distinguishes this region from others in the Western hemisphere where emigration is relatively recent (Chaney, 1987). In spite of the issue of brain-drain and other concerns associated with the departure of citizens, outward migration is not seen as a problem from the Caribbean perspective, but as an institutionalized strategy for economic betterment (Chaney, 1987). Historians of Caribbean migration highlight five major stages of the movement of peoples from this region: An inter-territorial migration of English-speaking islanders, particularly to British Guiana and Trinidad, after Emancipation; the movement of English-speaking islanders to Panama and other Hispanic-Caribbean destinations to aid in the construction of the Panama Railroad and Canal; a period of relative low migration during World War I and the Great Depression; a large-scale migration to the United Kingdom between World War II and 1965; and the U.S.-bound emigration from the mid-1960s onwards (Chaney, 1987).

Notwithstanding the seemingly late arrival of Caribbean émigrés to the U.S. suggested by this trajectory, there has been a West Indian presence in the U.S. since the slavery era (Chaney, 1987). In fact, much of the slave population of the Carolinas and Louisiana came from the wholesale transfer of plantation owners and slaves from this region (Bryce-Laporte, 1987). Freed West Indian slaves were also present in New York City, and some were even active in the city during the War of Independence. Early concentrations of West Indians were also present in Tampa, New Orleans, Boston, Cambridge, and Philadelphia, but most settled in New York City (Bryce-Laporte, 1987).

The migration of West Indians to the U.S. in modern times can also be divided into distinctive phases. In spite of having more direct access to Great Britain, the proximity of the West Indies to the U.S. made migration to this country a logical choice (Waters, 1999). However, U.S. laws enacted over the years to regulate immigration determined the extent and intensity of the flow, and, subsequently, created migratory waves with particular characteristics. The first wave began in the 1900s and climaxed in the late 1910s-early 1920s. Most of the émigrés during this time settled along the eastern seaboard, predominantly in New York City. Moreover, as a result of the immigration policies of the time that used literacy as a criterion for immigration, many of these arrivals at the turn of the 20th century were men, and were exceptionally educated and skilled people who participated in the intellectual, political and economic leadership of the city (Watkins-Owens, 2001). It has been argued that during this time, given their relatively small numbers, these early immigrants immersed themselves in the African American community, and largely hid their West Indian and Caribbean heritage (Foner, 2001).

In the 1920s, the U.S. tried to restrict immigration from this region by enacting a quota system. However, as part of the British Commonwealth, West Indians circumvented this policy by coming to the U.S. under the quota of Great Britain, which was substantially higher than that set for their own nations (Waters, 1999). It was not until the on-set of the Great Depression in the early 1930s that the number of West Indians seeking entrance into the U.S. declined. During this period, even some who already emigrated returned to their islands of origin (Waters, 1999). After World War II, West Indian immigration to the U.S. increased again, but this flow was curbed by the

McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 that prohibited colonial subjects from entering the U.S. under the quota of their colonizers, and that reduced the quota of colonies to 100 persons per year (Waters, 1999).

In 1965 the U.S. implemented yet another reform to its immigration policies, catalyzing an era of West Indian migration that differed from other periods in history because of the volume of people who immigrated, and the ensuing racial and political conflict into which they entered. On October 3, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Hart-Celler Immigration Bill which phased out the national origins quota system established in 1921. The new legislature valued family reunification and needed skills rather than immigrants' country of birth, supposedly allowing equal access to all peoples regardless of nationality (Center for Immigration Studies (CIS), 1995). The recruitment of workers centered on procuring two forms of labor (agricultural (for the sugar fields) and professional) that created a community of skilled as well as unskilled and poor constituents (Portes & Grosfoguel, 1994). Jamaicans and other West Indians were attractive to U.S. industries because they spoke English, making them good for service/personal service jobs. In addition, these immigrants were perceived as coming from an advanced educational system that produced skilled workers, such as nurses, who were needed in the U.S. The poor, rural farmers of the West Indies could also be recruited to work in sugar fields (Portes & Grosfoguel, 1994). In the last forty years, nurses and other health care professionals have been especially recruited, but, as can be seen in the preceding historical review, professionals have been a part of West Indian migration to New York City since the early 1900s, giving West Indians a different socio-

economic profile than that of other Caribbean immigrants and black Americans (Portes & Grosfoguel, 1994).

The recruitment of workers to the U.S. - coupled with barriers against Commonwealth immigration erected by Britain in the 1960s - therefore encouraged the migration of West Indians to the U.S., a trend which persists to date. West Indians continue to have a significant presence in the U.S. Jamaica is one of the top 25 sending nations to the U.S. (Camarota, 2005), and an estimated 400, 000 Guyanese, Trinidadians, and Jamaicans – the most prominent West Indian nationalities migrating to the U.S. – have made this country their home (Rytina, 2006). In 2005, 38, 447[6] persons from the Anglophone Caribbean obtained permanent residency in the U.S., approximately 3.4% of all immigrants receiving green cards, and over 11% of those coming from North America.[7] Of this number, 18, 213 (13%) live in New York City (Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS), 2006), making it the most significant area of resettlement for peoples from this region (Foner, 2001).

New York City's five boroughs, particularly Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx, now host one of the largest populations of English-speaking Caribbean immigrants (Kasinitz, 1992) with a population of more than half a million, which is about five times the size of Grenada, and twice the size of Barbados (Foner, 2001). When considered together, immigrants from the Anglophone Caribbean constitute the largest immigrant group in the city (Foner, 2001). In fact, in 2000, West Indian immigrants and their children outnumbered African Americans in New York City, comprising 54% of blacks

[6] This total includes the permanent residency issued to persons from Aruba, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.
[7] North America refers to Canada, Greenland, Mexico, Saint Pierre and Miquelon, the U.S., as well as countries in the Caribbean and Central American regions (http://www.dhs.gov/ximgtn/statistics/data/dsgeoreg.shtm).

in this metropolitan area. Most West Indian émigrés settle in New York City because their people's migration to this metropolis, established early in the 20th century, created a West Indian community in which many newcomers had some relatives or existing contact (Waters, 1999; Bryce-Laporte, 1987). Furthermore, New York City's move towards a more service-oriented economy created jobs that the English-speaking West Indians could fill.

The Migration of West Indian Women to the U.S.

Women have been, and continue to be, significant players and participants in West Indian migration. They were a substantial part of the first wave of West Indian migration in the early 1900s, and have been credited with the development and maintenance of the West Indian communities in the U.S. (Watkins-Owens, 2001). Though their ties to and responsibility for families made migration more complicated for them than for their male counterparts, they were often the first one in a family to migrate, and subsequently facilitated the emigration of others. Furthermore, more so than their male counterparts, who were perceived as more likely to "run off" with American women, the women were expected and trusted to send remittances and goods to help care for the family left behind. In this sense then, they were expected to be in constant contact with their homelands, a practice that facilitated the construction and maintenance of transnational ties (Watkins-Owens, 2001).

Social and familial networks in their islands and the U.S. played an important role in the women's migration. First, in most cases, these women left their children with relatives who acted as "foster mothers" in their absence. Such fostering not only

facilitated serial migration, but also gave social prestige to all parties involved as the émigré mothers were admired for securing better lives for their children, and the children and guardians were supplied with what were perceived as better American goods (Sutton & Makiesky-Barrow, 1987). Furthermore, their initial entrance into the cultural and social milieu of the U.S. was cushioned by the presence of a relative or friend who introduced them to jobs and social networks, and guided them through American society (Watkins-Owen, 2001).

The women who emigrated during the first decades of the 20th century were a highly-selected group. As a result of the literacy requirement of the U.S. immigration policies of the 1920s, these émigrés had at least a primary (middle school) education, and were skilled, particularly in needlework (Watkins-Owens, 2001). While in the U.S., many were also able to enroll in (segregated) vocational and occupational schools, such as those for nursing. Furthermore, given the cost of relocation (which included paying for a visa and transportation), the newcomers consisted mostly of middle class women, and those from families with a steady income (Watkins-Owen, 2001).

In spite of their high literacy, however, their race, color, and gender excluded them from many opportunities during this period. While some West Indian men, in spite of racial discrimination, were able to pursue advanced education in institutions such as Howard, and were employed as lawyers and doctors, their female counterparts were not extended the same opportunities. These women had to accept jobs that did not reflect their education and training, a downward mobility made more permanent than that of their male counterparts because they were denied access to schools. In 1925, 75% of West Indian immigrant women were employed as household workers, or in other

personal service capacities, and they had a significant presence in the low-paying garment industry. West Indian women thus occupied social and economic positions that were comparable to that of African American women (who were also victims of marginalization) during this era (Watkins-Owens, 2001). Being ethnically and occupationally categorized with African American women, and having to compete with them for the scarce job opportunities available to them, fostered conflict between this early group of West Indian women émigrés and African American women.

West Indian women in contemporary U.S. reflect a lot of the qualities of their predecessors, and have constructed identities that are products of the historical legacies of these early émigrés. For instance, they continue to be the most likely to emigrate from their homelands, a decision made possible by the continued practice of child fostering and network migration. Their migration to the U.S. also remains very strategic and goal-oriented, many of them coming to the U.S. to secure economic betterment for themselves and their families. They also continue to send money, and barrels of American goods to their families in their homelands,[8] fostering connections to their culture, and creating transnational subjectivities that suspend complete acculturation and assimilation to the U.S. culture. Moreover, in spite of having more educational and occupational opportunities than their predecessors, downward mobility and relatively low-paying service jobs continue to characterize their existence. Many West Indian women, at least for a time, work as childcare workers and domestics, making it possible for white women to have careers, and filling the gap created by African American women leaving such work.

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[8] It should be noted that this is a bilateral flow of goods and culture between the U.S. and the West Indies. American fare is sent to the islands, and island products (including, music, spices, pastry as well as bodies) are transported to the U.S.

West Indian women also continue to have a prominent presence in the health-care sector of New York City (Sutton & Makiesky-Barrow, 1987). Such "ethnic niching" (Morals, 2001), or the concentration of West Indians in the personal and professional service industries, may be produced by several social factors. First, it may be the result of U.S. immigration policies that continue to target nurses and other health-care professionals that are perceived to be produced in abundance and with excellence in the West Indies. This phenomenon may also be the result of the émigrés' reliance on networks of family and friends who recommend and encourage entrance into their field of work. Finally, their "niching" may be the effect of occupational discrimination that channels this group of immigrants towards the service industry. Whatever the reason, the historical and contemporary overrepresentation of West Indian women in the domestic and health-care sectors have contributed to them being stereotyped as nurturing, "mammie" figures - a perception that has found prolific expression in U.S. media, and which necessarily influences West Indian women's self-presentation in the U.S.

Notwithstanding these similarities, however, West Indian women emigrating in recent years necessarily develop a diasporic identity that, while it may resemble that of their predecessors, is unique and context-specific. Diasporic identities such as those of West Indian women are not innate, but are constructed through complicated interactions with the institutions, socio-political conditions and ideologies of the spaces they occupy. Therefore, West Indian women entering the U.S. in this particular era will necessarily develop identities that reflect and contain residues of their historical, social and political space. They will engage with issues, respond to exigencies, and deal with stereotypes

that are borne in this particular historical moment, and that make their diasporic identity distinctive from that of their ancestors who encountered a different U.S. society.

Furthermore, contemporary West Indian immigrant women are migrating into a different media environment than experienced by their predecessors. Contemporary immigrants must now contend with, for example, the proliferation of cable networks and programming, niche marketing, and more cynical modes of address. Given that interaction with media is constitutive of identity, the contemporary mediated milieu in which West Indian women enter has implications for the construction of their diasporic identity. For instance, the expanded global media market exposes the women to U.S. mainstream media fare before they enter the country, helping to construct a pre-migration impression of America, as well as serving to inform how these women will position themselves in relation to Americans. In addition, the rise of particular types of texts and themes – such as the current prevalence of reality-based shows on mainstream television - requires West Indian women to identify with texts in new ways, a phenomenon that fosters the construction of distinctive identities or ways of being.

This dissertation takes a closer look at the role of mainstream U.S. television in the formation of West Indian women's diasporic identity in this historical moment in the U.S. I recognize that the women in my study cannot be isolated from their long history of migration to the U.S., a past that necessarily informs the communities in which they live, as well as their current identity in the U.S. However, West Indian women in this moment in the U.S. develop subjectivities that differ in nature from that of their predecessors, and need to be examined as a discrete group, separate from all others in their migratory history.

The Caribbeanization of U.S. Cultural Studies

*Literature on First-generation West Indian*s

My focus on West Indian women is informed by and builds on a growing body of literature on West Indians in general in the U.S. Within the last 30 years, American critical cultural studies scholars have become interested in West Indian communities across the U.S., evidenced by the proliferation of inquiries into this population's countries of origin, migration patterns, the cultural heritage that they bring with them, and their incorporation into U.S. society. Extant literature on first-generation West Indian peoples can be divided into three major themes, namely their transnational identity, their oppositional identity to African Americans, and their response to U.S. race relations.

In terms of the transnationality of West Indian identity, Joyce Bennett Justus (1983), for instance, found that West Indians in Los Angeles simultaneously demonstrated integration into American society as well as "compartmentalization," or the separation of their engagement with U.S. culture from their sense of self. Being able to manage by "knowing the ropes," and knowing how to negotiate U.S. culture and institutions, these immigrants only adjusted, and had no reason to fully assimilate to U.S. society (Bennett Justus, 1983). Furthermore, their dependence on the West Indian community in Los Angeles and in the islands for cultural support strengthened their ties to their islands of origin. In sum, West Indians seemed to maintain their national and regional identity in the U.S., creating an enduring bond to their homelands.

On the other hand, Mary Waters (1999) concluded that, while classical theories of assimilation (that posit the gradual acculturation of immigrants into the American society) do not capture the diasporic experiences of West Indians in the U.S., this group of immigrants also cannot be perceived as transnational. She claimed that their maintenance of a Caribbean identity to avoid racism and discrimination is not the same as having a transnational identity. Furthermore, most of her respondents had no desire to actually resettle in their islands, had little interest in the politics of their homelands, and used their citizenship to bring others to U.S. (Waters, 1999). Their futures were thus tied to the U.S. and not their islands of origin, challenging their position as multinational and transnational subjects.

Nancy Foner (1997) found a more hybrid subjectivity among her participants when she explored the changes that familial and kinship patterns of West Indians undergo upon arrival in the U.S. She asserted that first-generation immigrants engaged in "creolization," fusing pre-migration beliefs and practices with new norms to construct familial relationships that differed from those of both the sending and receiving countries. Therefore, both the structural constraints and new norms of the U.S., as well as the "cultural understandings, meanings, and symbols" that West Indians bring from their islands, informed the familial patterns created (Foner, 1997, pp. 961). She stressed that, on one hand, though the pre-migration culture of the émigrés influenced their behavior, symbols and values, these elements were not exactly reproduced, but were redefined and restructured by their encounter with those of the U.S. On the other hand - and in spite of similar patterns of behaviors and values among West Indian immigrants and their American-born counterparts - the influence of the formers' pre-migration norms mediated

their complete assimilation into U.S. culture (Foner, 1997).

My dissertation contributes to understanding the type of cultural subjectivities that West Indians construct in the U.S. First, I focus on West Indian women. Caribbean families, including those of West Indians, are matrifocal, emphasizing relations to mothers and mothers' relatives (Ho, 1999) so that networks are formed around women. Furthermore, West Indian women, both historically and contemporarily, have been the agents who emigrate to the U.S., and maintain connections to their homelands through remittances, goods and care for children left behind. Given their role as caretakers of their families as well as their centrality to the formation of transnational West Indian networks, West Indian women's transnational movements and activities significantly inform the level of acculturation or insulation of their communities. Studying their formation of identity in the U.S. should therefore elucidate the type and nature of multiculturalism that their communities assume.

In addition, instead of the concepts of transnational or multicultural identities that have been used by other scholars in this area, I invoke the idea of diasporic identity in my exploration of West Indian women in New York City. While their actions are transnational (conducted across national boundaries), and their engagement with at least two cultures necessarily creates dual or multinational subjectivities, I believe the notion of diasporic identity, as expounded on by Stuart Hall (1990), Avtar Brah (2003), and James Clifford (1994) (discussed in more detail in Chapter One), captures both the elements of transnationalism *and* disruption inherent in the experiences of people who migrate. Moreover, the concept of diasporic identity conveys the various aspects of West Indian identity that have been identified in extant literature, namely their concurrent

connection to their homeland and implicit claiming of the U.S. as home, and their subsequent hybrid positionalities.

I also insert mediated discourses into the debate, an important inclusion in discussions of West Indian diasporic identity. Stuart Hall (1980, 1990), Marie Gillespie (2003) and Chris Barker (1997) all concur that media are reflective and constitutive of identity, expressing as well as shaping the self-presentation of their audiences. Given this assertion, and in light of the ubiquity of media in American society, West Indian identity in the U.S. is necessarily forged in mediated spaces and through interactions with mediated messages, and thus has to be explored in relation to this institution. I chose to focus specifically on television because of its omnipresence in American society. This medium is in almost every home in the U.S., and access to programming - particular those on the major networks for which no subscription is necessary - transcends class, race and gender. In other words, television programming is accessible across all stratus of society.

Furthermore, and more pertinent to my dissertation, television is the most consistently present medium in the lives of West Indian women. While some may go to the movies, use the Internet, listen to music, and read magazines and newspapers, all the women in my study had television sets in their homes, and engaged with it daily, whether intentionally by watching specific programs - sometimes recording them for later viewing - or unconsciously by just having it on in the background as they did chores or school-work. In addition, television was available to them outside of their homes, on their jobs as nannies and nurses, as well as in their beauty salons, West Indian “fast-food” restaurants, and in the student lounges on their college campuses.

My dissertation also makes important theoretical contributions to the ensuing debate. Through grounded theory, I expand on Foner's (1997) assertion, contending that West Indian women develop hybrid subjectivities in the U.S., but that their hybridization is strategic[9] and informed by television. I argue that their hybridization is thus not simply the product of juxtaposed cultures, but rather borne from strategic negotiations with media-transmitted U.S. ideologies and those of their pre-migration cultures. More precisely, they appropriated American mediated ideologies and, simultaneously, recuperated West Indian values and traditions to construct their identity and moderate the exigencies of both the U.S. and their homelands. In this way, the women created a space for themselves in both West Indian and American discourses, negotiating a culturally hybrid identity.

The second theme in the literature pertains to first-generation West Indian immigrants' oppositional relationship to African Americans. Many scholars have highlighted that West Indians strictly distinguish themselves from African Americans, proffering reasons of image management for the formers' disidentification with their American counterparts. Bennett Justus (1983) asserted that West Indians strived to protect their status as foreigners because they believe submersion into American society signified being grouped with American blacks who have a negative group image in the U.S., and who have limited access to the means of economic betterment for which West Indians left their home. Waters (1999) also concluded that this group of immigrants tried to maintain a Caribbean identity to avoid racism and discrimination, a move that

[9] Michel de Certeau (1984) asserted that "tactic" was the appropriate term to describe the resistive maneuvers available to the marginalized in a society, while "strategy" should be reserved for the subversive workings of the powerful. However, adopting a more Foucauldian conception of power – that power is everywhere, and not exclusive to the upper stratus of society - I use the term "strategy" throughout this dissertation to refer to West Indian women's negotiation of the West Indian and American cultural systems.

generated tendencies of avoidance, and precluded collective challenge to inequalities. Similarly, Du Bois (2000) asserted that West Indians tended to reject the American conception of race because of the historical legacy of the West Indies that cultivated constructions of race and ethnicity dissimilar to those embedded in U.S. society, but also because they wanted to assuage the threat of low social status that plagued black Americans.

Other researchers have interpreted West Indians' seeming insulation from African Americans as a strategy to attain prominence in a society that renders invisible people of their race and culture. According to Constance Sutton and Susan Makiesky-Barrow (1987), while being black in British society made West Indians conspicuous, being racialized bodies in the U.S. translated into erasure, compelling them to insist on differentiation as a crucial tactic in resisting cultural eradication. Analogously, Linda Basch (1987) asserted that West Indians distinguished themselves from African Americans by maintaining a Caribbean identity in the U.S. that conferred prestige to West Indians, and gave those who emigrated from smaller islands the feeling of belonging to a larger community.

While I concede that differentiation is a significant part of the identity of first-generation West Indian immigrants, the focus in extant literature on their distancing from African Americans is simplistic, and obscures a more complete understanding of West Indians' postitionality in the U.S. First, West Indians in the U.S. are stereotyped as criminal, foreign and "Other," so maintaining a West Indian identity does not automatically confer to them prestige and a favorable image in the U.S. (Du Bois, 2004). Furthermore, I found that the women in my study not only distinguished themselves from

African Americans, but from all things American, thus creating an identity that was oppositional to the U.S., its values, and all its peoples. In addition, the differentiation that these West Indians engaged in emerged as mechanisms to contend with the losses associated with migration rather than endeavors in image management and visibility.

The most recurrent theme in literature on first-generation West Indian immigrants is their encounters with and reactions to the form of racism cultivated in the U.S. According to the literature, West Indians hail from black majority, black ruled social and political systems with histories of black power movements (Waters, 1999); nations where racial hierarchy is organized by color as well as shade (Sutton & Makiesky-Barrow, 1987); and where education, income, and culture can partially overcome structural racism and “erase” blackness (Waters, 1999; Foner, 1998). This fact, as well as their culture as “voluntary immigrants” - that is, persons who willingly relocate to the U.S., and whose positions as perpetual foreigners allow them to perceive hardships as temporary and endurable (Waters, 1999) - arguably make West Indian immigrants experience and deal with race relations differently from their black American counterparts. Furthermore, some scholars posit that, even though West Indians develop a form of racial sensibility before they enter the U.S. - through media portrayals of America, stories from relatives and friends in the U.S., and the immigrants’ experiences in their own countries (Waters, 1999; Foner, 1998; Sutton & Makiesky-Barrow, 1987) - they are often taken aback by old fashioned (insults on streets, refusal to be employed) and subtle (being followed in stores) racism (Waters, 1999).

In her study of Jamaicans in London and New York, Foner (1998) related the migrants’ responses to racism to the social and political economic environment of the

receiving countries. She stated that "while West Indians bring with them a racial sensibility that is nurtured in their home societies, they develop new images of themselves, as blacks and as West Indians, in response to the particular nature of the ethnic and race relations and hierarchies they encounter in the new setting" (Foner, 1998, pp. 174). For instance, according to Foner (1998), early Jamaicans in New York City were able to submerge themselves in the wider black community, even as they differentiated culturally from African Americans, making them less visible (and thus less likely to be discriminated against) as a group. Furthermore, she stated that New York City has a history of migration and diversity so that West Indians' presence as immigrants was not seen as a threat. In contrast, Jamaicans in London were very visible, and seen as a social problem. Secondly, she argued that when West Indians in New York City became visible, they were usually compared to African Americans against whom they often fared well (in terms of being more educated, having higher incomes and less unemployment, etc.). In London, however, West Indians were compared to whites, and were often found lacking (Foner, 1998).

While examining West Indian's experiences with and interpretations of race is topical, my dissertation does not explore race as a discrete category because, as mentioned before, race is not as salient for West Indians as the prominence of this theme in the literature implies. In my study, race emerged as being subordinated to cultural subjectivity as, in spite of their racial identification, the respondents predominantly classified themselves by nationality and their West Indian heritage. Culture and not race was therefore the main organizing category for them, and the area that I emphasize.

Literature on Second-generation West Indians

While the majority of research on West Indians in the U.S. has focused on first-generation immigrants, there has been some scholarship on the U.S.-born children of this group. Literature on these second-generation West Indians tends to focus on their racial and ethnic identity in the U.S. For instance, Waters (1994) explored this theme in her study of West Indian high school students in New York City. Here she examined the racial identity of second-generation West Indians, arguing that the social capital as well as the level of assimilation of their first-generation parents produced differential racial identification among them. These factors fostered three forms of responses or identities: The ethnic response characterized by the maintenance of their parents' West Indian identity; the immigrant response expressed predominantly among newly arrived immigrants whose identity was still connected to their islands; and an American response in which the teenagers downplayed their West Indian heritage in favor of adopting a more African American culture.

Waters (1994) further argued that the type of identity that second-generation West Indians developed was contingent upon the social class and social networks of their parents, and whether they attended a public or "magnet" school. The socially mobile held their ethnicity to counter discriminations on the basis of race, while the poorer, less mobile respondents developed an American identity. According to Waters (1994), the latter, whose experiences with discrimination had caused them to abandon hopes of social advancement, saw no benefit to holding an ethnic identity, and perceived an American identity as more advantageous because it helped them to evade the xenophobia targeting West Indians.

In a similar study, Waters (2001) explored the influence of class and gender on how second-generation West Indians understood race and how they identified themselves. Through interviews with inner-city and middle class adolescents, she found that these teenagers were raised by their immigrant parents to have negative opinions of African Americans, and to maintain their ethnicity in order to garner favorable responses from white Americans. However, adherence to this teaching was confounded by their lack of a readily discernable accent and their subsequent conflation with African Americans. Waters (2001) asserted that, in light of this dilemma, the second-generation 's perception of race was not only determined by the identity of their parents, but also by their socioeconomic status, the neighborhoods they lived in, the schools they attended, and their gender. More precisely, their experiences with discrimination, the racial socialization they received from home, and the peers they kept informed how they reacted to American society, and the identity they developed (Waters, 2001).

Sherry-Ann Butterfield (2004) also addressed the issue of racial identification, setting herself apart from Mary Waters and others by examining adults, and by demonstrating how second-generation West Indians concurrently hold racial and ethnic identities in their everyday lives. She contended that, while either the black or West Indian identity may be emphasized more than the other in particular situations, second-generation West Indians embraced both identities without contradiction. She further stated that the saliency of one was not an indication of the absence of the other, but rather a response to the circumstances and the audience (Butterfield, 2004).

While expanding on Butterfield's (2004) notion of a dual-layered identity among adult second-generation West Indians, my dissertation shifts the emphasis from issues of

racial and ethnic identification to the cultural positionings in which second-generation West Indians engage. In other words, I explore the process of cultural hybridization that ensues among second-generation West Indian immigrant women who are West Indian by heritage, but who claim the U.S as their home. I argue that the identity that these women develop is characterized by legal and cultural citizenship, as well as by the strategic movement between American and West Indian cultural norms. Furthermore, unlike existing literature on this second-generation population, I examine how their interaction with mainstream television impacts their dual and hybrid identity, contending that their engagement with dominant television texts is symbolic and constitutive of their identity.

West Indians and the Media

Finally, there has emerged research on West Indians' representations in mass media which highlight the "symbolic annihilation" (Tuchman, 1978) of this immigrant group by mainstream media. In his textual analysis of West Indian characters in American films, Milton Vickerman (1999) found that West Indian peoples were usually depicted in three distinct, stereotypical ways depending on the genre: They were portrayed paradoxically as beauty and danger in films about tourists, plantations, and horrors; as buffoons in comedies; and as immigrant, criminal elements in movies with a prominent Rastafarian presence (Vickerman, 1999).

Analogously, in her book titled *Images of West Indians in the Mass Media*, Du Bois (2004) highlighted seven themes that pervaded representations of West Indians in films, including rebels, jokesters, and overly sexual islanders. Furthermore, she also found that the news media in the Chesapeake area, when they did address this population,

predominantly presented West Indians as criminals (Du Bois, 2004). Advertising in the area chose to emphasize a different image when addressing the non-West Indian population. They marketed West Indians as symbols of pleasure, as carefree, fun-loving, "Others" from distant paradises, and they appropriated aspects of West Indian culture (such as music) to attract Americans to the isles (Du Bois, 2004).

Du Bois (2004) also argued that the prevalence of such negative and stereotypical images in the media affected her West Indian subjects in several ways: It had economical repercussions on the lives of her informants who often encountered discrimination from employers and employees because of media-informed perceptions of West Indians. This bigotry often decreased the life chances for her respondents in the U.S., limiting their personal financial success and their ability to support their networks back home, and ultimately resulting in social reproach from relatives and friends in their homelands (Du Bois, 2004). She further noted that negative portrayals were often internalized by West Indians who, adopting media's construction of their peoples, developed self-hate and a sense of cultural and racial inferiority. In sum, Du Bois (2004) asserted that media representations of West Indians were significant to their well-being as these images potentially informed West Indians' conception of themselves as well as others' perception of the community. As previously mentioned, the predominant response of her informants to their portrayal in media was to distance themselves from the images and from persons within the community who they believed embodied these stereotypes (Du Bois, 2004).

In highlighting advertising's appropriation of West Indian cultural forms, and the possibility of West Indian's internalization of mediated images, Du Bois (2004) astutely

indicated a dialogical relationship between identities and the societies in which they are constructed. She said,

> West Indians' constructed knowledge about themselves affects the larger society's knowledge about them, although America's understanding of West Indian creativity is often limited, distorted, or syncretistically re-cast in familiar forms…The converse is also true: West Indians may internalize images about themselves that emanate from the larger society (e.g. "blackness" as inferior, but also Jamaicanness as hip). There is thus a dialectical relationship between the different constructions of identity (pp. 102).

However, she did not expand this argument, nor did she investigate in more detail the manner in which mediated images in particular inform and are informed by West Indian identity in the Chesapeake area. In addition, by only presenting the responses of her informants to media representations of themselves, she forfeited an opportunity to analyze how they responded to the presentation of other American ideologies, and, beyond "responding," how they *negotiated* mediated texts.

My dissertation builds on Du Bois (2004) ground-breaking work, examining the manner in which West Indian women contend with mainstream American mediated fare in general, analyzing in more detail the dialogical relationship between West Indian diasporic identity and television. Moreover, rather than simply addressing the content with which the women engage, I also explore how they interact with the texts, as well as how they engage with the texts in non-mediated moments. In doing so I conduct a more comprehensive assessment of their mediated activities, and ascertain how such interactions with television inform their everyday presentations of self.

Chapter Outlines

The relationship between the diasporic identity of West Indian women and their engagement with mainstream television is examined through three research studies, analysis of which are discussed across five chapters. In Chapter One I present the theoretical framework that informs the studies, defining the concepts of diasporic identity and cultural hybridity, as well as delineating the major elements of the relationship between media and identity. This chapter also presents in detail the methodologies from which the analyses are derived. Chapter Two explores the complex relationship between television and first-generation West Indian immigrant women's identity. Through in-depth interviews with 12 first-generation West Indian immigrant women, I examine how these women's identity influences their particular mode of interaction with television texts, and how their television engagement reinforces the diasporic subjectivities they developed in New York City. I contend that their interaction with competitive reality shows reflected their identity as hard-workers, and that their selection criteria for texts, as well as their post-consumption discussions of the content they watched, fostered their connection to their West Indian heritage.

Drawing on the information garnered from the respondents discussed in Chapter Two, Chapter Three examines first-generation West Indian immigrant women's identity more closely, looking at the prominent narrative of difference that informs their self-presentations in American society. I argue that these narratives were strategies deployed to contend with the distress of adapting to the lifestyle of New York City. I further assert that their engagement with mainstream television texts was expressive and facilitative of these coping mechanisms, and thus an important contributor to dealing with life in New York City.

Chapter Four uses information from focus groups with eight women to address the body politics of first-generation West Indian immigrant women in New York City. I elucidate how these immigrant women employ television texts to position themselves in relation to the hegemonic ideals of beauty, and how they challenge or are complicitous with these ideals in their own lives. They engaged in what I refer to as the *strategic selection* of elements from both sets of discourses so as to assuage insecurities with their real life bodies. Therefore, these women constructed hybrid body politics, and reinforced emphasis on women's external image even as they deconstructed dominant beauty norms.

In Chapter Five I focus on second-generation West Indian immigrant women and, through in-depth interviews with nine women of this cohort, I explore the development of their diasporic identity in relation to their interaction with mainstream television. I contend that these women constructed a dual-layered identity, one that was characterized by claiming cultural citizenship to the West Indies and legal citizenship to the U.S. This dual citizenship allowed them to strategically negotiate both cultures, to align themselves with West Indian-sanctioned self-presentations that perpetuated distancing from Americans, while overtly challenging aspects of West Indian traditions that reflected negatively in American culture. These women then circumvented the negative perceptions of Americans in the West Indian community, as well as the unflattering ideas about West Indians in the American imagination, creating an exclusive and positive space for themselves.

Chapter One
The Media Question in West Indian Diasporic Identity

This dissertation explores the role of U.S. television in the development of West Indian women's identity by examining the meanings they bring to, and take away from, their engagement with mainstream television texts. With racialized and gendered migrant bodies as its subject, the project necessarily speaks to the diasporic[10] identities of West Indian women in the U.S. In other words, it examines the discursive practices and material manifestations that signify West Indian women's cultural subjectivities in this historical and social moment in the U.S. This identity is worked out as West Indian women interact with institutions of U.S. society, including schools, and their various places of employment. Another significant institution in the construction of West Indian identity, but one that has not been given appropriate attention in the literature on this population, is the mainstream media. Dominant media texts greatly inform the diasporic identities being forged during resettlement as they transmit hegemonic U.S. ideologies (Hall, 1980), and are thus partially responsible for "instilling proper normative behavior and identity in newcomers" (Ong, 1996, pp. 738). Said differently, media are necessary for ensuring the conversion of newcomers into subjects of the existing system.

This subject-making capacity is particularly salient in immigrant identity

[10] I am invoking the idea of diasporic identity here, as opposed to the notions of cultural and transnational identities, because it captures both the elements of transnationalism *and* disruption inherent in the experiences of people who migrate or seek asylum.

construction because it is at points of rupture in identity, such as happens with relocation, when media's work in producing subjects are most conspicuous. Like other cultural agents, however, immigrants are not passively interpellated, but engage in negotiated and even oppositional "decoding" of media texts (Hall, 1980). These readings inform, but do not determine, their identities so that immigrants' interactions with mainstream media are processes of being-made *as well as* self-making.

Scholars who examine West Indian identity refer to the media in their analyses, highlighting their role in shaping West Indians' pre-migration perceptions of the U.S. as affluent, but tainted by discrimination (Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow, 1987); in influencing their views of black American culture as deficient and inferior (Waters, 1999); and in fueling the desire for expensive consumer goods among second-generation West Indian immigrants (Waters, 1999). All of these references indicate that media are implicated in West Indian identity formation, but the brevity of their treatment suggest that media interactions are perceived as tangential to West Indians' identity development. Du Bois (2004) directly addressed the issue of media in the lives of West Indians, highlighting their response to negative representations of their community in mass media. Notwithstanding her inclusion of media in discussions of West Indian communities, however, Du Bois (2004) did not adequately elaborate on the role of these media in the construction of West Indian diasporic identity.

These scholars then did not give much import to the identity-shaping ability of the media, and have thus undermined the complexity of the relationship between media engagement and cultural presentation of selves. This mindset understates extant literature on media and identity formation in general, which views media as inextricably

intertwined with subjectivity, as reflective and constitutive of identities.

My dissertation initiates this move to include media theories in the conception of West Indian identity, arguing that the identity of West Indian immigrant women is necessarily constituted by, reflective of, and challenged by their engagement with U.S. mainstream media. More precisely, through in-depth interviews and small focus groups with first and second-generation West Indian immigrant women residing in New York City, my dissertation explores the diasporic performances of West Indian women as they reconstruct their ethnic, national and racial identities in the U.S. I examine the forms of agency that West Indian women negotiate and claim in their receiving nation, and the manner in which these factors inform, and are informed by, their engagement with dominant television texts. In doing so, this dissertation demonstrates the significance of media in the construction of the subjectivities of displaced peoples and highlights media's role in their negotiation of dominant ideologies.

What is This "Diasporic" in West Indian Diasporic Identity?[11]

A Note on Identity

In terms of West Indian identity, I am cognizant that discussions that seek to present any identity are very thorny as the presenter has to negotiate the delicate balance between description and essentialization. This precarious navigation is exasperated by the fact that the very act of describing an identity is the *production* of that identity, and reveals the implicit power of the describer (Foucault, 1980). In addition, such a project endeavors to define a concept that is a socio-geographical construct. As Hall (1990)

[11] Apologies to Stuart Hall.

correctly theorizes, cultural identity is "a matter of "becoming" as well as "being"…It is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities… like everything else, undergo constant transformation" (pp. 394). It is with these problems in mind that I undertake the slippery task of invoking West Indian diasporic identity.

Drawing on the work of postcolonial scholars such as Stuart Hall, James Clifford, and Avtar Brah, diasporic identity as discussed in this dissertation is conceptualized as a signifying practice, as a set of discourses that give meaning to the myriad personal and collective experiences of people who share a similar heritage. According to Brah (2001), diasporic identity is the "process of signification whereby commonalities of experience around a specific axis of differentiation, say class, caste or religion, are invested with particular meanings" (pp. 473).

My dissertation extends Brah's (2001) conception of diasporic identity as shared experiences around a specific axis, further highlighting the *intersections* of identity categories (Crenshaw, 1991) as essential to understanding how these identities operate. For instance, West Indian women's diasporic identity necessarily includes the intersections of race, nation and gender, the combination of which creates a more complicated level of identification than that made on the basis of race or nation or gender. These overlapping categories form multiple points of identification (and differences), but they also influence how these women are positioned in the racial and gendered discourses of the U.S. Throughout this dissertation I contend that the intersection of race, gender and nation in West Indian women's diasporic identity places them in a unique position in the U.S., and informs the manner in which they interact with their diasporic space.

Hall also (1996, pp. 4 & 5) stated that diasporic identity is not:

> …[T]hat "collective or true self hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially posed 'selves' which a people with a shared history and ancestry have in common" and which can stabilize, fix, or guarantee an unchanging "oneness" of cultural belongingness underlying all the other superficial differences.

This statement highlights two aspects of diasporic identity. First, by mocking the notion of "true" or authentic diasporic identities, Hall (1996) rejected the notion of a pre-determined, a-historical identity, and, as also highlighted by Brah's (2001) quote, emphasized that diasporic identity is a *process* of identification. Rather than being viewed as a fixed, innate set of conventions, traditions and linguistic practices, diasporic identity should be understood as a continuous practice of identification with a group (or groups) and its values. My work substantiates this conception of diasporic identity, demonstrating that West Indian women's identity is a construction across that is continuously being reworked and reformed in the U.S. It is forged through narratives that they tell to themselves and others about who they are. These stories delineate their specific diasporic identity, establish the normative behavior and attitudes of the community, and reveal their negotiation with U.S. society. Furthermore, by dismissing any guarantee of "oneness," Hall (1996), like Brah (2001), debunked the notion of internal homogeneity within identity categories, suggesting that diasporic identity necessarily operates across differences in experiences, gender, class, religion, and even migratory generations.

Additionally, diasporic experiences in general are not monolithic and uniformed across persons; rather, "they are embarked upon, lived and re-lived through multiple modalities…for example, of gender, 'race', class, religion, language, and generation" (Brah, 2003, pp. 618). Diasporic experience and subsequent identities are therefore

always gendered, raced and classed, and anchored in multiple, serial locales that cause conflicts and make the diasporic experience less than harmonious (Hall, 1996; Brah, 2001; Joseph, 1994). One such source of tension is evident between the different migratory generations, in this case, between first-generation immigrants of the West Indies and West Indians born and/or raised in the U.S. Perhaps because “the relationship of the first-generation to the place of migration is different from that of subsequent generations” (Brah, 2003, pp. 625), later migratory generations develop diasporic subjectivities that are different from that of their relocated counterparts (Brah, 1996; Rumbaut, 1994; Waters, 1999). My dissertation explores the diasporic identities engendered by both first and second-generation immigrant women of the West Indies, examining their particular relationships to their culture as well as the institutions of American society.

The gendered differences in diasporic journeys are particularly fascinating because of the different demands placed on men and women in social and cultural contexts. Several scholars have asserted that most discussions pertaining to diasporic experiences have the tendency to “normalize male experiences” by privileging “traveling rather than dwelling,” and “displacement rather than place” (Clifford, 1994, pp. 313). However, male and female immigrants respond differently to displacement, and need to be examined discretely. Marita Eastmond (1993), for instance, found that Chilean women refugees in the U.S. in 1985 were able to more easily integrate social and cultural changes into their everyday practices than their male counterparts. Analogously, Gina Buijs (1993) asserted that responsibility for maintaining household routines, and closer interaction with the dominant white culture through domestic jobs caused migrant women

to “show greater…adaptability than do men” (pp. 4). Informed by such studies, my dissertation focuses on the experiences of West Indian women, recognizing their particular diasporic identity as distinct from that of their male counterparts.

Moreover, as embodiments of their nations and cultures, women not only uphold, but also *inscribe* markers of diasporic identity onto their bodies in the form of dress (Lewis, 1999), codes of conduct (Hitchcox, 1993), sexual activity (Espiritu, 2001; Morgan, 1997), and also body politics and moral codes regarding the body. Dominant discourses of the body – or aesthetical and moral ideologies regarding one’s gendered, classed and raced body - are idealized versions of femininity; more than body aesthetics, they embody the values, concepts and behaviors of a group, as well as a community’s ideologies of morality, gender and place (Cohen, Wilk, and Stoeltje, 1996). In other words, beauty norms reflect and present a group’s sense of itself, or its identity, and are inextricably tied to culture, and social and economical power (Bordo, 1993). Beauty standards are thus an expression of cultural identity.

Given this relationship between discourses of the body and cultural identity, diasporic women, who emigrate with a particular cultural subjectivity, enter their new home with a set of body politics cultivated in their homelands. However, they are forced to engage with the beauty ideologies of their receiving culture. What ensues is not the wholesale displacement or the complete retention of pre-migration aesthetic systems, but rather a negotiation that produces a dual body politics. In the case of West Indian women in the U.S., I contend that this negotiation is characterized by what I refer to as the strategic selection of elements from their body politics and those of the U.S. that are then deployed to insert themselves in exclusionary discourses of the body.

My assertion of bi- or multi-cultural body politics is informed by scholars who have conceptualized diasporic identity as being created through “the simultaneous strategies of community maintenance and interaction” (Clifford, 1994, pp. 308). In this sense then, diasporic communities do not simply signify “transnationality and movement,” but also “political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement (Clifford, 1994, pp. 308). As Hall (1995) asserted, questions of identity are not simply a matter of “discovery of tradition” (pp. 283), but rather are issues of invention, the negotiation of retention and assimilation. Analogously, in her discussion of South Asian immigrant women in Britain, Parminder Bhachu (1993) contended that “ethnic” identities, which are often perceived as comprising of, and being most influenced by, fixed elements from the country of origin, also includes other forces that are equally important in their construction. She said:

> [I]dentities are contextualized and not stable, despite a common core of key fundamental religious and cultural values that constitute their cultural roots. They shift according to the forces that operate on them…[The shifts] result not from conscious emulation of particular subcultures, or necessarily through the politics of confrontation, but through their natural familiarity with particular [dominant culture] economies…and symbolic and material cultures. From these they appropriate, transform and reproduce unselfconsciously, and also strategically (Bhachu, 1993, pp. 110).

In other words, diasporic identities entail the concurrent recognition of traditions from one’s country of origin, and the negotiation of customs of the receiving nation; this duality results in the strategic invention and reinvention of one’s own traditions as a means of maintaining a unique community. Bhachu (1993) and other scholars point to the dialogic relationship that diasporic identities have with their receiving cultures so that parts of the dominant culture and other cultures within the “diasporic space” (Brah, 2003) are evident within them, creating cultural hybrids.

Diasporic Identity and Hybridity

Recuperated from its association with purist, racist ideas of identity, cultural hybridity has now been embraced by post-modern theorists as a means to transcend the essentializing tendencies of identity discourse; rather than being perceived as the destructive result of corporeal and cultural miscegenation, cultural hybridity is now recognized as a positive, and potentially transgressive aspect of identity (Werbner, 1997), particularly in postcolonial studies (Papastergiadis, 1997). While it would be simplistic to say that there is a consensus among postcolonial scholars about the nature and political potential of cultural hybridity, there is some congruence in how the notion is conceived.

Homi Bhabha conceptualized cultural hybridity as not simply an accumulation of identities, or the strange becoming familiar, but rather as being formed by the concurrent processes of "displacement and correspondence" that occurs with the "juxtaposition of space" (Papastergiadis, 1997). Bhabha argued that it is within these interstitial and liminal moments that hybridity is employed as a mechanism to bind the ruptures, creating a sense of self that vacillates between familiar and stranger (Papastergiadis, 1997). Analogously, Hall contended that cultural hybridity is the never-completed process of differentiation and exchange that occurs between the mainstream and its margins, and the cultural communities within the margins (Papastergiadis, 1997). Mikhail Bakhtin stated that this discourse between cultures may be the result of the unconscious, natural evolution of cultures that are not bounded, but rather constantly engaged in exchange (organic hybridity), or an intentional state of double consciousness that "fuses the unfusable" (intentional hybridity) (Werbner, 1997).

These theorists all suggest that cultural hybridity is the process of identification and differentiation that occurs when two spaces are concurrently occupied. This process creates a space of liminality and dual consciousness that simultaneously contains elements of, while differing from, the original cultures. These interchanges and translations occur in historical, cultural and political contexts so that each situation of cultural hybridization is unique, and not generalizable. Drawing on this theory of cultural hybridity, then, West Indian women, who "participate, identify, and engage in more than one cultural-political systems" (Siu, 2001, p. 8), have subsequently developed culturally hybrid identity performances[12] (Clifford, 1994; Bhachu, 1993; Hall, 1996). Rather than perceiving West Indian women's diasporic identity as assimilation or insulation, which assumes a linear process, I conceive of their identity as the integration of the values, traditions and ideologies of the West Indies and the U.S.

However, given that cultures are forged and maintained by ideological forces, it should not be assumed that their hybridization is peaceful. It is necessarily borne through struggle and negotiations, "shifting (self)-identifications and unpredictable alliances…all manners of collusions and complicities, and jockeyings for power" (Dayal, 1996, p. 50). Therefore, I argue that West Indian women's cultural hybridity is characterized by constant negotiation and renegotiation, erratic identifications and disidentifications with the receiving and sending cultures, and those within its diasporic space.

Diasporic Identity and Power Struggles

It is also important to note that within the process of cultural hybridization, all

[12] I employ the Butlerian concept of performativity here to foreground the constructed-ness of West Indian identity.

cultures are not equal. Rather, much like every other social process, it is moderated by power so that the dominant party seeks to influence and control the product that is being created (Darling-Wolf, 2004). As Foner (1998) stated, cultural practices and symbols are intersections and struggles between social structure, culture and agency. Culture-building in the receiving country therefore involves power struggles: the receiving country endeavoring to create conforming subjects, and immigrants wrestling with the subject-making processes of their new home (Ong, 1996). The identity that is created, then, reproduces, in a modified form, traces of the dominant hegemonic cultural forms (Chen, 1999).

This form of struggle is particularly salient for "third world,"[13] non-white immigrants endeavoring to make a "first world" country their home. As Gayatri Spivak (1993) demonstrated, because of discrepancies related to language and modes of representations, subaltern (or formerly colonized) cultures cannot be reconciled with cultures of the West as their experiences and realities do not correspond with Western categories. For cultures that have been irrevocably damaged by colonialism, equitable dialogue with the colonizer is not possible (Papastergiadis, 1997).

Given their imperialist past, immigrants from the "third world" have to contend with thriving in the U.S. As Ong (1996) stated, "the different institutional contexts in which subjects learn about citizenship often assess newcomers from different parts of the world within given schemes of racial difference, civilization, and economic worth" (Ong, 1996). In other words, one's country of origin, and the history of its relationship to the

[13] "Third world" is written in quotations to highlight the problematic nature of the term. In addition, while many feminists of color, such as Chela Sandoval (2003), use the term "third world" in reference to all marginalized women - a move which I find very problematic since it assumes that the experiences of women of color who live in "first world" countries are synonymous with those of women from economically poor nations – I use the term to signify those women from nations classified as underdeveloped or developing.

receiving country, always already informs how one is perceived racially (and thus economically), and the place one is given in the political-economic system. As non-white, "third world" subjects then, I believe West Indian women residing in the U.S. face similar "racialization" (Ong, 1996), and have to struggle against social and economic structures that label them as intellectually inferior, and perceive them as a source of cheap, exploitative labor. These perceptions of them result in their development of self-preservative identities.

In light of the contested nature of diasporic identities, it is imperative that we develop a "double vision" to see the hegemonic subjectifying forces as well as the strategies of resistance that allow new possibilities to emerge (Dayal, 1996). Therefore, this dissertation explores the shifting allegiances to the cultural practices and discourses of the U.S. and the Anglophone Caribbean enacted by West Indian women, examining their negotiation of dominant discourses in the U.S. (including racial norms, class relations and body image), and highlighting the new possibilities for living that emerge from such engagements. Looking at processes that occur in power systems, the project necessarily speaks to the manner in which West Indian women are interpellated by U.S. hegemonic discourses, as well as how they enact agency in the dominant society.

Diasporic Identity and the Media

Investigation of West Indian women's struggle with dominant U.S. ideals necessarily entails exploration of their engagement with mainstream media. The latter often plays a central role in the interpellation of immigrants, teaching them about who they are supposed to be in their new home (Ong, 1996), and influencing how others in the

social space expect them to behave. Therefore, interactions with mainstream media are sites of identity construction and contestation for immigrants; they are moments when complete acceptance, negotiation and out-right opposition of U.S. ideals occur (Hall, 1980).

Several scholars have explored the role of media (both mainstream and ethnic) in the construction of diasporic identities, particularly in their maintenance and hybridization. In his study of Iranian television in the U.S., Hamid Nacify (1993) contended that:

> Television introduces a sense of order and control into the life of the viewers by producing and replicating a variety of systematic patterns that set up continually fulfilled (or postponed) expectations [which] together…produce an electronic communitas, which creates for…exilic viewers…a sense of stability out of instability and commonality out of alienation (pp. 53).

Similarly, in their study of Hong Kong emigrants to Canada, Wei-Na Lee and David Tse (1994) found evidence that exposure to either ethnic or mainstream media was significantly related to acculturation, helping their subjects to assimilate into or become insulated from Canadian society. Analogously, based on his case study of a Cantonese-Chinese family, Casey Man Kong Lum (1991) concluded that assimilation, pluralism (partial adaptation to the receiving culture) and insularity were evidenced in media use. The more assimilated members of the family tended to engage with mainstream American media fare, the culturally insulated members were drawn to ethnic content, while the partially adapted ones interacted with both.

Chango Lee (2004), who examined satellite television use among Korean immigrants in Texas, found that the available communication technology contributed to the cultivation and maintenance of Korean ethnic identity. Video tape recordings of

Korean programs, and now direct access to Korean programming via satellite, helped first-generation immigrants to keep abreast of happenings in Korea, and to teach American-born children the Korean language (Lee, 2004). Flora Keshishian (2000) also demonstrated that, though mainstream communication can facilitate acculturation, they can also hinder assimilation by disseminating content that taints how a particular culture (in this case Iranian culture) is viewed.

The contribution of these studies to understanding immigrant media engagement patterns is invaluable. However, they tend to adhere to a functionalist paradigm of assimilation/insularity that simplifies the complex media interactions of diasporic peoples. Lum (1991) expressed this complexity when he stated that media environment (the messages and the manner in which these messages are disseminated in a society) shapes how one constructs reality and diasporic identity. Therefore, when one enters a new media environment (as immigrants do when they settle into their receiving country) one has to contend with different ways of "constructing, legitimizing, and maintaining one's sense of reality and identity" (Man Kong Lum, 1991, pp. 92). Beyond simply pulling or repelling a community then, interactions with the mainstream media environment of the U.S. inform and transform the very manner in which immigrants present themselves and their communities. Furthermore, and as suggested by Ong (1996), immigrants' media engagements are about self-making, and, as such, are potential exercises in self-assertion, claims of agency and struggle for power. Given these assertions, I argue that West Indian women's interactions with U.S. mainstream media environments necessarily entail the revision and (re)construction of their identities in

their receiving country, and can elucidate how these women negotiate specific identities in U.S. society, as well as how media influence their struggles for agency.

Media, Active Audiences and Identity Formation

Catalyzed by Hall's (1980) seminal "Encoding/Decoding" essay, cultural studies scholars in media studies have explored these issues of social power and agency in their work. In this treatise, Hall (1980) posited that cultural texts perpetuate the normative standards established by the dominant class through the dissemination of "preferred meanings." Nevertheless, the "encoded" message and that which is received by the audience is often asymmetrical, as receivers have liberty to accept the intended message, accept part of that message, or reject the message entirely; they may engage in dominant, negotiated or oppositional readings, respectively (Hall, 1980).

The disparity between the intended message and its interpretation occurs because, contrary to previous ideas that assumed homogeneity and universality among audiences,[14] persons do not receive and engage with media messages in the same way. Rather, the ideological positions held by individual viewers and listeners moderate their interaction and acceptance of the desired message. In other words, the socio-cultural factors that shape perspectives and give significance to the experiences of audience members mitigate their interaction with and acceptance of media texts. Through this treatise, Hall (1980) introduced the theoretical structure that encourages and frames the current interest in the influence of social markers on media "decoding."

[14] In the period following the Payne Fund Studies and Hadley Cantril's study of the "War of the Worlds" broadcast, scholars of mass communications were of the opinion that the mass media were capable of exerting powerful influence over the behavior of audience members.

Hall (1990) also stated that identities in general are about representations; they are questions about how one is represented and how one chooses to represent oneself. The image or portrayal of self that is selected is forged through "interactions, relationships, and influences between individuals and institutions" such as the media (Means Coleman, 2002, pp. 7). As Franz Fanon (1967) stated, "there is a constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly and subtly - with the help of books, newspapers, schools and their texts, advertisements, films, radio - work their way into one's mind" shaping how one views and constructs self in society (pp. 152). Scholars have explored this interaction between media and identity, demonstrating, for example, how media can foster contradictory subjectivities (Douglas, 1995), create fans (Jenkins, 1992), proliferate cues for coolness (Frank, 1997), and perpetuate beauty standards (Harrison and Cantor, 1997; Harrison, 2000).

Taken together, the preceding arguments illuminate a dialogic relationship between media and self-presentations or performances, illustrating that what one consumes of mediated fare is both indicative and constitutive of identity, revealing as well as shaping the way we conceive and present our private and public selves. These claims also highlight the ideological struggle that characterizes engagement with media texts so that it is never a passive act of consumption, but rather one that entails subject-making strategies and exercises of agency by audience members, replicating the struggles that occur in non-mediated experiences.

Radically Conceptualizing Media Engagement

In order to capture the ideological struggles that occur around interactions with the media, we need to refine our definition of media engagement, looking beyond content and interpretation to the contexts in which interactions take place, and beyond the actual moment of watching or reading to those non-mediated instances when media are still being engaged. Robin Means Coleman's (2002) analysis of one boy's interaction with the media depicted the importance of expanding our conception of media engagement. She found that the young man, Caryon, looked for media texts that resembled his life, texts that in turn affirmed his reality, and from which he took cues for his fantasies and identity. The "thug" identity which he assumed - characterized by heterosexuality, violence, drugs, and control of the streets and women - was reinforced by media that glorified "thug" rappers and athletes, and this identity was then used to moderate subsequent media interactions (Means Coleman, 2002).

In addition to aptly elucidating the inextricable relationship between mediated fare and social identity formation, Means Coleman (2002) also deconstructed the bifurcated manner in which media and identity are often studied. She highlighted how media engagement is embedded in other everyday practices that moderate how audiences read, negotiate and apply mediated messages. Chris Barker (1997) underscored this idea in his study of British teenage girls by demonstrating that what one consumes, as well as how one discusses media texts with one's peers post-consumption, informs identity construction. He posited that social agents receive multiple narratives of self and social knowledge from diverse sites and contexts of interaction in everyday life, including television texts and discussions of those texts within peer groups. The proffered scripts become a part of the "intersubjective" reflexive process of identity formation, used by

subjects to create identity makers and boundaries, and to revise and rework their subjectivities (Barker, 1997). Marie Gillespie (2003) found similar phenomena in her analysis of soap operas, contending that the content as well as the narrative structure of soap operas, such as the Australian produced *Neighbours*, informed the everyday talk of Asian teenagers in Britain, and fostered the creation of "symbolic communities."

Analogously, Larry Nathan Strelitz (2002) suggested that scholars should examine media consumption in relation to other cultural experiences that moderate media messages. Through focus groups, in-depth interviews and participation in viewing sessions with underprivileged South African college men, Strelitz (2002) found that social location and networks influence media consumption patterns and identity formation; the social group that his subjects identified with informed what they desired from and how they interpreted shows. In addition, the commentary they offered throughout the viewings of their preferred programs confirmed to each other the "correct" meanings of the texts, meanings that in turn cemented their particular identity, and mediated how they interacted with and experienced their social space. Their in-program discussions, as well as their regular, exclusive viewings, contributed to their production and distribution of knowledge about themselves (Strelitz, 2002).

By suggesting that it is important to look at media texts as well as community (social networks and environment, who one talks to, and about what), and the context of consumption (where consume and with whom), Strelitz (2002), Barker (1997) and Means Coleman (2002) support Ien Ang's (1996) call for "radically contextualized" ethnographies in audience studies. They thus endorse a more holistic definition (and analysis) of media engagement that captures what is consumed, how it is consumed, and

its application (or lack there of) to everyday life. These scholars also imply that we amend the way we conceive of social identities to account for media engagements (radically defined) as they are a part of the presentation of our social and cultural selves. Interactions with the media are indicative of who we are, and are thus no less a part of our social identities than other modes of self-expressions such as dress, speech and conduct. Joe Grixti (2006) supported this claim when he concluded that Maltan youths' discussion of program choices and media consumption were a part of the process of defining and positioning themselves in relation to power; media engagement, among other things, was used as a symbol of cultural superiority, a means of distancing themselves from the indigenous culture while appropriating what was perceived as the better, foreign/Other.

Informed by these scholars, I conceive of West Indian women's interactions with television as what they consume, how, where, and with whom they consume it, and how they apply it in extra-mediated moments. I contend that this comprehensive engagement with television is reflective and constitutive of their diasporic identities. Exploring what West Indian women bring to their media experiences as well as their comprehensive engagement with mainstream television furthers the project to reconceptualize our definition of media engagement and social and diasporic identity. It also expands our understanding of the dialogic relationship between media and subjectivities, particularly those that are being reconstructed in the U.S. Furthermore, examining West Indian women's engagement with mainstream television programs and its influence on how they situate themselves within the power hierarchy of the U.S. helps to elucidate the relationship between diasporic identities, media and power struggles within receiving

countries.[15]

Methodology

My dissertation is based on information gathered from 29 women and three discrete research studies. These studies were: An exploration of the relationship between mainstream television and the general diasporic identity of first-generation West Indian immigrant women in New York City; an examination of the role of dominant television on the particular body politics of first-generation West Indian women in New York City; and an analysis of the influence of mainstream television on the cultural identity of second-generation West Indian immigrant women. Across these studies, I employed two methodological approaches (in-depth interviews and focus groups) that reflect the research traditions of qualitative audience studies.

Scholars in this tradition align themselves with various non-positivistic research paradigms, such as constructivism or naturalism (as discussed in Lincoln & Guba, 1985), pragmatism (as discussed in Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), and idealism (as discussed in

[15] Though my inquiries may be similar to those explored by scholars in the uses and gratifications tradition in mass communication studies, my project diverges from this theory in significant ways. Uses and gratifications theory is concerned with "the social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of the mass media…, which leads to differential patterns of media exposure…, resulting in need gratifications…" (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973, pp. 510). Its proponents assume that, among other things, media use is always goal-directed, audiences seek out the media that will satisfy their particular needs, and that "value judgments about the cultural significance of mass communication should be suspended while audience orientations are explored on their own terms" (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973, pp. 511). While uses and gratification models move the field beyond dichotomous inquiries (that is, effect or no effect) (Klapper, 1963), these underlying tenets are antithetical to my project. Firstly, though interested in getting information from the audience, uses and gratification theory is derived from a tradition of positivism that values prediction and generalization above interpretation. Secondly, this theory's belief that media serve a primarily need-fulfilling purpose and is unmitigated by power is functionalist and simplifies media engagement. Thirdly, the call to defer speculations about the cultural significance of media is problematic as it seems to discredit the fact that cultural values inform media interactions, and that media participate in producing and perpetuating culture, both of which are central ideas in my project.

Wilson, 1983). In spite of their eclecticism, however, most qualitative audience scholars (myself included) believe that social reality is at least partially constructed, and thus not completely knowable. Furthermore, researchers are not “immaculate perceiver[s] of objective reality” (quoted in Fortner and Christians, 1989, pp. 377), but are necessary instruments in the research process (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Wilson, 1983). Most would also contend that research subjects are “spontaneously” acting agents, and that researchers should aim to “understand how people in everyday natural settings create meaning and interpret the events of their world” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000, pp. 103); interpretation as opposed to prediction and generalization is thus tantamount. Qualitative researchers also believe that their methodology should not degrade or dehumanize their participants, nor should it undermine the creative process they intend to explore (Christians & Carey, 1989). They thus use inductive, rather than deductive, reasoning to situate their respondents’ behaviors and attitudes in larger cultural and historical contexts (Christians & Carey, 1989).

My dissertation is also inspired by feminist epistemological traditions, particularly situated knowledge paradigms. Like qualitative audience scholars, proponents of situated knowledges believe that reality is (at least partially) socially constructed. In addition, they contend that researchers (and subjects) simultaneously occupy multiple positions (Haraway, 1991), and are situated, only “seeing” in part, making objectivity impossible (Haraway, 1991); thus, no researcher is innocent or pure, and none can make claims to a single truth. Furthermore, having a feminist agenda, this tradition seeks to empower its subjects, and to challenge the de-contextualized, uncontestable nature of modern Western science.

Given my desire to work within qualitative, feminist paradigms, I employed in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus groups with first and second-generation West Indian immigrant women in New York City to explore what West Indian women in the U.S. bring to and take away from their engagement with television texts. More precisely, I investigated the manner in which mainstream television engagement informs the general self-presentation of first-generation West Indian immigrant women in New York City (the information which informs the analyses presented in Chapters Two and Three) through in-depth, semi-structured interviews; I examined the relationship between second-generation West Indian immigrant women's identity construction and media engagement (presented in Chapter Five) also through in-depth, semi-structured interviews; and I explored the body politics that first-generation West Indian immigrant women negotiate in New York City (discussed in Chapter Four) through focus group interviews. As is apparent, three discrete studies where conducted using two methodological approaches. A detailed description of the methodologies, and my rationalization for selecting each, follows.

Methodology for the In-depth Interviews

In the manner of audience studies scholars such as Robin Means Coleman (2000), I employed in-depth, semi-structured interviews to explore the general construction of the diasporic identity of both first and second-generation West Indian immigrant women. This method was appropriate for this particular section of the project. Firstly, the research study examined the complicated intersections of diaspora, identity and media, intersections that only in-depth discussions and interactions with West Indian women can

expose. Qualitative interviews are conducive to this interaction as they allow extensive dialogue, observation of non-verbal cues and affords the "flexibility and spontaneity" of probing (Means Coleman, 2000). In addition, being interested in how West Indian women construct their identities in the media environment of the U.S., it was imperative that I employ a research method that facilitated open-ended discussions that allowed the women to speak freely about their experiences (Fortner & Christian, 1989). Finally, these types of interviews were especially suitable to exploring diasporic identities. As Rina Benmayor and Andor Skotnes (1994) stated, personal testimony can highlight individual experiences, giving "glimpses into the lived interior of migration processes" (pp. 14). They further contended that:

> [P]ersonal testimonies allow some sense of how individual migrants, in situations of extreme and sometimes unpredictable flux, make sense of their experiences and thereby continually construct and reconstruct understandings of themselves and their larger social circumstances…They speak precisely to how im/migrant subjects constantly build, reinvent, synthesize, or even collage identities from multiple sources and resources, often lacing them with deep ambivalence (pp. 14, 15).

This is precisely the level of information and dialogue that is needed to expand and enrich extant literature on "third world" immigrant black women as audiences, or, in other words, to theorize about the complex intersections of race, gender, nation, and diaspora in media engagement. Though Benmayor and Skotnes (1994) were referring specifically to oral histories and life narratives, I believe qualitative interviews, when recuperated from their positivistic histories, can facilitate the generation of such rich information.

Participant Selection. Working within qualitative research traditions, and thus not being interested in generalizations, random selection was not requisite. Therefore, I

recruited participants for the in-depth interviews purposively (Miles & Huberman, 1984). This allowed a selective sampling based on the women's perceived ability to contribute to the themes being explored. Furthermore, using a purposive sample reduced the risk of the duplication of typical cases that probabilistic samples tend to generate, and increased the chances of capturing the disparate and contradictory experiences in the group of interest, thus generating rich texts for analysis (Weiss, 1994). The selection criteria for women in these studies were: maturity (must be at least 18 years of age), residency (must be currently living in New York City), and country of origin (must have emigrated from the Anglophone Caribbean, or have parents who emigrated from the West Indies). As indicated by the latter criteria, I define first-generation immigrants as those women who emigrated from the West Indies, and the second-generation as those women who were either born outside of the West Indies, born in the U.S., or who came to the U.S. at an early age.

By using place of birth as the sole determinant of migratory generation, I realize that I group together diverse experiences that are informed by other factors such as length of time in the U.S., whether the women migrated directly to the U.S. or by way of other countries, connection to family and friends on their islands, and frequency and length of visits to their homelands. However, in spite of such intra-group differences, the women within each of my functionally-defined migratory groups exhibited strikingly similar characteristics, and seemed to develop comparable diasporic subjectivities. In other words, place of birth, or the place that the women called home, engendered similarities in the women's self-presentation that cut across in-group differences, and thus emerged as a suitable means of categorization for my project.

In addition, West Indian women who were in the hospital, incarcerated or housed in mental institutions were not eligible to participate. I also selected participants from a variety of socio-economic, educational, maturity, and national backgrounds so as to create a "densely textured" analysis (Fortner & Christian, 1989), capturing the experiences of most West Indians in New York City.

I recruited the representational purposive sample for this study from New York City using a snowball sampling technique (Goodman, 1961) or chain-referral sampling (Heckathorn, 1997) which entailed identifying participants who were then asked to refer other participants for the research study. This procedure was particularly useful for obtaining West Indian women who are a sort of "hidden population" (Heckathorn, 1997; Rowland & Flint, 2001) that conventional means of recruitment cannot reach. As I realized while conducting the pilot study in August 2004, asking for volunteers was not effective for attracting West Indian women. Due to the fear of deportation and general insecurities about living in a new country, West Indians tend to be very guarded and secretive. Many are living and working in the U.S. illegally, and have to remain as inconspicuous as possible. They are also not likely to join community organizations (such as a local chapter of the Kiwanis club) that require them to give personal information about themselves, so searching such directories would be futile. In addition, they are also not persuaded by in-person or telephone pleas by strange researchers, even if the latter is West Indian. Furthermore, they do not respond to flyers, even the ones that promise cash incentives, as I realized after posted flyers were ineffective in soliciting West Indian women to participate in my pilot study. The most effective way, therefore, is through their networks. In this way, the women feel safe, knowing that the researcher

is not only an “insider,” but also the relative or friend of someone they know and trust; they deem me trustworthy by association. I chose New York as the research site because, as stated before, this city hosts one of the largest populations of Anglo-Caribbean immigrants in the U.S. (Kasinitz, 1992).

Similar to media scholars such as Janice Radway (1984) and Jacqueline Bobo (1995) who used gatekeepers (Groger, Mayberry, & Straker, 1999) or vouching figures (Weiss, 1989) to recruit their initial subjects, I also employed gatekeepers in the form of my West Indian family, friends and associates. I asked friends, relatives and associates with access to a variety of West Indian women (that is, those who are seamstresses/tailors, hair stylists, nurses, plumbers, pastors, teachers, etc.), to solicit their associates and/or clients who met the criteria presented above. I instructed my vouching figures (Weiss, 1989) to seek women from different West Indian countries and/or women who have dissimilar worldviews. They asked potential respondents if they were interested in participating in my study, and if it would be acceptable for them (the gatekeepers) to can give their information to the researcher.

I contacted potential participants twice by telephone: In the first conversation, I explained the study in more detail, confirmed their participation and decided on the particulars of the interview. The second call was to remind the women of the date, time and place of the interview. The location of the interviews were decided based on what was most convenient and comfortable for the participants (Weiss, 1989), as well as what facilitated the best tape-recording conditions (Morgan, 1997). As anticipated, most of the participants requested that I come to their homes. This was because, for many of them, finding time to travel was difficult as they held jobs that did not correspond to a nine-to-

five schedule, and they had to fulfill their domestic roles as cooks and cleaners after the completion of their “day jobs.” Some women were only available during this relative “down time” at home, or on their much-needed days off. Furthermore, for women who live comparatively private lives, their homes provided a safe space for them to talk about themselves.

At the end of each interview, I asked the women who participated to suggest other persons for the research study, both those who they thought would share their views, and those who would not, thus engendering diversity of views. As is common with qualitative designs, interviews were conducted until I attained theoretical saturation, or until the information being garnered reached redundancy (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Twenty-one first and second-generation West Indian immigrant women were interviewed.

Interview Protocol. In the actual interviews, I endeavored to develop a good “interviewing partnership” (Weiss, 1989) at the beginning of the session. To this end, before each interview, I introduced my work, and the current project, and gave the interviewees an opportunity to ask me questions and voice any concerns they might have had. During this pre-interview stage, I also asked the participants to read and sign a consent form that gave permission to be interviewed and tape-recorded; they were given a copy of the form for their records. The interviews were tape-recorded, and lasted an average of one hour. The women received monetary compensation for their time.

After each interview, I made observational or field notes related to the respondents’ body language, attitude and my general impressions of how they responded to the questions in the interview. These notes were used to enrich the analysis of the

information gathered, and to provide a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of the proceedings. With the help of an independent party, I transcribed all the interviews for later analysis.

The organization of the questions used in the interview approximated Michael Patton's (1990) recommendation for interview order, beginning with the behavioral/descriptive, followed by the interpretive and the emotional, and concluding with demographics. However, my main concern with the question order was coherence (as determined by practice interviews), and so Patton's (1990) suggestions were not strictly followed. The interviews comprised of questions that fell into four major categories that closely corresponded with the conceptual framework discussed in previous sections (Weiss, 1994). These categories were life prior to migration, life in the U.S., cultural norms, and television engagement. When necessary, I followed each question with probes (Means Coleman, 2000) designed to obtain concrete descriptions.[16]

Data Analysis. As with qualitative research projects, analysis of the information gathered from the in-depth interviews occurred throughout the project (Strauss, 1987; Miles & Huberman, 1984), and was closely linked to the kind of report I intended to produce (Weiss, 1989). Preferring an issue-focused report organized according to a synchronic strategy - that is, a report that focuses on what can be learnt from all the respondents, organized according to major themes (Weiss, 1989) - data analysis entailed coding and interpretation. During coding or data reduction (Miles & Huberman, 1984), I used ATLAS.ti software to help to code the participants' responses, and organize them into themes, which included television consumption and engagement, construction of

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[16] See Appendix A for the interview guide used in the in-depth interviews of the first-generation participants. The interview questions for the second-generation respondents of the in-depth interviews are in Appendix B.

homeland, changes to lifestyle as a result of migration, and relationship to Americans.

The interpretation stage occurred at two levels: I engaged in "local integration" by developing "minitheories" that created connections between the themes or codes that emerged. For instance, I proposed that the women's conception of their homelands was informed by mainstream television portrayals of their islands as paradises. I then engaged in "inclusive integration," or the development of a theoretical framework that organized all the information into a coherent account (Weiss, 1989). For example, I contended that the particular form of identity that first-generation West Indian women developed in the U.S. was a coping mechanism, a means of contending with their changing lives as well the difficulties they face in their new home. By doing this, I employed Miles and Huberman's (1984) method of moving from "empirical instances" to a single conceptualization of the social process.[17]

Methodology for the Focus Groups

Semi-structured focus groups were used to address the development of a specific aspect of the identity of West Indian immigrant women, namely their construction of body politics in the U.S. Focus groups were ideal for this portion of the dissertation because of their ability to allow the participants to have relatively fluid discussions of a range of issues related to beauty ideals that were not yet in my purview (Morgan, 1997). Having the women liberally discuss their cultural conception of body presentation and care in this manner also fostered more inductive, and thus more grounded analysis. Furthermore, this research method facilitated more engagement with the questions that I

[17] While I have discussed the parts of analysis as mutually exclusive and successive, in reality, they overlapped, and occurred simultaneously (Miles & Huberman, 1989).

posed. Initially, I intended to investigate West Indian women's body politics through in-depth interviews, but quickly realized that such an approach created a level of self-consciousness that inhibited the dynamic and free-flowing discussion that I desired. On the other hand, the discussion that ensued among the women in the focus groups was lively and unforced, revealing the issues that surrounded beauty ideologies for these women, the manner in which they contended with cultural discourses about their bodies, as well as how they negotiated this terrain as a community. Such dynamic, generative and community-revealing discussions could only have come about through focus groups.

Participant Selection. Analogous to the selection process for participants in the in-depth interviews, I recruited a purposive sample (Miles & Huberman, 1984) using vouchering figures (Weiss, 1989) and a snowball sampling technique (Goodman, 1961) to garner subjects for the focus groups. The selection criteria for women in this study were: country of origin (must have emigrated from the Anglophone Caribbean), maturity (must be at least 18 years of age), and residency (must be currently living in New York City). A total of eight women participated in the focus groups.

Research Procedure. I conducted three sessions - one with four women, and the other two with two women each - in my home in New York City. Each session began with warm-up questions (Morgan, 1997), which comprised of inquiries into television consumption (e.g. "What's your favorite show?"; "Why?").[18] The questions then gradually moved towards probes of beauty ideals and cultural expectations (e.g. "When

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[18] The participants were provided with a list of drama series and situation comedies currently airing on the major television networks of New York City to help them recall what they consumed.

in your country, what did you consider attractive?”). The sessions were tape-recorded for later transcription, and lasted approximately one hour and fifteen minutes each.[19]

Data Coding and Analysis. Being informed by the “grounded theory” tradition (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), analysis of the information gathered entailed data coding and interpretation. During coding or data reduction (Miles & Huberman, 1984), I organized the participants’ responses into themes (for instance, West Indian beauty expectations, U.S. beauty expectations, insecurities about bodies, and coping mechanisms). In the interpretation stage I highlighted the logical relationships between categories (for example, that between West Indian and American ideals and insecurities with their bodies), as well as the incongruities that emerged (such as the women’s simultaneous emphasis on self-acceptance and working on attaining the ideal body). I then engaged in “local integration” by developing “minitheories” that might account for, and create connections among, the themes that emerged in each category. I also engaged in “inclusive integration” or the development of a theoretical framework (namely strategic selection) that organized all the information into a coherent account (Weiss, 1989).

Measure of Quality

To ensure that the information collected in both studies were of the highest quality, I took steps to establish trustworthiness and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). This included continually peer-debriefing with colleagues and advisors, member checking to establish credibility, and providing a detailed account of the interview process and setting (or “thick description” (Geertz, 1973)) to facilitate transferability and dependability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

[19] A full list of the questions used in the focus groups is in Appendix C.

Like Weiss (1989), I believe that, as a researcher, I have a responsibility to the women who participate in my research study. Therefore, I tried to treat my participants with respect, not undermining or questioning their choices, personal interpretations or motives. Furthermore, I ensured that no harm or disadvantage came to the respondents during or after the study, and handled their interview materials - including consent forms, recorded statements and subsequent transcripts - with the utmost confidentiality, properly storing them in secure locations.

Chapter Two
"I'm A Reality TV Junky:" Engagement with Reality and Narrative Television and West Indian Women's Diasporic Identity

As immigrants to the particular socio-political milieu of the U.S., West Indian women have to rework their conception of themselves and their communities, a process that is moderated and facilitated by the television fare with which they engage. What follows is a holistic exploration of the television engagement of first-generation West Indian immigrant women – that is, what they consume, how, where, and with whom they consume it, and how they apply it in extra-mediated moments – in an effort to ascertain how this mediated activity informs their identity in New York City. Conversations with my respondents divulged an intricate relationship between television and their identity, the latter informing their choices of and the pleasure derived from texts, and the former fostering and reinforcing the particular diasporic subjectivities they negotiated in New York City.

The Women of the Study

The analyses presented in this chapter, as well as those discussed in Chapter Three, are based on conversations with 12 first-generation West Indian immigrant women. A brief introduction to each follows.

- **Andrea**[20] is 33 years old. She emigrated from St. Lucia less than a year ago. She works as a receptionist for a small entrepreneur in the Bronx, where she lives with her sister and son in a private house.

- **Barbara** is in her fifties, and a recently retired nurse. She migrated from Barbados to England where she lived for several years before coming to the U.S. She has been in the U.S. for over thirty years, and lives with her husband, daughter, and granddaughter in her home in Queens.

- **Cassie** is in her forties. She was born in Guyana, moved to Toronto when she was 16, and to the U.S. at 19 years old. She lives 30 minutes from New York City in New Jersey, but she works in the Bronx as a manager for group homes for the mentally and physically disabled.

- **Charlotte** emigrated from St. Lucia five years ago. Prior to that, she lived in Miami for three and a half years before she returned to St. Lucia. She is married, and lives in an apartment in Brooklyn. Even though she was a paralegal in St. Lucia, she is now employed as a nanny.

- **Donna** is 30 years old, and emigrated from Jamaica seven years ago. She lives in a basement apartment just outside of the Bronx. She is working as a nanny as she pursues a Master's degree in education.

- **Evelyn** migrated from Jamaica when she was 10 years old, and has been here for 36 years. She is married, and is the mother of seven children. She owns her own home in Brooklyn, and is a social worker.

- **Jamie** is a 58-year-old Jamaican emigrant, and mother of a 27-year-old daughter. She came to the U.S. when she was about 18 years old. She works in a predominantly white law firm, and lives in an apartment in Queens.

- **Katherine** is 22 years old, and emigrated from Barbados three years ago. She is a full-time student working towards her Bachelor's degree at a private university in the Bronx. She lives off-campus with her father in an apartment in the Bronx.

- **Lily** is a 24-year-old Dominican, and lives in the Bronx with her mother and Jamaican step-dad. She recently returned to college after taking a year off. She has been in the U.S. for five years.

- **Margerie** is a 34-year-old from Dominica. She lives in an apartment in the north Bronx with her son and husband who is Jamaican. She migrated 11 years ago. She is a licensed EKG technician, but at the moment she is a nanny.

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[20] Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the respondents.

- **Wilma** is 31 years old, and the sister of Lily. She is Dominican, and has been in the U.S. for 13 years. She is married, and is nursing a three-month-old daughter. They live in their own house in Queens.
- **Winnie** is 43 years old, and migrated to the U.S. from Trinidad when she was 12 years old. She has been in the U.S. for over 30 years, and lives in Brooklyn where she owns 1/3 of a house, and works in a major hospital in this borough as an administrative nurse.

Their Communities

Before presenting the women's engagement with mainstream television and its influence on their identity, I want to discuss the nature of their communities in New York City. Such a discussion is important in a media study as it will elucidate the cultural environment within which these participants engage with mainstream television, and which necessarily influences how they accept, negotiate and resist the proffered ideologies. I particularly want to highlight the residential separation of the women from Americans in general. Such segregation informs the particular diasporic identity they develop in New York City, but also alludes to the extent of their reliance on media in their everyday lives. Being segregated from Americans, media become vehicles through which these women acquire information about the U.S. and Americans; they compensate for the cultural divisions engendered by residential segregation. Knowing the type of community in which these women live therefore helps us to appreciate the place of media in their diasporic experiences.

Most of the women presented above resided in communities with a prominently Anglophone Caribbean presence, had social networks that comprised almost exclusively of West Indians, and had little relationships with people from other cultures and ethnicities, including African Americans and white Americans. Katherine, the college

student from Barbados, had this to say about her engagement with white classmates:

> In a class setting I'll talk [to them]…I'll meet, we'll study together, but as to, "Let's go to dinner or to the movies," not really… Maybe I haven't been here long enough; I haven't opened myself up enough to like do [that]…[also], I commute so I'm not [on campus] all the time, so the people I have hung out with is like regular friends.

Katherine indicated that she did not dislike her white counterparts, and was willing to associate with them on a practical – and thus superficial – level, but she did not include them in her social network. One of the reasons offered for this exclusion was her residence off-campus which inhibited her contact with whites; she only had occasion to interact with them when she was on-campus for classes. This statement suggested that there were no white Americans in her neighborhood, only her "regular" friends who she later said were West Indians, an evidence of her geographical isolation from white Americans.

Furthermore, the difference in places of residence - Katherine commuting from the surrounding area of the Bronx and her white counterparts living within the confines of the university - indicated a class disparity that may have influenced Katherine's willingness and ability to "hang out" with her white classmates. As she shared later in the interview, she felt that her interests (which included finishing school to start earning money) were not compatible with those of her white American school mates who spoke about doing things such as taking a year off from school to travel around Europe. Katherine concurrently blamed her relatively short time in New York City, and delayed reception of white Americans for her lack of white friends, putting the focus on herself, and away from the racial, cultural and class constraints that moderated such interactions. Thus, even as parts of her statement highlighted underlying societal issues for her

separation from white Americans, Katherine's reflexivity replicated the contemporary mainstream ideology that racism and classism were not structural, but rather the result of character deficiencies in individuals, or problems that surfaced in very isolated, individualistic situations.

Analogously, Cassie, who had lived in the U.S. for over 20 years, did not engage with white Americans in any meaningful manner. She said,

> I work in the Bronx, I live in New Jersey, so my neighbors are white up there. They are nice people. They're neighbors, not like friends or anything. They'll come to our barbeques and…we use their pool, and that kind or stuff, but we don't really hang out; we not close. But other than that honestly I can't tell you the last time that I actually had access to meeting and becoming friends with a white person. I don't think I would have a problem, but you don't find them, not unless you go looking for them. You never have time to go looking for anybody anyway.

According to Cassie, she did not have white friends because she did not have many opportunities to meet them and cultivate relationships, indicating that she did not share the same social spaces as white Americans. The issue was not with her then, as she would not "have a problem" with having white Americans as friends, but the trouble was with a segregated society that did not allow the time or occasion for the intermingling of races. Even when she did have access to white Americans, however, Cassie did not claim them as friends. In contrast to Katherine, she had been in the U.S. for several years, and shared neighborhoods with white families. Yet, like her younger counterpart, she interacted with white Americans on a practical level as neighbors, being cordial and helpful, but not developing relationships with them. This fact added another layer to her structural explanation for her dearth of white American friends, indicating that implicit personal inhibitions also informed her distance from them.

Analogously, in response to my inquiry about her social network in New York City, Charlotte said,

> [They are] mostly the people from the Caribbean. There are few other people…I mean you see a lot of people when you go to work, you know, [you] be nice, be cordial, say hello, but that's it…You see the environment I'm in: only black people. Only black, black West Indian people around. On my job, I'm a babysitter. Only black West Indian that's on the job, that's doing the same thing that I do. It's true we work for the white people, but we don't get many white friends. It's like very rare.

Charlotte, who had been in the U.S. for five years, lived in the Flatbush area of Brooklyn, a large and prominent West Indian enclave in New York City, which she felt limited her interaction with Americans. In addition, her activities outside of the community kept her among people with her heritage as she was employed in an occupation saturated by West Indians. She did encounter people of other cultures and races, but she had no desire to move beyond cordiality to form relationships with them. Furthermore, even though her job brought her in contact with white Americans, these interactions were limited to employer/employee relations, and were thus regulated and restricted by class – as well as racial and cultural – difference. Thus, residential, occupational and cultural segregation - imposed as well as self-selected - reinforced these women's attachment to their own community while obscuring engagement with white Americans.

While physically more accessible to them than their white counterparts, the participants similarly did not develop relationships with African Americans. Margerie commented:

> I have few [black American] friends, but you know what? Their parents are not Americans. I've never really been around somebody for a particular amount of time who is American and their parents American, and the parents' parents are American. Every [black] American girlfriend that I know or I have, they parents from the West Indies.

Therefore, none of her close friends were American natives; they were either West Indians by birth, or parentage. Cassie also stated,

> I never really got close to any [black] American person that I can think of. I have one [black] American girlfriend right now. She happens to be someone that, other than shopping, we think a lot alike… The few black people that I have met from here I couldn't relate to them, and I could not tell you right now specifically what I couldn't relate to; no, I couldn't.

Cassie felt that she operated on a different register from African Americans, and she implied that only those who exhibited her way of thinking were welcomed into her social network.

Statements such as these were prolific, denoting the women's cultural separation from the African American community, a disconnection established on the grounds of moral difference (a point that will be elaborated on in the preceding chapter.) The non-West Indian black friends that they did admit to having were spoken of as being in-graphed members of the community. For instance, Cassie's only "American" friend thought like her, and thus exhibited West Indian tendencies. Similarly, Evelyn shared,

> The few [non-West Indian, black] friends that I have, a lot of times we joke about it cause we say that they are indoctrinated Jamaicans, because a lot of them either they're married to a Jamaican man, or they have that extended family from [Jamaica]. The values are the same…it's very funny cause it's almost like they're drawn into the culture; they're into the culture.

Both of these women, then, established relationships with African Americans who had become West Indians by adopting West Indian ways. Their statements seemed to laud the strength of their West Indian culture that could draw Americans in, but that remained seemingly unaltered by American society. Furthermore, these women exhibited a form of exceptionalism and essentialism in their discussions of their non-West Indian black friends. They suggested that African Americans in general were irrevocably different

from West Indians (as will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter), with the exception of their friends who were redeemed by their association with West Indian culture, and who were thus more West Indian than African American anyway.

Their Connection to "Home"

The women's level of contact with their homelands is also an important moderating factor in their interaction with television. Frequency of visits and communication with people in their network "back home" affect the women's psychological proximity to their homelands, the salience of their pre-migration culture in their minds, and, subsequently, the form, level and degree off their engagement with television. What follows is a survey of the women's connection to their homelands and, thus, a look at the cultural mindset that they bring to their mediated experiences.

Most of the participants still had relatives and friends back home with whom they kept in contact via the telephone and the Internet, and to whom they sent remittances in the form of money and barrels of goods. The women themselves visited the islands with varying levels of frequency. For example, Evelyn and Katherine visited Jamaica and Barbados, respectively, quite often, taking a trip there at least once a year; Andrea planned on going back to St. Lucia for carnivals and holidays; Jamie went back to Jamaica several times, but had not visited in the last two years; and Winnie and Margerie had not been back to Trinidad and Dominica, respectively, in years.

There was consistence in the manner in which they spoke of their return to their islands, however. Jamie said, "It is very exciting. I love to go [home]… I guess it is the freedom and the difference. It's a big vacation for me, even if it is just two days."

Katherine also said,

> Everybody goes to Cancun and Mexico and whatever. I may go there one time, a couple of times, but [Barbados] is like my vacation where you see old friends, go out, hand out, party, whatever. Just replenish myself to get back to work…lay on the beach, whatever, party…Then to come back and study. That's like my break.

These descriptions of visits home did not reflect the experiences of returning natives, but rather the brief stays of vacationers, characterized by the disruption of work and their daily routines, and long days of idleness. In other words, returning to their islands was an escape from "life."

Furthermore, even though the women insisted that the U.S. and New York City were not their homes, many had no desire to return permanently to their homelands. For example, when asked if she wanted to resettle in St. Lucia, Charlotte exclaimed,

> Oh my God! I don't know…Although it was just…a year [after] I had left, [on my last visit] the place look so different. You know I was walking on the street. I'm like, "Where are the sidewalks?" You practically walking in the streets when you home. Unlike up here…I wanted to come back…In spite of the fact that I love my country, I wanted to come back up here, cause when I had to take the bus, I've gotten so used to taking the buses up here…You ring the bell when you get to your designated stop. Back in St. Lucia the buses would stop anywhere; you'd be squeezing on a bus. Owh! Um-um! It was a good experience though,…just going back home; it was nice, but I think I'll just go and visit. Maybe at some point we'll retire back in St. Lucia.

In other words, Charlotte had habituated herself to her lifestyle in New York City so that, even though she still claimed St. Lucia as her country and her home, she was not prepared to move back there. She thus harbored two ideas of home, one based on birth and heritage, and the other based on familiarization. Jamie also said,

> Because of the political situation in Jamaica, it is very scary. I have never known Jamaica to be the way that it is now where people are scared to go home because they are scared that they are going to get robbed…That scares me because the Jamaica that I grew up in, you could leave your door wide open. Given that, I would rather go somewhere [else].

This participant, who viewed visits to Jamaica as a return to her roots, was deterred from moving back to this island by reports of the prevalence of violence and corruption there. Therefore, Jamaica was her homeland, but, in the interest of personal safety, the U.S. would be her permanent home.

The women who did want to go back home postponed their return migration until later in their lives, or until retirement. In her statement quoted above, Charlotte only considered going back to St. Lucia to retire. Katherine also said,

> I would love to be involved in the ministry of finance or something like that back home, have a position there, but that's way down. I have to establish myself here a little bit before I can even think about going back.

Katherine had ambitious plans of participating in the governance of her country, but these were contingent on her financial success in the U.S. Her aspirations were thus postponed indefinitely, making her actual return far in the future, and very tentative. Evelyn also stated,

> Although I've been here 36 years everyday there's something in the back of me that saying, "I can't wait to retire"… I work; I get up…and I go to work, and my focus is that, o.k. it's for now, but I'm looking forward to say, in a few years, this is all behind me. I'm gonna be home; I can make my decision to get up if I want to. I could plant my garden. I could plant my flowers. I got all this space outside…so I'm really looking forward to that.

While she made a definitive statement about her return migration, Evelyn had no intentions of moving to Jamaica in the immediate future. Furthermore, she would only go back to her homeland after she had accumulated enough finances to retire. Regardless of the time of her actual return, however, it was the hope of returning to her homeland, of having her own home with a yard, and not having a work schedule, that seemed to motivate her to endure her life in the U.S., to get her through her work days. Home for her was the end of her lifestyle in the U.S. as she knew it. For these women, then, the

prospect of returning to their islands was not in their immediate purview, and appeared to function as a sweet possibility rather than an actual plan. In other words, their discourse of returning to rest in their "home" was a narrative to give hope and purpose to their lives in the U.S.

Taken together, the women established their lives in New York City, but endeavored to live culturally separate from Americans; they conceived of themselves as West Indians living in New York City. As I will demonstrate, their construction of a separate world within New York City, and their conception of themselves as separate from Americans had significant implications for their engagement with mainstream television. Their exclusively West Indian or West Indian-minded social networks formed the backdrop against which they interacted with, interpreted and drew on television texts in their everyday lives. These communities moderated their reception of American norms proliferated by television, forming a cultural support system that enabled negotiated and even resistive responses to television's subjectificating mission. Their social networks thus regulated the manner and the extent to which these texts informed their diasporic identities in New York City.

Their perception of themselves as displaced West Indians, a view that was undoubtedly facilitated by their segregated communities, similarly informed their engagement with television. Emphasis of their pre-migration identity necessarily fostered connections to their culture, and made it salient during their interaction with New York City in general, and television texts in particular. This prominent presence of their West Indian heritage provided another worldview that helped to moderate their selection of, identification with, and interpretation of television texts; it facilitated other,

non-American forms of interactions with television texts, and, subsequently, fostered their particular diasporic identity.

The women's establishment of home in the U.S. problematized the West Indian identity they sought to construct in New York City, however, forcing them to become acclimatized to the city's system and way of life, and thus become cultural hybrids. This dilemma also had implications for the women's interactions with television. As will be discussed later, the resulting twofold subjectivity was evident in their erratic and strategic deployment of televised American values and ideologies to position themselves in American discourses, as well as to contend with the exigencies of both their homeland and their new home.

With these characteristics in mind, I now move to look more closely at the women's interaction with television, and how this engagement reflected and informed their West Indian diasporic identity. In the remainder of the chapter I demonstrate how the types of programs they most consistently engaged with, the selection criteria they used to choose television texts, and their post-consumption discussions reinforced their West Indian identity, and were expressive of their self-presentation in New York City.

Television Engagement and West Indian Identity Formation

Competitive Reality TV

The women in this research study watched a wide variety of programs airing on network television, creating a diverse television diet that comprised of serious and comedic dramas, reality based shows, and news-based programs. Donna said,

> I think I've gotten more into this soap opera thing. I'll go for the *Grey's Anatomy*, not so much *Desperate Housewives*. *House*, the [*Crime Scene Investigations*], mostly those. [*Law and Order*] *Criminal Intent*, crime scene shows… One program that I watch every week and that's *Grey's Anatomy*. That's Sunday night so I do have the time.

In addition to highlighting Donna's penchant for medical and criminal dramas, her final comment about watching the shows that aired on Sundays – that is, during her leisure time - also revealed that her work schedule influenced the programs with which she regularly engaged. This sentence then emphasized that she did not arrange her life around television, but rather inserted it into time slots that did not interfere with her busy schedule, or "when she had the time." Donna, along with other women, regularly made this disassociative maneuver during their interviews to reinforce their commitment to productive pursuits, a point that will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

Jamie also watched much of her favorite shows on Sundays. She said,

> Right now when I go home from work I would watch *Two and Half Men* because it is funny, and it makes me laugh, and I am coming from the office where I am stressed, and I want to watch something that will make me laugh. *Desperate Housewives* of course. [I watch it] every Sunday, and *Grey's Anatomy*, *Law and Order*. [I watch *Desperate Housewives* the most] because of the fact that it comes on every Sunday night, and that it is a story so that you don't have to catch up.

Cassie, the 40-something Guyanese emigrant, was attracted to a completely different genre of shows. She said,

> I used to watch *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* from the time it started to the end…I even have the DVD set…I don't like to watch reality based stuff, you know how they have all this stupid reality shows? First of all, they are not reality; it's ridiculous. And I figure life is rough enough, you do not need to be living other people's misery. I like stuff that's very unrelated to my life. Entertaining, lots of action. I like Buffy because Buffy was a little tiny little blonde girl that could kick ass, and it was fun, and it was very dark, like tongue-in-cheek darkness… *American Idol*, that's o.k. That's people singing, and that's different. I will watch that sometimes… It's also a free concert.

Cassie was drawn to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, then, because of the show's thematic distance from her own reality, the opportunity to engage with characters rather than real people, and what she considered a more sophisticated plot and script. Even though she dismissed reality shows in general as banal and false, she could admit to watching *American Idol* which she described as "a free concert."

Many of her fellow immigrants shared her acceptance of reality-based programming, enjoying (to varying degrees) television fare of a more factual nature. Among this group of reality television aficionados, the most popular reality based programs were those of the nature of *American Idol*, that is, the non-scripted programs that featured "ordinary" people competing for what is often a monetary award. Annette Hill (2004) referred to these programs as reality game shows. In fact, these types of shows were the most frequently mentioned during the interviews, and were thus the most consistent in shaping and reflecting these women's identities in the New York City. Margerie exclaimed,

> My top favorite show, my like favorite show that I can't miss, but if I miss it I have to tape it, is *American Idol*. That's like my show. *American Idol*, *America's Next Top Model*,…*Big Brother*, too. That's another thing I used to watch a lot… I like award shows. I like reality shows.

Based on her statement, her preference was not for reality shows in general, but for those that were competition-driven, those that were based on merit, as determined by others, and those that recognized the winners with rewards. Even Charlotte who loved news-based programs expressed similar sentiments when she said, "I'm a reality TV junky. Not all though, you know. I like *Survivor*, and *The Bachelor*, and *Big Brother*…" Katherine also claimed, "[My favorite show] is *American Idol* or *America's Next Top Model*, just because I associate with the whole thing of talent…it's exciting to me." Like

their Dominican counterpart, Charlotte's and Katherine's list of favorite reality shows exclusively comprised of those that emphasized optimum performance, hard-work, applying oneself, and the survival of the "best."

The plot and suspense of these programs are generally predicated on individualistic competition, separation from family units, antagonism among conflicting personalities, and the gradual elimination of players until only one champion remains (Frau-Meigs, 2006). These elements of the shows resemble aspects of the women's lives as immigrants, resonating with the lengthy separation from families and networks, subsequent feelings of loneliness and individualistic struggle, competition for jobs, and animosity from other groups that they have had to deal with.

Moreover, the shows thrived on the presumption that "ordinary" people, regardless of race, class, or ethnicity, and through hard-work, can achieve the ultimate American dream of financial success. This premise seemed to resonate with many of the women in the study who exhibited a similar attitude towards their lives in New York City. For example, Katherine said:

> You really just have to get on task… it's so fast-paced that you really have to get up and try to get something for yourself. I guess you can just sit back and wait for the State, or whatever to give it to you, but that's not why you moved 100, 000 miles away to just wait. You came here to do something with yourself. So, you just have to be organized, wanna do something.

Her comment implied that newcomers were able to better themselves, even in the fast-paced milieu of New York City, but they had to be determined, and proactively claim it. By saying that one had to "get" something for themselves, Katherine suggested that resources were abundant and accessible, and could be achieved through hard-work. Furthermore, in her paradigm of success, depending on the government was indicative of

slothfulness and passivity, and there was no acknowledgement of structural or ideological impediments. Katherine thus believed that a successful life in New York City could be attained through the aggressive pursuit of what one wanted, a perception that echoed the "American dream" ideology that has found prolific expression in reality game shows.

The ideology of competition and success that propel these shows particularly resonated with the women's lives as West Indians in America. Like the premise of these reality game shows, the women generally predicated their identity on being able to perform better than, and therefore excel above, American natives. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, these women prided themselves on being exceptional workers, students and parents, characteristics that they deployed to differentiate themselves from, and claim superiority to, both black and white Americans. These reality shows that put a premium on excelling echoed their competitive identity in the U.S., and, in turn, attracted these women who built their identity on competition. In other words, their engagement with reality game shows was informed by, and reflective of, their diasporic identity as West Indian immigrants.

Furthermore, as Paddy Scannell (2002) noted, by watching *Big Brother* - and, by extension, reality shows based on the same premise of competition and elimination - people learn over the course of the competition who "has what it takes" to triumph in the specified arena, and, in essence, become experts. Engagement with competitive reality programs may thus be perceived as productive, contributing to the production of the next top model, or the next idol, or just witnessing their rise to fame. Many viewers do not or are unable to actually determine the winner, but, nevertheless, the audience can still feel and act like judges while they are watching the programs and even in non-mediated

moments. As opposed to being simply viewers, then, they can perceive themselves as functioning in the more constructive and honorable roles as adjudicators and supporters.

West Indian women's preference for television programs of this nature may be related to the feelings of productivity engendered by the programs, a sense of not wasting time. A few of the reality game shows devotees in my study actually inherently conceived of themselves as judges. For instance, Barbara actually voted for her chosen *American Idol* contestant, the only respondent who said she did. Also, Wilma was upset when her favorite on *American Idol* was "voted off," undoubtedly because she determined that this candidate should have been crowned the idol of that particular season. Analogously, Charlotte said that she watched shows like *The Bachelor* to see "women making fools of themselves on national TV" to win the heart of a man. While she did not claim to be able to identify a partner for the bachelor, she did implicitly establish herself as being of superior character, and thus able to judge acceptable - and wife-worthy - behavior.

Other women did not necessarily establish themselves as judges, but it was apparent that many thought that reality game shows were constructive programs. For example, by using the analogy of a concert in reference to *American Idol*, Cassie implicitly likened this program unto a cultured event, making engagement with it the equivalent of attending singing-oriented performances. Thus, unlike what she called "stupid" and unsophisticated reality shows, interacting with *American Idol* was actually valuable. Furthermore, Cassie added, "It's like you pick someone and you kinda root for them…," indicating that, rather than simply watching the program, she actively participated in supporting a candidate, even if she never voted.

To further emphasize the meaningful nature of this engagement with *American Idol*, and as evidence that she was not participating in some trivial pursuit, Cassie also said, “They are very talented people, even the ones that get kicked out.” In other words, by virtue of the exceptional aptitude of the contestants, her engagement with *American Idol* was not simply a waste of time, but functioned as exposure to true talent.

Katherine, the university student who listed *American Idol* as one of her favorite shows, also highlighted the talent of the contestants in justification of her engagement with such programs. As her preceding statement demonstrated, it was the “whole thing of talent” that attracted her to *American Idol* and *America's Next Top Model*. Furthermore, after sharing that she tended to support the black contestants, she quickly added, “It really doesn't matter their race; it's about the talent.” Whatever the actual reason for her choices, it was clear that she did not want her engagement with *American Idol* to be interpreted as petty partisanship, but as the support of true talent. Katherine also stated that she was attracted to *American Idol* because she was “musically inclined,” and had an appreciation for all types of music. She thus presented herself as a music-enthusiast, and solidified *American Idol*, by virtue of its ability to attract someone with her level of love for music, as sensible programming.

These participants' engagement with relatively productive reality game shows reflected the identity of superiority that they claimed in the U.S., and their ideology that hard-work results in fulfilled dreams. In this sense then, their engagement with reality game shows contributed to the construction of their subjectivities in the U.S., reflecting and facilitating their self-expression as hard-working, industrious women.

"Our Reality" TV

While engagement with reality game shows was prevalent among the participants, it was reality of a different kind that attracted the respondents to narrative-based shows. Despite their diverse diet of television dramas and comedies, many of the participants in the study seemed to obtain most pleasure from shows that resonated with them. More precisely, they seemed drawn to shows that portrayed experiences that reflected some aspect of their present and/or past lives. According to Wilma, who loved the *Law and Order* series,

> *SVU* [*Law and Order, Special Victims Unit*], it reaches home, but it is more heartfelt related, and they investigate sex crimes: rape, sexual abuse to minors, Internet porn, predators, and things like that. I like *Law and Order* because I think it's interesting the different episodes, and I guess it is real life with art or art with life because some of the things that happen on the show it really happen. I could say that I read this or I saw it in the news, so even though it is fictional, many times it is things that have happened.

In spite of its fictitious nature, for Wilma, *Law and Order* was able to "reach home," and generate emotional identification, most likely on the level of gender, or motherhood, as she was the mother of a three-month-old daughter.

Similarly, Charlotte, who enjoyed investigative news shows, said she watched them because, "They always have those investigative reports…I just get intrigued with those things. I don't know if it's because I'm a paralegal by profession." In her island home of St. Lucia, Charlotte, who was currently employed as a nanny, trained and practiced as a paralegal before migrating to the U.S. to "make more money." She implied that her past profession, her pre-migration career experiences, informed her current attraction to, and love of, investigative television shows. In turn, these programs created a space in which she could reclaim expertise and status in a place where she experienced

downward mobility. In this sense then, Charlotte's desire to engage with "investigative" programs may also be an attempt to connect with a part of her life that she had lost when she emigrated to the U.S.

Her counterpart from Guyana, Cassie, explicitly associated her television choices with a nostalgic memory of times past. She said,

> Some of the stuff actually reminds me of when I was a kid. Although we weren't fighting ghosts or anything, but just the relationships with the teenagers, the stuff that they have sometimes reminds me of that…Like the Buffy for example…[S]he had two best friends, one girl, one boy. The relationship that they had reminds me of me and my friends where they got your back no matter what…It's like you fight, you sarcastic, and you throw things at each other and verbal [wars] and back and forth and very sarcastic…but then I could be telling you, "Oh please; your hair looks like a mess," … and somebody else want to come and tell you the same thing and I want to smash their face in…[T]hat kind of relationship.

Her reading of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* resonated with her memory of the ideal friendships that characterized her younger, pre-migration experiences, and helped to cultivate an enduring relationship with the text. Cassie's statement was also indicative of her longing for times past. Her relationship to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was expressive of her nostalgia, and provided a means of reliving what she considered happy times.

Katherine also spoke of her decision to engage with programs such as *CSI*, *ER*, and *American Idol* in similar terms. She stated,

> The reason I think we like shows is because there's always something you can relate to on the show, and especially where I'm from, a lot of those shows I watch now were shows that I did watch back there…so they weren't really like new shows.

Her statement was indicative of the "mediascapes" (Appadurai, 1993) that rendered the notion of completely discrete media environments obsolete, and was illustrative of the relationship between the selection of television shows and the participants' past

experiences. Interacting with the same programs she watched in Barbados created an extra-textual point of identification; the familiarity she developed with the shows by watching them "back there," and the continuity created by perpetuating viewership in the face of the disruption caused by migration, made the shows appealing.

The influence of pre-migration life on present television interaction was also prominent in Andrea's statement. She had only been in the U.S. for nine months, and had an affinity for shows, such as *Sanford and Son* and *Golden Girls*, that was influenced by her lifestyle back home. She said,

> I guess is because of my mom, cause she was the leader of the house; she was the person in charge, so when she puts on her television, and that's what she's watching we didn't have any choice, but to look at the same thing. *Golden Girls* has always been there, and *Sanford and Son*…

In other words, the fact that she lived in a household with one television that was controlled by her mother influenced her current engagement habits in the U.S. She was still an avid viewer of *Sanford and Son,* which she watched on a non-network channel. She therefore constructed a relationship with mainstream U.S. television programs on the basis of pre-migration viewing habits. This phenomenon demonstrated that the dominance of U.S. television fare in the global market may have the unexpected "benefit" of giving immigrants to the U.S. some continuity in the face of disruption, and providing implicit connections to their homelands.

In general, these quotes demonstrated that the women used their lives, past and present, to inform what they chose to watch on television, and, subsequently, how they derived pleasure from texts. Perhaps these women's mode of engagement with mainstream television content was catalyzed by their "symbolical annihilation" (Tuchman, 1978) by mainstream television which rarely and inaccurately depicts West

Indians and their culture (Du Bois, 2004; Vickerman, 1999). The absence of themselves and the limited possibilities for cultural identification compelled them to derive pleasure through other means, namely through engaging with programs and characters that reflect some aspects of their past or present lives. Whatever the reason, using their lives as the selection criteria for television programs, the women validated their lived experiences; rather than suppressing old memories and new experiences in concession to an industry that undermined their existence and circumstances, they employed television content to keep them connected to their experiences back home and in the U.S. Such interaction with mainstream television thus helped to reinforce and preserve their relationship to the lives they left in the islands, and the lives they now lived as diasporic subjects.

Interestingly, by proliferating ethnocentric and "othering" depictions of West Indians, the television industry unwittingly participated in strengthening these women's connection to their homelands, pushing them further into themselves, and negating their complete transformation into American cultural citizens. This assertion problematizes the mainstreaming pattern explicated in cultivation theory, demonstrating that, rather than catalyzing the convergence of audience perceptions toward commonality (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980, 1994), consistent exposure to dominant television content may repel immigrant audiences.

Constructing Community

In most cases, the women reported watching their favorite shows alone, but discussed them with their relatives or West Indian friends, using mainstream television programs to create and solidify relationships with members of the West Indian

community. Charlotte said,

> If we watching *Survivor* and *Big Brother*, [I get on the phone] with my [Trinidadian] friend because she watches those things. She says, "What happen to this woman?" "What happen to so and so?" We talk back and forth about those things.

Her favorite reality game shows therefore cultivated an area of identification and a basis for her inter-island friendship with a Trinidadian, a fellow West Indian. Cassie, the fan of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* spoke analogously about her non-mediated experiences with her favorite show. She said,

> Me and my sisters used to watch it. My sister is 7 years older than me…and we would talk. She's in Seattle…It was like…have you ever seen those women that live in soap operas? It becomes kind of their life? I'm not that bad, but it's like we discuss the show like it actually is [real]. For example, "This is Buffy from the time she started…She's 4 years old; you saw her grow up…that's not part of her character. She would not do something like that." That kind of thing. "O.k. the writers are screwing up now. Why are they gonna do that? Did they forget about this?"

Note that in her statement she disassociated herself from soap opera fans whose particular type of engagement with television texts was considered useless and unproductive. She highlighted instead her form of textual involvement that included more intellectually informed critiques of the writers and characters. She also implied that both she and her sister developed parasocial relationships (Horton & Wohl, 1956) with the characters of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a shared connection to the show that helped to bridge the generational and geographical gap that separated her from her sister. In other words, their mutual involvement in the life of Buffy and her friends fostered ties to each other, and created a means to nurture and strengthen their own relationship.

Similarly, Katherine, a fan of *American Idol* commented,

> I'll watch [*American Idol*], I'll get on the phone with my cousins or my friends, and we'll talk about it…You know you always have a favorite person. You don't

> talk while it's happening, but at the end you'll call them, and say, "Oh, did you see this?"…Those kind of things that connects you, like you see what other people like.

A significant part of her engagement with *American Idol* was frequent telephone conversations with her cousins or friends - who she earlier admitted were predominantly West Indian - in which she shared and received "readings" of what occurred in each segment, and learned "the favorites" of her fellow viewers. In this way, Katherine "connected" with, or got closer to her relatives and friends. Jamie also discussed *Desperate Housewives* within her social networks. She shared one such conversation, saying,

> I was talking to one of my friends [about *Desperate Housewives*], and I was talking about the one [played by] Terri Hatcher…that she is so stupid. In the episode when she took the mail out of the mailman's bag and instead of her putting it in a drawer, or in her pocket she puts it on the table, and her daughter comes, and…puts it in the mailman's bag so it got delivered. If that were me, I would shove it in my pocket, or hide it somewhere where no one could find it. She does really stupid things.

Within these post-consumption discussions, Jamie and her friend critiqued the actions of the characters, setting themselves up against what they saw. The shows then became a way for them to bond - through the voicing of similar opinions and criticisms - as well as a way for them to establish normative behavior for themselves and difference from the "Americans" they saw on television.

Given that the women discussed television content with other West Indians, these post-consumption dialogues appeared to underscore intra-community relationships rather than facilitate the forging of new ones with their American counterparts. These women already had little relationship with Americans, and such handling of mainstream television content reinforced ties within the community while further impeding

relationships between the community and Americans. Furthermore, the content of the conversations seemed more conducive to the reinforcement of West Indian values than to the propagation of American cultural norms. As illustrated in the preceding quotes, and in the responses of other participants, the women recounted the sequence of events that occurred on the shows, but also declared their favorites and least liked, and evaluated the actions of the characters or players, determining what was funny, what was fair, what was unacceptable, and what was moving. During conversations about these shows then, the women implicitly discussed their values, their moral codes and standards. Consequently, their exchanges about mainstream television shows seemed to refresh and reinforce West Indian cultural norms. Such an activity would certainly strengthen the women's connections to their homelands, and potentially alleviate some of the sense of loss that they had to contend with in New York City.

When Culture Was Not Important

For women who obsessively emphasized the maintenance of their cultural heritage in other aspects of their lives, the lack of concern for the preservation of their West Indian-ness in their discussions of engagement with American television was quite conspicuous. None of them selected television programs based on their perceived ability to accentuate and promote West Indian culture; none of them expressed concern about interacting with this major conduit of American culture, and the subsequent risk of Americanization.

The unproblematic way in which they interacted with U.S. television may be related to the fact that they were exposed to U.S. mainstream media, particularly

television, in their homeland. Because of the dominance of the U.S. in the global media market, and the underdevelopment of television industries in the former colonies, the women were able to partake of American television fare (from the classics *Dallas* and *Sanford and Son* to the contemporary *Days of Our Lives* and *WWW Smack-down*), rendering mainstream U.S. media familiar before the women even entered the country. In fact, many of the women stated that television and other media, coupled with the stories of relatives who had visited the country, shaped their expectations of the U.S. (its customs, the availability of opportunities and possible quality of life). These pre-migration moments of consumption may have facilitated the embedment of the texts in the women's everyday lives and consciousness. This presence fostered a level of comfort with the texts that carried over into the women's lives in the U.S., and diminished the texts' association with American culture in the mind of these participants. Globalization and the women's position as diasporic subjects may have thus rendered television and other media fare a-cultural and innocuous.

Another reason for the culturally detached manner in which the women discussed their television interactions may be related to their mode of consumption. As mentioned before, the participants tended to watch their favorite programs alone, and in their homes. In the seclusion and privacy of their homes, they may not feel compelled to continually perform, or be protective of their cultural identity as they have to in other, more public encounters with American society (such as with American co-workers, or with values that are in conflict with their own). While culture was a significant category of organization in more public interactions, the women seemed to relax their cultural guards

during mediated moments, facilitating identification with television characters on the basis of shared experiences rather than culture.

Conclusion

In this chapter I demonstrated how the television engagement of the first-generation West Indian immigrant women of my research study reflected and constituted their diasporic identity. I found that, while they watched a variety of television's offerings, the majority of them engaged with competitive reality shows. Such programming stressed the American values of individualistic ambition and hard-work, values that potentially informed the participants' claim of superiority, and reflected as well as facilitated their drive for a productive existence. In addition, I argued that their tendency to use their present and past lives as selection criteria for television programs, as well as their post-viewing discussions of shows, reinforced West Indian cultural norms, countering the mainstreaming effect of television, and alleviating the sense of loss they felt in the U.S.

Their engagement with mainstream television was then significant in their negotiation of U.S. culture and that of their homelands, and was facilitative of their culturally hybrid subjectivity. Television programs exposed them to American ways of being (such as the "American dream" ideology) while concurrently facilitated the reinforcement of their pre-migration values and tradition. This ambiguity fostered an identity characterized by what Dayal (1996) referred to as "shifting (self)-identifications and unpredictable alliances…all manners of collusions and complicities, and jockeyings

for power" (pp. 50).

Chapter Three
"I'm Dealing With It:" West Indian Women, Television and the Negotiation of Diasporic Space

Though their television engagement patterns discussed in Chapter Two divulged some attempt to cope with their new lives in the U.S., strategies of coping were more evident in the manner in which the women of the study presented themselves and their homelands. In this chapter, I explore an aspect of first-generation West Indian immigrant women's self-presentation - namely, their differentiation from American society - demonstrating how this oppositional positionality was in relation to *all* Americans (not just African Americans), and was deployed to mitigate, or contend with their experiences as black immigrants from the West Indies residing in New York City.

Rather than the image of a culturally insulated community, or one in the process of assimilation, what emerged most noticeably from my interviews with first-generation West Indian immigrant women was a cultural identity predominantly characterized by the establishment of difference and moments of negotiation and shifting. These women seemed to interact with New York City as permanent foreigners and sojourners, resolutely holding their national and regional identities, and only minimally and strategically adapting to both black and white American culture. As discussed in the Introduction, many scholars have highlighted this oppositional and seemingly resilient cultural identity of this immigrant group, citing reasons of image management (Bennett Justus, 1983; Waters, 1999; Du Bois, 2000) and cultural visibility (Sutton & Makiesky-Barrow, 1987;

Basch, 1987) for their decision to segregate. While valid explanations, there are a few analytical oversights.

First, the authors do not take into account the poignancy of displacement that would impel these immigrants to construct such an identity in the U.S. Scholars have found that displaced peoples develop identities in response to the particular diasporic spaces that they occupy, in many cases as means of contending with the distress of the migration process. For instance, in her study of Senegalese men in southern Italy, Louise Zinn (1994) found that her respondents used the trope of world-traveling to describe their migratory experience, a move that allowed them to discuss their harsh circumstances as phases in the development of manhood, and the acquisition of international knowledge and experience. In doing so, the men justified to themselves that their migration was not in vain, even if they returned materially empty-handed to Senegal. They constructed these meanings around their lives in Italy with three “audiences” in mind: themselves, Italians and people in their homeland (Louise Zinn, 1994).

Analogously, Gadi Ben-Ezer (1994) reported that Ethiopian Jews imbued their migration to Israel with religious significance. Though marginalization and persecution prompted them to leave Ethiopia, they attributed the time of departure to the time being “right,” as decided by God. They also drew parallels between the hardships of their actual migration and what the Children of Israel endured in their journey to the Promised Land, a process which God used to purge the unrighteous. The Ethiopian’s perceived their successful entrance into Israel as a sign of their righteousness and deservedness to enter their promised land (Ben-Ezer, 1994).

Within their communities then, immigrants told stories to themselves and others

about themselves in order to deal with the loss (of land of origin, social status, references, and meanings) experienced in the migration process, and the adjustments they have to make to facilitate successfully building a new life in a new country. I believe that first-generation West Indian immigrant women engaged in similar discursive works, constructing narratives about their identities to contend with their changing lives in the U.S. Thus, I seek to introduce the notion of loss and recovery into discussions of West Indian immigrants' experiences in the U.S., challenging the self-regarding and race-centered interpretations in extant literature.

Furthermore, and as discussed in Chapter One, the influence of media has not been given significant treatment in extant literature on the production of West Indian identity in the U.S., understating the indicative and constitutive work of media (particularly television) in helping West Indians cope with their new lives as immigrants.

In this chapter, I argue that first-generation West Indian immigrant women's identity formation in New York City was less about self-promotion and image-construction, and more related to contending with cultural loss and pain. In other words, I believe that their differentiation from American society was a strategy deployed to minimize the distress of adaptation to the lifestyle of New York City, and to avert the repression of what they considered an essential and authentic part of their identities. Furthermore, their engagement with mainstream television texts - comprehensively defined as what they watched, how they watched it and how they engaged with it in post-consumption moments - was expressive and facilitative of these maneuvers. More precisely, I demonstrate how the oppositional identity constructed by first-generation West Indian immigrant women was a means of dealing with the various disappointments,

disadvantages and discriminations that they faced in New York City, and how their engagement with mainstream television texts reflected and informed these self-preservative representations. In doing so, I highlight the significance of engagement with mainstream U.S. media in the development and expression of coping mechanisms among diasporic peoples.

These assertions are based on information garnered from the in-depth interviews of the 12 first-generation immigrant women introduced in Chapter Two. These women are Andrea, Barbara, Cassie, Charlotte, Donna, Evelyn, Jamie, Katherine, Lily, Margerie, Wilma, and Winnie.[21]

West Indian Women's Strategic Self-Presentation and Television Engagement

Narratives of Superiority

The women of the study employed information garnered from television to claim superiority over Americans, constructing images of their Anglo and African American counterparts that recuperated the portrayal of these groups in mainstream television. While conceding that the U.S. had a better economy, or "stronger dollar," the women found American values deficient and lacking compared to those cultivated in their islands, particularly as related to education, discipline and work ethic.

These women thought the prominence of education in their culture engendered students who were more focused and dedicated than African Americans and white Americans. According to Wilma, who had to work as a full-time waitress to pay her tuition,

[21] For a more detailed description of the respondents that informed this analysis, see pages 65 and 66.

> Americans here have everything; they get to go to school at any age. They can get financial aid and go to school for free, yet they won't. And the Dominicans I know are very goal-driven because education is so important to them.

Her statement contended that, unlike her people for whom erudition was tantamount, Americans squandered their educational privileges, neglecting to avail themselves of the myriad academic opportunities in the U.S., or failing to appreciate what was accessible to them. Her use of the word "Americans" in her statement was in reference to African Americans, which she made apparent later in her interview when she recounted her confrontation with a young African American who accused her of usurping the benefits of schooling in the U.S. while he himself neglected to go. Katherine implicitly concurred with her counterpart, commenting that,

> I know I'm here to go to school, but there are so many other things, so many parties you could go to, so many other things you can get involved in that could pull you away from that…Just coming from where you're from, and being raised the way you're raised, I think kinda [make you steady].

Katherine felt that her heritage equipped her to remain focused in spite of the distractions present in New York City, diversions that she thought may and do cause people with lesser tenacity to deviate from their goals. Later in her interview she stated that Americans in general "partied all the time," to the detriment of their academic goals, revealing exactly who she thought were the corruptible students.

The women were also convinced that people raised in the West Indies or by West Indian parents were more disciplined than their American counterparts, knowing how to conduct themselves in public, and showing appropriate respect to everyone. In response to my question about the types of values that characterize Americans, Charlotte quipped,

> Are there any values in America? Really. I mean take for example the way Americans discipline their kids. You would see like a five-year-old yelling at their mother to shut up, or the parent would ask them to do something and they

> wouldn't do it. I couldn't dare do that in St. Lucia, or any island for that matter. Once you're West Indian…And it really annoys me; it pisses me off when I see children speaking back to their mother. I'm 36, you understand, I live on my own, I'm married, and I am so careful what I say to my mother, you understand, because of the level of respect I have for my mother.

Her irritation was directed towards some African Americans, but mostly towards upper middle class white Americans with whom she interacted on her job as a nanny. She claimed that they made excuses for their children (such as, "He's only five, you know," or "She's a teenager; what do you expect?") instead of punishing their bad behavior. Her statement was thus an inherent critique of the disciplining capabilities of white Americans, implying that it was their deficient parenting that created unruly and substandard children. She thought that West Indians, on the other hand, cultivated manner-able and disciplined offspring. In other words, she suggested that West Indians were better mothers and parents, and thus raised outstanding children.

Margerie expressed this sentiment more overtly. She said,

> I take care of two little kids, and I teach them the same thing that I was taught. So the older boy he goes out, and everybody sees him, and they see me. They like, "Margerie, what did you do to this child? I mean he is so different." I mean, he has friends coming over, they look at me in my eye…they don't even greet me or say, "Hi" or anything. He's not like that…He meet their parents, "Hi Mrs. so and so, and Mr. so and so," and "Nice to meet you." If my friend come over too, he shake their hand.

Like Charlotte, Margerie worked as a nanny taking care of upper middle class white American boys. She believed that it was only through her association with them that her wards could develop appropriate respect; she passed on to them what she was taught in Dominica, and thus cultivated respectful and disciplined children, even if they were from another race. The fact that the white neighbors noticed that the older one was different from other white American boys suggested to her that he had acquired traits that were

unfamiliar to that community. Furthermore, their inquiry about the techniques that she used to produce such behavior seemed to indicate to her that such capabilities eluded her white counterparts; she believed that she had a trait that they lacked. In her opinion then, the problem was not with the children who, under the right guidance, could be molded; it was the fault of incompetent parents. In her eyes, the contrast between the behavior of her ward and that of the white boys who showed her no respect proved that her West Indian heritage made her a better parent than white mothers, who, being products of the American culture, were destined to raise unpolished children. Not greeting her, and neglecting to acknowledge her presence might have been indicative of racism and classism on the parts of her ward's friends, but Margerie interpreted these behaviors as the manifestation of bad upbringing and deficient mothering, and used this experience to claim superiority over white Americans.

Likewise, the women alleged that, having had to work all their lives, they were better and harder workers - meaning able to do better quality work, but also willing to do menial jobs, and work longer hours without complaining - compared to African Americans who they thought were too hasty to accept welfare. Jamie had this to say about African Americans:

> One experience that I had was that they said that these Jamaicans they come here and they take away [African Americans'] jobs. My response to that was if you wanted the jobs we wouldn't be able to come here and get any. So what does that say about you? You don't want to work and we want to work so we work six jobs.

Having six jobs may have been an exaggeration, informed by media's depiction of West Indians as holding many jobs, but it was illustrative of her point. For her, the fact that Jamaicans were able to get the jobs of African Americans was a demonstration of the

latter's laziness, particularly when compared to West Indians who were theoretically willing to hold six. Cassie, while reluctant to make generalizations, also stated that,

> I'm thinking right now of two American black women that were actually born in the north up here. One I end up firing because she was not doing her job, and I'm very good - at least I think so - about telling people this is your responsibility and teaching them how to do it…If you know how to do your job, I'm gonna leave you alone. Do your job! It's like you have to write people up…So go through this stuff with this person, and they just not doing their job…I actually found that after I terminated her that she caught in drugs, back in drugs.

This experience reaffirmed Cassie's belief that the African American women she encountered in New York City were deficient in character and self-will, a lack that she felt was manifested in bad work ethic and drug-use. Donna also said,

> From what I've seen, there's a huge difference where work ethic is concerned. I think we take so much pride in ourselves that we'll have second thoughts when it comes to going on certain welfare programs or just [government checks] or anything like that, and it's the first thing jump into their mind, as far as I am concerned. I have a sister-in-law who is African American, or black American and that's her thing. "I can't find a job. Oh, I think I'm gonna do this." You're not even looking for a job. Just the whole work ethic I realize it's different. We've always worked, in one way or another. West Indians, from my experience, have always been working, always been expected to work.

Donna, who spoke candidly about her own financial struggles, implied that she would not consider government aid, and, if she did, only as a last resort. Being employed was a proud part of her identity, a trait that she thought was inherently lacking in African Americans. Her statement suggested that, based on her experience with her sister-in-law, African Americans could find jobs if they searched, but they were unwilling to do so.

Equally vexing for her was the lack of work ethic among white Americans. She asserted,

> The most experience I've had with white people are white Jewish people who come from money, and to me there's no [similarity between us] because they don't have to necessarily work. Their parents already work and have stuff provided for them to do their education and then from there they start their own

> life. And I realize that coming from Jamaica I have to work to pay my way through school.

In other words, in her estimation, white Americans were always already privileged, and did not have to hold jobs. While her tone indicated her resentment toward this group of wealthy white Americans, she did not perceive them as better than their African American counterparts where work ethic was concerned; she felt that white Americans' economic privilege made good work ethic just as foreign to them as it was to African Americans. She seemed to believe that only she and her people, who were always expected to work and who had to work for their goals, knew what it meant to work hard. In her opinion, then, neither the indolent black Americans, nor the advantaged white Americans placed the appropriate importance on work.

Margerie also thought that her work ethics differed from those of white Americans. She said,

> Because of the job that I do, that's how I get to interact with [white women] so most of them are mothers who doesn't work. The husband taking care of stuff, so they home…As far as independent, they depend on their husbands, I don't; I depend on me, even if I have a husband…I take care of my own.

She did not interpret the situation from a socio-economic perspective, seeing her employer's ability to stay home as reflective of the high income status of a household that did not need two incomes to sustain it, thus making the wife's employment optional. Rather, Margerie perceived her employer's decision to stay home and concede financial responsibility for the home to her husband as the absence of gainful employment, and the dependence on another. For her, a woman from a people who presented themselves as hard-workers, staying home instead of working was indicative of passivity and weakness. She claimed difference from her white counterparts on this ground: She worked, and,

beyond that, *desired* to work, while white American women were content to be cared for. The self-proclaimed work ethic of the women in the study thus made them superior to black Americans, more passionate than whites, and different from both.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the women's claim of superiority, and thus their competitiveness, was perhaps informed by the ideology of competition and success that pervaded the competitive reality shows that many of them enjoyed. Furthermore, while some of the participants' impression of American blacks and whites were derived from a few personal interactions with members of these groups, their limited experience and contact with either group indicated that the material used in the construction of their perception was gathered through indirect means, most notably, the media. In fact, the participants' conception of Anglo and African Americans conspicuously reflect the image of these groups propagated by mainstream television. The black welfare queen, the party-loving college students, and the way that race is generally used as an indicator of class are ubiquitous in primetime news and series, which they admitted to watching extensively. The women then in part cast themselves against what they saw on television, and, rather than creating American subjects, television texts gave these women the material necessary to set themselves up against what they perceived as American lifestyles. In doing so, they claimed superiority over Americans in their own country, demonstrating that far from being passive, the "'margins' do imagine and construct the 'mainstream' in order to assert superiority over it" (Espiritu, 2001, pp. 416).

Furthermore, their contradictory denigration of mainstream television reflected their perception of superior difference. Similar to Grixti's (2006) and Strelitz's (2002) studies, West Indian women in my research used reports of infrequent television

engagement to reflect and substantiate their identity as hard-working, disciplined and education-oriented. Most of the women, when asked about their television viewing habits, responded dismissively. For instance, Margerie immediately followed her confession that she had not missed an episode of *American Idol* with this statement:

> I'm not a big TV person though. Sometimes, actually, I'm at home, if I'm home alone the TV would be off for the whole time…I'd be in my bed, and I won't even turn the TV on. I'm not a big TV person. During the day, if I have time, I will still watch *Young and the Restless*, but it's really not all that important for me.

Similarly, Donna, who admitted to watching the medical drama *Grey's Anatomy* every Sunday night, exclaimed with pleasure,

> I can't remember the last time I watched TV…I'm not a chain watcher where I have to keep up with watching every week. If I have the time, I'll sit and watch it.

Katherine, who confessed her love for crime and hospital-oriented shows, such as *ER* and *CSI,* and who could name all the contestants of *American Idol*, claimed, "I haven't been watching a lot of television lately, because school has [kept me busy]."

According to these responses, neither of these women spent a lot of time engaging with television, demonstrating the medium's relative insignificance in their everyday lives. Furthermore, television engagement in general was spoken of as an activity that stifled and stunted valuable and fruitful pursuits, as this comment by Cassie explicitly illustrated:

> I don't wanna be prejudice, but I think that because we didn't have television we were a lot more creative and a lot more active…I remember me and my brothers and my friends making things…You come up with imaginative ways of having fun. And I remember in Toronto when I was watching my nephew, he was like four at the time. I don't remember what I did at four, but he was watching TV. My brother got him some toy that was advertised on TV, and he was playing with it, and he was doing exactly what the kid did on television. Sometimes I think the TV, when you start that young, kind of takes away from your creativity.

Cassie's remark was indicative of the third person effect of media (Davison, 1983), and presented television in general as an unproductive use of time.

Their extensive discussion of favorite shows belied their statements of indifference and malevolence towards television, however, indicating that they did partake of televised fare, and suggesting that they deliberately verbalized rejection of the medium to communicate a particular point. Perceived as inhibiting resourcefulness, competing with time needed to study, and an unnecessary part of daily activities, admission of extensive television consumption would be a contradiction of the identity they sought to create, and therefore had to be dismissed when inquires were made about it. As further substantiation for this point, and as discussed in Chapter Two, the majority of them enjoyed competitive reality shows that allowed them to be judges, and that facilitated interaction with television in what they perceived as a more industrious manner. Their dismissal of television engagement in general as unproductive, and their involvement with more constructive reality game shows, thus served to solidify their identity as hardworking, disciplined, focused, and goal-oriented.

Employing television content and viewing habits, the women in the study established difference from both black and white Americans, constructing an identity that they felt was superior to their U.S.-born counterparts. I believe that such an identity was necessary to deal with the derision and marginalization meted out to West Indians in New York City. Such discrimination included ethnocentric attitudes, those epitomized by Wilma's account of her confrontations with African American colleagues:

> While I was a supervisor…this one African American guy said to me, "Before you came here you didn't know what Levis jeans were."… I was like, "What kind of ignorance was that?" He thought that me being here was the first time that I got to see clothes and shoes and know what food is. I thought that was so ignorant. I

> was better off back home than he is here. This one other guy asked, "Do you live in a hut?" He thought that I lived in a hut!…All these stupid comments like, "Do you have TV back there?" I'm like, "Does he even read?"

She was offended and piqued by their implications that she was primitive because she lived in the West Indies, their assumption that coming to the U.S. was an upwardly mobile move, and that Americans were therefore superior. Her sister, Lily, similarly commented on African American ethnocentrism. She said, "In terms of [African American women's] black consciousness, I think that they think of themselves as superior to us, to blacks in the Caribbean. They look at us as if we don't know what they know."

Others expressed their struggle with the attitudes of white Americans, one of the most poignant coming from Charlotte, the former paralegal currently employed as a nanny. She shared,

> Some will say "Hi" to you and "How's the little boy doing?" and "How are you doing?" and others will just totally disregard you. They will look right through you like you transparent or something…Some parents, some people they feel that they superior to you because of the color of their skin. Like even when they would call the house, and they would answer the phone, give me a message, some of them would not choose to give me a message, and tell me if I could hang up and they'll back and let the answering machine pick up, or if they calling out something for me, they want me to repeat.

Charlotte was describing her interactions with her white employers and their counterparts, relating the effect of the intersection of class and race on her experiences as a black child-care worker in a white, upper middle class environment.

As black women from the "third world" entering the U.S., and having to contend with ethnocentrism, classism and racism, these women needed to create an affirming identity to help them to survive in this milieu; they had to tell the narrative of superiority about themselves to themselves and others in order to deal with the prejudices they faced.

General engagement with television and its content aided in the formation of these narratives.

Paradise Home

Beyond claiming incomparable values and morals, however, the women in the study conceived of their islands of origin as the absolute converse of their diasporic space, an equation in which America emerged as the antithesis of the West Indies, embodying the negative version of experiences in the islands. What emerged was therefore the narrative of a better homeland, one informed by representations of their actual islands on television.

In response to an inquiry about how her life in the U.S. was different from her life in Dominica, Margerie stated:

> Number one, here it's all about bills, you have to pay bills. Down there you just free, you know. When I was [there] I had my mom, my father, you know; it was cool. Now, it's me. I gotta do everything for me now, you know.

Margerie constructed Dominica as a nation characterized by abundant leisure and rest, a stark contrast to her current life in New York City, which was consumed with attending to expenses, and, subsequently, constantly working. Furthermore, in Dominica, she felt that she could rely on her family for support, unlike in New York City where she was forced to be self-reliant and autonomous. Similarly, Donna said:

> The thing that stood out to me was the fact that there were homeless people…There were [homeless people in Jamaica], but I don't think there were so many. I think occasionally you might see one guy on the side of the street, and you know he must be insane, or something is wrong with him mentally. But then I came here, and I realized that so many smart people are living on the street, and it's not a matter of being insane why you're on the street, it's money. And for some reason money didn't play such a huge role back home.

Donna seemed to conceive of her island of origin as a place where the lack of money did not result in destitution, implying that wealth was not an important determinant of quality of life, and that even the very poor (providing the absence of mental illness) had hope. On the other hand, for her, the U.S. economy, propelled by money, was cruel and unforgiving even to the best.

Furthermore, some of the participants thought that New York City was not conducive to raising healthy children. Cassie, for whom the U.S. was her fourth country of residence, said this about Brooklyn:

> They had a couple of trees, but it was too concrete for me. My niece lived in the other apartment above us, and when I moved here she must have been five or six. She couldn't ride her bike unless we were out there…I grew up riding around the neighborhood. Even in Toronto, you could do whatever. Kids play hockey in the street and basketball, and all that stuff…so it was really different here. It was very different. The feeling of safety, and worrying about watching the kids; they can't have any freedom, and they have to play on concrete.

Compared to Guyana, Montserrat and Canada, life in New York City, as she saw it, was restrictive and dangerous, and she worried that the children of her family were being deprived of the natural childhood she experienced outside of the U.S. Her statement implicitly stated that even children with exposure to a non-American way of life were in danger of becoming deficient adults if brought up in this environment.

Through descriptions such as these, the West Indies emerged as virtuous paradises that fostered a leisurely, convivial atmosphere that could not be found, or replicated in New York City; it was the anti-New York City. These reports conflicted with the harsh realities of living in countries trying to deal with the legacies of imperialism, nations troubled by high crime and corruption, and ever growing poverty, conditions which probably brought many of the participants to the U.S. Moreover, as

discussed in Chapter Two, most had no intentions of returning to their island homes, which many confessed had changed considerably. Nevertheless, the general narrative of an idyllic homeland was prolific.

Interestingly, the conception of home that they presented approximated the perception of life in the Caribbean that exists within U.S. ideology, and that is disseminated by mainstream television. Such descriptions include a life oft stereotyped as hospitable and fun-loving, the ecological embodiment of “no problem, mon.” Epitomized in mainstream television by commercials displaying the bright and colorful life of the West Indies, these images construct an “Othered” place of white sand beaches, aquamarine waters, and lush mountains designed predominantly to give pleasure and escape from the “normal,” productive life of the U.S. Du Bois (2004) provided evidence of this exoticized portrayal in her analysis of advertising in the Chesapeake area, arguing that the West Indies were overwhelmingly marketed to Americans as carefree and leisurely, miles away from the rationality of U.S. life.

Tourism for the islands, as well as promotions for individual resorts, have also projected the mantra of an uncomplicated existence to characterize their nations to audiences abroad, marketing their islands as a compilation of warm weather (indicative of lots of leisure) and warm people who seem to exist to cater to the foreign vacationer. Implicit within this idea of unspoiled paradise, however, is the assumption and expectation of dull-wittedness, servitude and childishness from people in this region. In spite of these stereotypes, West Indian women seem to appropriate the image of paradise and difference associated with the West Indies in American mediated discourses to inform their own conception of home and culture. Such television-informed conceptions of their

homelands disassociated them from, and seemingly made them superior to, America and Americans.

While these women's adaptation of their mediated representation signify the successful hailing and placements of subjects into the existing U.S. hegemony, other elements of their discussions complicate this analysis. First, the women shared many fond memories of growing up in the West Indies, of living in beautiful, tropical countries, and of the traditions practiced there, indicating that the construction of their islands of origin were at least partially grounded in actual experiences. Moreover, as mentioned before, they do experience the restful, idyllic islands of the American imagination, because they return as visitors - or "farinas," as they are referred to by the "locals" - and are treated with deference because of their perceived relation to the U.S. Therefore, I believe they were not deluded, but were engaging in the practice of "re-memory" (as discussed by Barbara Christian, 1990), in which they deliberately privileged positive recollections of their homelands over others, resulting in them putting great value on their lives in the West Indies. These purposeful recollections were reverberated and amplified by media discourses about their islands, affirming their memories, and fostering connections to their homelands - or at least an aspect of them – that ultimately set them apart from Americans who embrace the U.S. as their home.

Most importantly, the women in the study needed such an image of home to help them to survive in American society, and to deal with the space they occupied in New York City. For these women, relocating to New York City meant contending with a change in environment, isolation and loneliness, anxiety about employment, and the threat of insufficient funds. Others mentioned dealing with menial jobs that were beneath

their educational capacity, and settling for previously unacceptable living arrangements. The most poignant account of adjustment to life in New York City was rendered by Donna. In response to an inquiry about how she was adjusting to the U.S., she said,

> I just moved into a basement apartment, and for a couple of weeks I didn't stay here, cause I've never lived in a basement before, and it's not my idea of somewhere where somebody should live. But hey, it's affordability… I lived in a six bedroom house…Nice big house, huge kitchen, good space, lots of land outside, lots of yard space, fruit trees everywhere… I'm stressed out, I'm tired, I'm depressed…I don't think I am coping with it very well. But it's just almost as if you doing what you have to do…just can't wait for it to be done to go back.

Donna's despondency communicated the loss, sadness and hopelessness that hovered beneath the surface of the responses of most of the women, and was indicative of some of the emotions that unacceptable living standards produced. Evelyn also candidly shared her impression of her neighborhood. She said,

> I just came from downtown Brooklyn, like the Park Slope area, and we were walking around, and we were shopping… my daughter and I, and when we left from there and got [to our neighborhood] I said, (sighs) "Do you feel a difference?" I said, "…It's so strange. It's not the buildings that are different; it's like the atmosphere." I can't breathe. I feel hot, and a few blocks back…I felt like (exhale of relief); you would see these white couples holding hands, and they would be sitting down having breakfast outside, and the farmers market, and you would see the shops, and everybody look so family-oriented, and the father's holding the child hand, and you feel like you wanna breathe…But now that I'm coming down here I'm just feeling so hot…it's very destructive…in this area.

Evelyn suggested that she had to live in an environment of anxiety, hopelessness, decay, and despair, a place that, while spatially close, was socio-economically distant from the wealthier, white neighborhoods that she visited. The condition of her community was one of the factors that led her into social work, so that she could attend to some of the needs of the people around her. However, this positive outcome did not negate the fact that this was her daily reality.

Through memory and television texts, the participants created a home that was

better than America and their current situations, a place that represented the possibility of escape. This conception of home helped them to deal with loss of preferences, norms and points of comfort, and functioned to give them hope in the face of disappointments and loss. Television content reinforced their memory of a happy homeland, and helped them to cope with these changes.

This assertion is substantiated by the fact that the women did not present a monolithic narrative of their homelands. Rather, the elements that comprised each image of home (such as the discipline, the warmth, the focus on community) varied depending on the speaker. In other words, while the theme of "West Indies as anti-New York City" was ubiquitous, the frame within which the narrative was told differed across respondents, and, furthermore, seemed to be informed by their current uneasiness in New York City. For instance, Barbara, the recently retired woman feeling isolated at home, spoke at length about the dearth of interactions among neighbors in New York City, a phenomenon she claimed would not happen in Barbados; Donna, who feared the unruliness of the students she was about to encounter in public schools, verbosely emphasized that Jamaicans were more disciplined; and Margerie who felt pressured by bills stressed that Dominican life was carefree and laid back.

Therefore, the women did not hold a fixed set of characteristics about their islands, and their peoples, but rather constructed a picture of home moment by moment as they moved through New York City. When they encountered aspects of the receiving nation that concerned, or displeased them, or that made them uncomfortable, they created "home," a place that was the opposite of their current situation, where they could theoretically obtain what they were denied in New York City, and where they were

comfortable. "Home" then was not necessarily the actual islands, but an idea of them, the place where they felt they belonged; this construction was ongoing and reactive to their situation and experiences in New York City, and was informed by mediated and non-mediated discourses.

Phenomenal Women[22]

The act of coping itself also became a narrative through which these women forged their identity in New York City, exhibiting their engagement with contemporary conceptions of black women in American society and television. Many of the participants spoke proudly about their adaptive capabilities, their ability to contend with adverse circumstances, and their ultimate triumph over situations. For example, Wilma beamed as she recounted how she overcame the hardships of working in a menial, low-paying job, and balancing work and school. She shared,

> I had to clean the toilet where people were pooping all day. I didn't want to come back there to work. I was devastated. I felt like crying…I worked there for five year where they opened seven stores, and I went from making $6.50 and I left making $28,000 a year, and I was only twenty-two because I worked my butt off… I was devoted. I kept saying that I came to this country for one thing. I came here to go to school and to work. I remember that I would be in class sleeping…I remember one day my eyes were like crossed. If I worked in the morning shift I went to school at night. I changed my shift around when I became a manager. I had to be there at four in the morning to beat the breakfast rush at six am…So to leave and take the train uptown to go to school I used to be so tired in class.

Wilma, who came from a middle class family in Dominica, prevailed over minimum wage, cleaning restrooms and a grueling schedule by being dedicated and hard-working. Her statement recuperated the mantra of good work ethic that pervaded the participants' identity in New York City, but it also functioned as a testament to her strength and

[22] This heading references the poem by Maya Angelou, *Phenomenal Woman,* (1978).

resilience. It required a very strong person to persevere through such circumstances, and accomplish her goals - she had obtained her degree, and was now living comfortably in Queens.

The participants who were currently facing difficult situations communicated similar resolve and resiliency. Charlotte, who as a nanny had been exposed to racism, classism and ethnocentrism, concluded her account of these experiences by saying, "Hey, this is America, eh? Is either you deal with the situation or you don't. I'm dealing with it; [it] don't bother me anymore." Similarly, Katherine said this about the racism and ethnocentrism that she encountered on her college campus: "I guess the best definition would be an issue, not a problem. It's not a problem." Both of these women took on a defiant attitude towards their circumstances, implying that they were capable of coping with discouraging situations, and were therefore not subjected to them.

By presenting themselves as hardworking, resilient and defiant, the women of the study reinforced the myth of the strong black woman that pervades American as well as West Indian cultural discourses. In her contemporary form, the strong black woman is "a motivated, hardworking breadwinner" who is "smart and sacrificial" with a "seemingly irrepressible spirit unbroken by a legacy of oppression, poverty, and rejection (Harris-Lacewell, 2001, pp. 3). She has the "ability to simply shake off or get past the formidable obstacles that face [her]" (Harris-Lacewell, 2001, pp. 6). According to Melissa Harris-Lacewell (2001), this superwoman is prolific in the American imagination, fueled by the lived experiences of black women - who seem to miraculously maintain their households in spite of poverty - as well as mainstream and popular African American media. Through television sitcoms such as *Girlfriends* and *The Parkers* -

which several of the women said they watched relatively frequently - and television personalities the likes of Oprah Winfrey, the symbol of the strong black woman has been rehearsed and venerated to the detriment of real women who are expected live up to their ideological foils (Harris- Lacewell, 2001). In spite of its problematic nature, and the psychological and physical risks it incurs, many of the women in my study appropriated the narrative of resiliency, incorporating it into their identity.

Their discourse of resiliency was fueled by an underlining determination borne specifically from their positions as voluntary immigrants. Many of the women expressed that during difficult moments they focused on the goals for which they migrated. For example, while she worked in the coffee shop for minimum wage, Wilma encouraged herself by saying, “My purpose was I came here to go to school so that really kept me going because this is not my life…working for whatever I was working for at that time.” To deal with the myriad distractions in New York City, Katherine also said, “I know I’m here to go to school…This is what I’m here to do. You can enjoy that stuff and be a part of it, but then you know what your goal is here.” Focusing on these objectives, the women told themselves that they were working towards their goals, the achievement of which took precedence over their immediate situations. Like the competitive game show contestants they liked to engage with, these women encouraged themselves to persevere, implicitly telling themselves that they could endure and overcome, and that the current circumstances were temporary. Such goal-oriented subjectivities, created by their voluntary migration to the U.S., thus fostered the strong black woman narrative.

Their deployment of this symbol was perhaps because of the absence of suitable alternatives. As Charlotte said, “Hey, this is America, eh? Is either you deal with the

situation or you don't." In other words, one could either contend with the circumstances that came with migrating to the U.S., or one could return to one's homeland. Given that the latter was not desirable, as discussed in Chapter Two, the women had to find ways to cope with "the situation" in their new home. One such way was to tell the narrative of resiliency to themselves in order to endure the myriad issues they faced in New York City. The superwoman ideology, prolific in U.S. society and mainstream television, therefore aided in the negotiation of their new diasporic space.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I asserted that the women's television engagement fostered the construction of an identity of superiority, and the creation of idyllic homelands, both of which were used to counter the discriminations and lowered social status they encountered in New York City. I also argued that their particular method of coping with New York City as well as the narrative of coping itself reinscribed the notion of the strong black woman prevalent in American society and television.

Resentments and disappointments pervaded the discussions with the participants, indicating that, while they were coping with their situations, they were not forgetting or forgiving. However, their claim to resiliency and superiority did not allow for protests, so only one participant overtly confessed that she was depressed, and not coping very well with her basement apartment. Therefore, the identity they negotiated recuperated stereotypes and engendered harmful attitudes towards and within themselves while it concurrently helped them to exist in New York City.

Chapter Four
"Accept Yourself and Dress Appropriately": Television and Strategic Selection among West Indian Women[23]

In Chapter Two I argued that mainstream U.S. television reflected as well as constituted the general self-presentation of the first-generation West Indian immigrant women in my study. In the current chapter, I explore television's influence on a specific aspect of this immigrant group's identity, namely their body politics. By "body politics" I mean the cultural and social discourses that inform and regulate the public presentations of their bodies. I examine how television informs, transforms and challenges the discourses about the body that West Indian immigrant women maintain in the U.S. More precisely, I elucidate how these immigrant women employ television texts to position themselves in relation to the hegemonic ideals of beauty, and how they challenge or are complicitous with these ideals in their own lives. Small focus groups with first-generation West Indian immigrant women revealed that the women negotiated with both American and West Indian body politics. They engaged in what I refer to as the *strategic selection* of elements from both sets of discourses so as to assuage insecurities with their real life bodies. Rather than creating an alternate discourse that moved away from a focus on body aesthetics, these participants constructed hybrid body politics, and reinforced emphasis on women's external image.

[23] I would like to thank Dr. Dara Greenwood for her helpful comments during the development of this chapter.

As discussed in Chapter One, beauty norms reflect and articulate a community's sense of itself, or its identity. Therefore, addressing the beauty ideologies of West Indian immigrant women in the U.S. contributes to our understanding of the construction of their diasporic identities. In addition, using diasporic women as its subject, this chapter is significant in addressing the media-informed body discourses of a population in the U.S. that is not Caucasian, but also not African American. It also debunks the misconceptions of body politics as singular and coherent, and demonstrates that, rather than creating an alternative to an emphasis on body size and shape, women's focus on inner beauty and character - or body ethics (Rubin, et al. 2003) - may actually serve to reinscribe and reinforce body ideals.

Body Discourse Research

Black Women and Hegemonic Body Ideals

Extant research shows that black women in general do not ascribe to the thin ideal of Anglo cultures (Flynn & Fitzgibbon, 1996; Thompson, Corwin, & Sargent, 1997; Lovejoy, 2001), and subsequently are not affected by cultural fare that disseminate this standard. For instance, through a survey of black and white females, Renee Botta (2000) found that, even though both groups reported watching the same amount of television, her white respondents displayed more symptoms of eating disorder behavior than their black counterparts. Similarly, Berrin Beasley (2000) found that images of black and white models of varying sizes did not produce any body-related anxieties in her black female subjects. More recently, Deborah Schooler, L. Monique Ward, Ann

Merriwhether, and Allison Caruthers (2004) showed that viewing mainstream television was associated with greater body anxiety among young white women, but was unrelated to black women's body image. Moreover, they found that viewing black-oriented programming was associated with more positive body image for black women. Thus, the research evidence to date suggests that black women are relatively resistant to the media-perpetuated standards of thinness that seem to distress their white peers.

In spite of these findings, however, black women, including those of West Indian heritage, often struggle with issues related to body size and weight (Cachelin, et al., 2000), albeit not those pervasively documented by media scholars in the U.S. (Kuba & Harris, 2001). In other words, body dissatisfaction among black women in general often goes unnoticed because it does not reflect the dominant obsession with a thin ideal body type. To accurately assess the body image disturbances of non-white populations then, it is important to examine the cultural and ethnic contexts in which they are produced, as well as the strategies these contexts provide to modulate dominant expectations of the body.

Rubin, Fitts, and Becker (2003) demonstrated the need for culturally and ethnically-specific explorations of body aesthetics in their study of the role of ethnic identity in the choice of strategies women use to present their bodies. Through information gathered from five focus groups with 18 African American women and Latinas, they found that, contrary to the orientation towards body aesthetics in dominant society, their participants emphasized "body ethics," specific "cultural values regarding the care and presentation of the body, as well as personal and political commitments" (pp. 55). They found that their respondents defined attractiveness in terms of respect and care

for one's body, and thus were less focused on attaining an ideal body, and more concerned with acceptance of the bodies they had (Rubin, et al. 2003). Rubin, et al. (2003) suggested that, because these women placed significance on facets of body presentation that were not endorsed by dominant society, the nature and expression of any concerns that they had with their bodies should be distinct from those described in extant literature on body image. Moreover, they argued that their participants' move away from a body-centered politics "provided alternative, often more positive ways of experiencing their bodies and cultural norms and practices," and moderated body dissatisfaction and eating disorders (Rubin, et al. 2003, pp. 55).

While an important and elucidating work, Rubin, et. al.'s (2003) presentation of body ethics as an alternative and primarily oppositional ideal may be overly optimistic. It overlooks how these women may be using the tropes of body ethics to procure inclusion into dominant discourses of beauty, and it undermines the subjectificating power of U.S. structures that encourage and often coerce conformity to mainstream ideals. While women of any cultural, racial and ethnic heritage have the agency to choose strategies of bodily representation that differ from those promoted within dominant society, it should not be assumed that this choice occurs without struggle with the hegemonic ideals, or that the resulting ideal is always empowering. In fact, the West Indian women that I spoke to developed a negotiated, rather than oppositional body ideal and politics, one that comprised of some resistive aspects, but that also had evidence of conformity to the mainstream ideal.

Negotiated Body Discourse

In recent years, body image research has supported the notion of a negotiated ideal. For example, J. Robyn Goodman (2002) used small focus groups to assess Anglo women's and Latinas' readings of the mediated ideal of thinness, and found that, rather than size and weight, both groups of women thought the toned, flab-free body of the dominant culture was ideal. In addition, both groups interpreted mediated images as unrealistic and "touched-up," views that helped them to resist the thinness ideal. However, she also found that media's depiction of thinness as guaranteeing social rewards (such as attention from men) made thin bodies desirable to her participants, and led to weight-controlling practices (Goodman, 2002).

Goodman (2002) argued that the Anglo women in her study felt that mediated images affected their self-worth/self-esteem, and some had incorporated the thinness ideal into their everyday lives without realizing it. Her Latina participants saw the dominant ideal, which discouraged curves, as lacking femininity, a critique on a standard of beauty that excluded them. On the hand, she found that, while these respondents justified a more voluptuous figure by saying that food was more central in their culture, and that men were attracted to bigger women, they simultaneously held the dominant ideal of thinness, citing health reasons for dieting and weight control (Goodman, 2002).

Similarly, J. Robyn Goodman and Kim Walsh-Childers (2004) found that the white college women who participated in their three focus groups engaged in both dominant and negotiated or oppositional readings of mediated bodies, particularly as related to breast size. The authors reported that the women knew what the ideal breast and body looked like (c-cup and thin, respectively) even as they admitted that the perfect breast size depended on the context in which the women were viewed (for pornographic

pleasure or on the street, for example) and on body size. In addition, they found that, though their participants desired "perky" breasts that were proportionate to their bodies (resisting the dominant ideal of very big breasts prevalent in the media), their preference of thinner frames corresponded with the dominant ideal. In addition, their desire for "perky" breasts was indicative of the influence of media that associated "perky" breasts with power and desirability (Goodman & Walsh-Childers, 2004). Furthermore, their participants said weight and size of one's stomach were more important than breast size, but considered flat-chested women unattractive; they felt the images in media were fake, based on their personal experiences and knowledge of enhancement tricks, yet they wanted to look like the models being portrayed (such as Tyra Banks); they also discussed images as illusions, yet many said they could attain the mediated ideal with enough time and money (Goodman & Walsh-Childer, 2004). These contradictions signaled negotiations of personal experiences and mediated norms that moderated their desire for an ideal body.

Evidence of negotiated and competing body discourses may also be found among non-U.S./non- white women. Erynn de Casanova's (2004) study of Ecuadorian teenagers revealed that these young girls simultaneously held white and Latin ideals. They identified light skin, thin bodies and light, long hair as the standard of beauty, but demonstrated attitudes and behaviors similar to African Americans (that is, they desired a voluptuous figure and focused on self-presentation) in their everyday lives. De Casanova (2004) argued that their inclusion of dress and personality in the definition of beauty mitigated the effect of the thin ideology disseminated by North American media, but their esteem of white prototypes simultaneously validated the thin, white ideal (de Casanova,

2004).

Analogously, Fabienne Darling-Wolf (2004) found that, even though the Japanese women in her study critiqued their local and Western media representations of beauty, these images informed their conception of attractiveness as young, thin, tall, light-skinned, and having bigger eyes. Her participants placed a premium on having good character, but concurrently spent a lot of time talking about and caring for their bodies, reinforcing the emphasis on physical beauty that they critiqued in the media and society in general (Darling-Wolf, 2004). They also hybridized the beauty ideologies of Japanese and Western cultures by identifying Japanese media figures with Westernized features as the most attractive models (Darling-Wolf, 2004).

The first-generation West Indian immigrant women in my study also exhibited hybridized and negotiated body politics informed by media (television). However, this chapter differs from the studies mentioned above in that it addresses a population of women who are not simply receiving American media fare, but who have resettled in the American media environment. This study thus facilitates a glimpse into the types of negotiations of body politics that occur when diasporic women are ensconced in an ideological milieu not their own. In addition, I found that the duality of their ideology was partially engendered by strategic engagement with the discourses of both the West Indies and the U.S. In other words, they developed hybrid body politics that were forged through what I call the strategic selection of parts of each discourse, which they then deployed as social capital to facilitate participation in discourses that excluded them. I therefore argue in this chapter that the body politics that the women discussed were not an alternative ideology, but rather a strategy to contend with the failure of their bodies to

achieve the ideal imposed on them by both the U.S. and their homelands.

West Indian Body Politics[24]

Based on scholarly works by Richard Wilks (1998) and Errol Miller (1969), as well as artifacts of popular culture such as music, magazines and television, and personal observation, peoples of the West Indies seem to esteem women “with shape,” or women with a voluptuous figure. This “shape” is characterized by moderate to big busts, small waists and broad hips. The buttock has a particularly special place in West Indian body aesthetics, with fleshy posteriors being revered as a definitive sign of physical attractiveness (and sexuality). Furthermore, an attractive woman should not be too tall, and should have long legs. Color or shade and hair type are also important, with brown (as opposed to black) skin color and straight hair conferring social status and self-worth unto their possessors (Wilks, 1998).

In addition to physical beauty, women are also expected to be of good character and above reproach, always being vigilant of the reputation being cultivated. A good character is often translated to mean controlled sexuality so that valuing church, school and home over explicit sexuality, clubs and “the street” is rewarded with respect and admiration (Wilks, 1998). Such purity and non-deviance is often judged by the public performance of the individual. More precisely, demeanor (the pleasantness of one’s countenance, and how one walks and talks in public), as well as grooming (the style, fit

[24] Given that culture and the body politics they produce are not constant, but continuously shift in relation to social and political ideologies, this description should be seen as a snapshot of a particular moment in history, and not as *the* discourse of the body of West Indians. Moreover, in light of the inextricable relationship between body politics and social markers, including class, it would be naïve to suggest that the description presented here is upheld by all sectors of a West Indian society, or even across West Indian nations. Therefore, though what I present here would be considered the norm, it should be noted that there are variations based on many factors, including class and nationality.

and appropriateness of clothing and hair), are used to determine deviant or conforming sexuality, respectability and social worth. This expectation of sexual integrity for West Indian women contradicts the desire and highly sensual position of the buttock in West Indian body politics (Wilks, 1998).

Dress and clothing choices are particularly significant. There are unwritten guidelines that prescribe the type of clothing to be worn at a particular place or on a given occasion, as well as the condition that those attires should be in. For example, these guiding principles declare that there be a clear distinction between clothing worn in public and those donned in the home. There is a set of comfortable "house" clothes that are worn within the confines of the home and the surrounding yard, and that should never be worn beyond the domestic space. These garments were considered unsuitable for participation in public, and people who don them outside of the home are perceived as uncultured, poor or illiterate, as not knowing how, or not having the means, to present themselves appropriately in public. The "good" clothes - usually the newest, most fashionable, or least damaged clothing - are reserved for appearances in public. These garments should not worn at home for fear of becoming tattered, but also because there is no reason for one to "dress up" in one's home; while one always endeavors to "put the best clothes forward" when entering the scrutinizing public, such monitoring of appearance was not necessary when at home.

Public attire was also distinguished by occasion, so that, while jeans my be acceptable for markets, fetes, barbeques, and other outdoor outings, they are certainly inappropriate for indoor functions such as balls, award programs and receptions, no matter how casual the affair. In addition, given the prominence of religion in the West

Indies, and the high level of socialization that occurs within and around churches, attire for church services and functions were the most formal and exclusive. One's "Sunday best" - usually a formal dress or skirt suit with matching shoes and other accessories - should only be worn to church, or on very special occasions such as graduations and weddings.

Furthermore, while the "house" clothes could be soiled and torn, public attire of any kind needs to be in great condition, with no visible stains or rips, or wrinkles. In fact, clothes donned in the public should be well ironed and starched when necessary. Failure to wear clothing that met these standards was indicative of filthiness and poor living conditions, a direct indication of poverty and low class. Deviation from any of these proscriptions results in social reprimands which include derision and humiliation, ostracism, and being labeled as uncouth and uneducated. Violating these guidelines thus reflected negatively on one's class status, creating a reputation that had long-lasting and detrimental effects on people in societies that valued class hierarchy.

This treatment of West Indian body politics reveals that monitoring of the body was common in the West Indies, and that the women in the present study were conditioned to be vigilant of their bodies before their migration. As in the U.S., surveillance of their bodies does occur in the West Indies, albeit for the maintenance of a different set of ideals and ideologies. These women thus came to the U.S. already habituated to monitoring their bodies, and being surveyed by men and women in society. My argument then is not that these women learnt to continuously survey their bodies on entering the U.S., but rather that relocation to the U.S. necessitated the maintenance and surveillance of a different type of body; migration placed them in direct dialogue with

body politics that differed from their own. They were already exposed to American ideals through the media in their homelands, but now settlement in the U.S. made interaction with these discourses unavoidable and necessary. The voluptuous aesthetic system of the West Indies was coming in direct contact with that of the thin-promoting ideals of mainstream America, barraging the women with diametrically opposed body politics.

My intention is to explore how first-generation immigrant West Indian women negotiate these discourses of the body. I argue that their negotiations were characterized by strategic selection: They selected elements from both discourses, taking aspects of each that allowed them to participate in and contend with the exigencies of both. More precisely, as they engaged with the body politics of the U.S., they recuperated some of their West Indian discourses and concurrently displaced others with those of the U.S. in the interest of self-preservation. In this sense then, while they challenged some aspects of each set of body politics, they dismantled neither, and ultimately reinforced the importance of women's external image. Furthermore, I contend that their engagement with television exposed them to U.S. discourses of the body, but also facilitated the women's negotiation of American and West Indian ideals, providing the material necessary to manipulate both.

Women of the Focus Groups

The analysis that follows is informed by three focus group sessions with eight first-generation West Indian immigrant women. The proceeding is a brief introduction to each.

- **Janet** is a 48-year-old emigrant of Barbados who lives in her own home in the north Bronx with her husband and two grown children. She travels 30 minutes everyday to her job as a preschool teacher. She is a self-reported size 14.

- **Kathy** is 34 years old, and wears a size six dress size. She emigrated from Barbados, and lives in her own home in Brooklyn with her husband and two small sons. She is a quality assessment officer for the organization where Marsha works.

- **Leslie** is the 30-year-old sister of Kathy who also emigrated from Barbados. She is not married, lives in an apartment, and practices law in the city. She is a full-figured woman.

- **Marsha** is a full-figured 34-year-old emigrant from Jamaica. She is married with a daughter, and works as the supervisor of an apartment that houses semi-independent, mentally and physically disabled adults. She and her family live in the south Bronx.

- **Natalie** is a petite 27-year-old who emigrated from Bermuda. She had been married for about one month at the time of the interview, and recently moved to a basement apartment in Brooklyn. She is a public school teacher.

- **Shelly** is a tall, slender 21-year-old with heritage in St. Thomas and Nevis. She attends a city university near her home in the South Bronx. She is unmarried, and lives with her mother and other relatives in an apartment.

- **Sue** is the 34-year-old half-sister of Marsha. She is a mother of two who emigrated from Jamaica. She lives in the South Bronx with her boyfriend, and works in Manhattan as a nurses' aid. She is a full-figured woman.

- **Tamika** is a tall, slender 27-year-old who is the cousin of Kathy and Leslie. She was engaged at the time of the interview, and attending a local college. She lives with her family in Brooklyn.

Discursive Negotiations

Television in West Indian Women's Lives

While all the women promptly denied any influence of television on their lives - supporting literature on the third person effect of media (Davison, 1983) - their responses divulged a more complicated relationship to television, one that was ambivalent, and one that, I argue, helped to foster their particular construction of discourses of the body.

Much like their counterparts in the in-depth interviews, the women's tastes in television shows were eclectic, varying greatly within each participant as well as among the women. Their television diet comprised of serious dramas (such as *24*, *ER*, and *Law and Order*), comedic dramas (like *Veronica Mars* and *Desperate Housewives*), situation comedies (including *The Bernie Mac Show*, *Girlfriends* and *The Parkers*), soap operas (like *Days of Our Lives* and *All My Children*), and reality shows (such as *Extreme Makeover* and *America's Next Top Model*). Having lifestyles that were not conducive to habitual and patterned television consumption (they worked long hours, and had to take care of their families when they were at home), a lot of the participants tape-recorded their favorite programs to watch them at the end of their dual work days, on weekends or on days off from work. In most cases, they watched the shows alone or with whichever family member happened to be home at the time (often partners or children). If they had friends or colleagues who enjoyed the same programs, the women would discuss with them at their next in-person or telephone meeting the latest plot twists or, in the case of reality programs, the latest dismissals from the shows.

The participants were not oblivious to the standard of thinness for women exalted by television. They commented that everybody on television was pretty and skinny, that dieting and losing weight were recurrent themes, and that everyone, even characters and

television personalities who seemed comfortable with being bigger women in the past, were forced to comply. As Leslie said,

> Especially for young girls growing up here, they see the thing about they should look a certain way…Perfect example is Oprah. The thing about her is that I don't think she suddenly reached a larger audience, that her show suddenly became much more successful, so there was obviously some pressure on her. "If I'm gonna be on TV I should look a certain way." The recent example is Star Jones…She said she had to change her image also, and I wonder how much of that isn't because she's sitting next to these women who are slightly smaller that her, and feeling that kind of pressure.

This Barbadian, who admitted that she too felt pressured to be thinner by family as well as American mediated culture, was skeptical of stars who lost weight, even when they cited health reasons for their decision (as Star Jones did). She suggested that television exerted powerful influence on the beauty standards held by girls and women, both on and in-front of television, making it difficult to accept and maintain ideals that deviated from the norm of thinness.

According to Sue, who had stopped her gym workout, and decided to accept her full-figured body, "This country is all hyped about exercise, but there's a lot a big people around us, so what's up with the exercise? And [it's] all because of what you see on TV." She also commented, "Television doesn't make it easy to be big." Like her counterpart, Sue thought television propelled the contemporary obsession with body sculpting and thinness, a fixation that she felt was impractical - evidenced by the amount of women in society who were not able to attain it - and thus hard on the self-esteem of full-figured women. Both women's recognition and critique of television's hegemonic work of disseminating the norm of thinness moderated their acceptance of unrealistic and unhealthy dominant norms of beauty. As Goodman and Walch-Childer (2004) argued in

their study of ideal breast size, these women's discussion of the images as not realistic and contrived helped to establish their bodies as real and the images as illusions.

Beyond simply promoting thinness, however, some of the women thought that television placed undue emphasis on body aesthetics in general, to the neglect of moralistic attributes, such as resilience, perseverance, self-betterment, and self-confidence. Similar to the women in the Rubin, et. al. (2003) and de Casanova (2004) studies, the current participants perceived such inner traits as important elements of women's beauty, the lack of which could detract from even the most physically beautiful women. For example, Natalie, who was disgusted with television's emphasis on aesthetics, passionately stated:

> Regardless of what you think it does put the message in somebody else's head that it's all about what I see. There's more to you than that…but [television] make it so much of a focus that it's all about your breast size or your butt size, and it's not so. Cause you could be a beautiful person on the outside, and your personality is nasty. Nasty!

Like Leslie who made the comment about Star Jones, Natalie feared that television's failure to promote good character would give young girls and other women faulty messages, and encourage them to strive for the right physique rather than a wholesome character.[25]

Television's incessant promotion of the thin ideal seemed to alienate rather than pull in the participants, engendering critique rather than acceptance. The women ridiculed and were even disgusted by the "Hollywood thin" presented in American shows, even in programs with a black cast such as *Girlfriends*. Shelly commented that

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[25] Both Leslie's and Natalie's reference to "young girls" and "somebody else," respectively, expressed no concern for themselves, but for other, more impressionable women, supporting the third person effect of media (Davison, 1983).

she and her friends often joked about wanting to meet some of these television women, including Mia and Tony from *Girlfriends*, so that they could feed them, and "put some meat on their bones."

They also criticized the clothing choices of television characters, stating that their attire was too scant, or that the clothing style being worn just did not "look right" on their bodies. These women scrutinized and criticized the bodies and dress of women on television in the same manner that they talked about women in their everyday lives, exalting themselves as experts on appropriate dress and self-presentation, and foregrounding their own ideas about the relationship between dress and morality (a point which will be discussed later). The women's thinking that they could discuss television women in the same way that they spoke about women in their environment may have been fostered by the nature of television that allows audiences to form relationships with characters, and treat them as members of their social space. Indeed, since television's inception, scholars have noted the power of media personas to inspire imagined interpersonal or "parasocial" bonds (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rubin, et. al., 1985; Auter & Palmgreen, 2000).

The women's repudiation of portrayals of the thin ideal on television may have also been because of the absence or misrepresentation of their cultures and women who share their heritage, a fact that made identification, and thus the internalization of values and ideals, difficult. As Leslie stated, the women and lifestyle depicted on *America's Next Top Model*, one of the shows she admitted to occasionally watching, were so surreal and removed from her own desires that their thin-promoting beauty norms did not trigger dissatisfaction with her own full-figured body. Sue was even more forthright. In

justification of why she did not feel that she could relate to *Desperate Housewives* (and other shows like it), she said, “Cause we are not white and [very] skinny…There’s not too much black people that you say, “…I wish my body was like that, or I wish I was like that.” Such alienation from and disidentification with television characters and personalities helped to create an environment that fostered some resistance of the idealized body, and facilitated the contemplation of other, more inclusive discourses of the body.

The extra-mediated environment - or the network of people with whom they associated and discussed media texts - was also crucial to the women’s engagement with and acceptance of the dominant discourses of the body disseminated by television. Most of the women resided in predominantly West Indian communities across New York City, namely the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens. They did not participate in environments and communities that compelled them, albeit informally, to conform to the mainstream ideal of the slender body. Separation and disconnection from mainstream society and its values facilitated fewer encounters with Anglo beauty ideals. Furthermore, almost exclusive involvement in West Indian communities reinforced their own standards of beauty, allowing them to negotiate the dominant aesthetic and ideological discourses about their bodies (as Rubin, et al. 2003 also found among their participants). Their disidentification with television characters, coupled with their limited movement outside of their community, functioned to weaken the objectifying power of the dominant discourses of the body.

Yet television played a significant role in the construction of their current body politics, particularly personal makeover reality shows which were the most consistently

mentioned shows in the focus groups. Contemporary makeover programs such as *What Not To Wear* and *Extreme Makeover* are usually predicated on the humiliation and then deliverance of participants by experts who transform the outmoded, plain and unattractive into works of beauty (Philips, 2005). Through makeovers, these programs seek to create more aesthetically pleasing and thus more competent femininity (Wood & Skeggs, 2004) through consumerism (Sender, 2006). Some of these shows deal with acquiring and sculpting the ideal, thin body through dieting, exercise and even plastic surgery. For others, taste experts, rather than critiquing the bodies of the participants, highlight the clothing that is unacceptable for their particular body types, and what should be bought to "make the best" of what they had. The latter shows depict cosmetic makeovers as the revealing of some "true self" through clothing, and are designed to allow one's youthful, or professional, or romantic self to be evident through attire.

Both types of makeover programs had significant influence on the body politics that the participants developed. First, personal makeover shows encouraged their pursuit of thin bodies, and quick and easy weight loss. For instance, Sue said,

> That show, *Biggest Losers*. Everybody that comes on is humongous, and then in …two months, four months they go down. I'm like, "O.k. Should I call them up, and get on the TV?" It's a free way of losing the weight.

This statement implied that Sue, who had tried several methods to lose weight, was impressed with the short time in which the contestants acquired thin bodies, and believed the same was possible for her. The *Biggest Loser* show thus not only supported her quest for thinness, but communicated to her that expeditious weight loss was available to all.

Second, beyond actual body size and shape, the women of the study emphasized proper presentation of bodies (discussed in more detail later) in a manner that reflected

the theme of personal makeover shows. For example, Natalie stated,

> That's the whole thing about fashion anyway, your body. It's just complementing your features you already have, enhancing it, basically. Because it's there, it's yours. You can't get rid of it, but it's just …when you look at it, it's still you, but it's a better you, for yourself, not for anybody else.

Her comment suggested that clothing could and should be used to contend with deviant body parts that one could not change, to create an improved image, and, subsequently, to foster self-love. This statement conspicuously endorsed the themes of personal makeover reality shows that address self and body improvement, demonstrating that these shows, that Natalie and other participants said they watched, influenced how they constructed body politics in the U.S. As will be seen later in the chapter, the respondents' endorsement of self-acceptance challenged conformity to the West Indian and American body ideals, and concurrently facilitated inclusion in, and thus reinforcement of, both sets of body politics.

Furthermore, some of the women used what happened on these reality shows as cautionary tales, and justifications for vigilance over their own bodies. This statement was particularly true of Janet who, more than being impressed with the transformation of the subjects on makeover shows, was astonished at the lack of self-awareness that could have allowed subjects to become so unattractive. She said this about the "fashion victims:"

> What really motivate me is when I watch…[shows] where the people let themselves go and somebody have to send in their names… and just a shampoo and a cut and some rinse, a lipstick or something make such a difference. And I'm saying, "So why did somebody have to tell them to do this," you know? They see themselves looking older than their years [and they don't do anything about it].

Her statement indicated that she believed that people needed to be more watchful of their own bodies, and suggested that she was reminded never to allow herself to become so unaware of her body that others had to give her a makeover. The televised humiliation of others became a warning to be vigilant of her image, reinforcing her West Indian body discourse, and complicating claims to self-acceptance.

From the discussion above, it is apparent that the personal makeover shows engendered ambivalent attitudes among and within the women, on one hand cultivating self-acceptance while on the other promoting self-surveillance and conformity to American ideals. The presentation of such polysemic discourses undermined the dominant body politics of the U.S., and fostered the strategic selection process in which the respondents' engaged; these shows presented the women with an array of discourses of the body available in the U.S., discourses that they deployed to negotiate, and position themselves within, dominant body politics.

The "Supple" Body Aesthetic

Similar to the non-white women in Lovejoy's (2001) and de Casanova's (2004) studies, my respondents thought that a voluptuous figure was the ideal. In their estimation, it was this roundness that their parents and relatives wanted them to achieve, and it was what West Indian men were most attracted to. Natalie and Tamika, two petite women of the study, candidly expressed that growing up their more shapely friends received more attention from boys than they did. Likewise, Sue enjoyed going to her homeland, Jamaica, for vacations because of the encouragement it gave her self-esteem. She said,

> Men in Jamaica will make you appreciate your [big] body just a little bit more than the men here. You could have like six rolls here or whatever, if you put on some [shorts, they will say], "Baby! Psst, psst! You looking sexy." Here in New York they just look at you, "Oh lord, look at her. She need a diet. All the rolls. Laad, she big…!"…When [the Jamaican men] come here, they get culturalized, and you know the skinny girl, long hair, you know, the nails and stuff; you have to have the flare. But then when they back home and you there, they all over you.

Her statement suggested that Jamaican men find full-figured women sexy and attractive, unlike American men (and women) who perceive them as "fat." She thus highlighted the difference in body ideals of the West Indies and the U.S. Interestingly, she also indicated the acculturation process that she saw happening among Jamaican men who she felt emigrate to the U.S., and begin to valorize a thinner ideal while away from home. Upon returning to their nations, however, they resume exaltation of bigger women. Her statement implicitly spoke to the competing aesthetic ideals that informed West Indian women's lives in New York City: The communities back home, to which they were always loyal, esteemed voluptuousness, but, through the dialogic relationship with American norms, a smaller (though not thin) ideal was emerging in the communities in the U.S.[26]

The women in the study concurred that in West Indian communities (in New York City as well in their islands of origin), what Kathy referred to as the "coca-cola bottle" shape was the optimum body ideal. As with the *Coca-Cola* glass bottle from which it derives its name, this silhouette is characterized by average sized top, small waist, and, most importantly, big (but proportionate) hips and buttocks. Their desire to replicate this shape created many of their physical insecurities, and, subsequently, fueled much of their body-improvement projects. These women wanted to lose or gain the

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[26] Note that Sue suggested that it was the men's expectations, and not her ideals, that changed, again supporting the third person effect of media (Davison, 1983).

weight that would make their bodies adhere to this curvaceous image, desiring bigger or smaller breasts, smaller stomachs, and larger buttocks. For instance, Natalie, a relatively small woman, admitted that she was self-conscious about her small bosoms. Another petite participant, Shelly, who characterized her breasts as big, said "I don't so much like my breasts, and I've always wanted a bigger butt."

The bigger women in the research study communicated similar attitudes, exemplified by this comment from Sue who told me she weighed almost two hundred pounds:

> I would love more boody, less boobs, but I've learnt, since I can't afford plastic surgery right now, I minimize [my boobs]; I just gotta work on the butt. Overall my pet-peeve with my body is the gut; I need to work on that. Everything else I truly like.

Sue's complaints about her buttock, breast and stomach were indicative of her desire for the "coca-cola" bottle shape. The attainment of the sanctioned body aesthetic of her community was important enough for her, a working class mother of two, to consider incurring the expenses and risks of surgery. Interestingly, her reference to plastic surgery - one of the only references in all the focus groups - implied the development of a contemporary American mindset. Perhaps because it is deemed an unnecessary expense, or because the islands do not have the resources to facilitate it, the option of plastic surgery is not usually in West Indians' purview. Sue's comment therefore suggested that being in the U.S., where such surgeries were prolific, had began to revise the manner in which she dealt with her perceived imperfections.

Additionally, some of the women extended the "coca-cola" bottle description by adding that the ideal bodies had to be tight, having "big legs that didn't move [jiggle]," arms that did not sag, and "Jennifer Lopez butt." The latter was explained as being a

fleshy, but toned buttock that protruded upwards in the back, rather than across the hips. Their glorification of toned-ness exposed another moment of negotiation with dominant U.S. ideals. Scholars have found that both women of color and white women in the U.S. favor the toned body (Harrison, 2000; Goodman, 2002), the "flab-free, tightly controlled" body disseminated by the media (Goodman, 2002, pp. 716), the epitome of the self-discipline and youthfulness esteemed in U.S. society (Bordo, 1993). The participants' simultaneous subscription to a voluptuous body ideal and the dominant muscular body aesthetic was indicative of their active negotiations of their cultures' discourses about body image and those of the U.S.

While the women had a clear sense of the desirable shape and condition of the female bodies sanctioned by the West Indian community, their discussion of the ideal weight was more indistinct and ambivalent, indicative of a more democratic beauty norm. Being too heavy was undesirable, evidenced by the bigger women's desire to lose weight: They all wanted to dispose of the extra pounds they gained during pregnancy and/or due to changes in diet and lifestyle in general. Furthermore, for Janet, being overweight was unforgivable (even though she admitted to struggling with weight herself). She stated:

> Over the years I've seen where people really are morbidly obese, you know, cause like, "Oh well, I can eat more," and they still want to do the same things that they usually do and that kind of tick me off, especially when I go on the bus and somebody takes up two seats and I wanna sit down and I'm hanging off on one side, and they're looking at you like, "Oh well," and you can do something about it.

Janet had no tolerance for people who were too big, people who she suggested were in that condition because of a lack of self-control, or laziness to work on losing weight. Such ideas were indicative of the dominant perception in the U.S. that big people were deficient in restraint and self-discipline (Crandall, 1994).

However, they also expressed disdain for thin bodies, a sentiment exemplified by Natalie's disclosure of her recent distressing experience with weight loss:

> Recently I went to down to 97 pounds…and to know that I am going backwards to that…and you could see my collar bones and stuff like that. It was very traumatic for me…I would sit down and complain all the time, and…look at myself and say, "Oh my God, I don't look good," and…I wouldn't get dressed in front of the mirror…Now that I see that I am picking up back the weight I think I'm comfortable now with myself…I don't like to fluctuate in my weight because is like it brings me backwards… I don't know if I haven't deal with that part yet where I come to the acceptance it's o.k. to be skinny, but 97 was just too much for me.

Natalie was a petite woman who had struggled with her small size all her life, and had recently began gaining weight on her hips and buttock, to her delight. Having experienced a bigger, happier self, she saw her loss of weight as regression to a size that was less attractive and less desirable than her more voluptuous self. She had to accept her small, relatively thin stature, but she refused to be skinny. In contrast to the euphoria that weight loss is said to guarantee,[27] Natalie was disheartened by what she deemed an overly thin, unattractive body, a state that was placated only through the gaining of pounds. For her, "skinny" was not acceptable.

Her sentiments were echoed by her bigger counterparts who lucidly and illustratively spoke of their hypothetically thin selves. Marsha, a Jamaican woman who struggled with the size of her thighs and stomach, said:

> I don't look good skinny; if you see me skinny, I look very, very sick. I have like this nice big head, and everything else looks like…I'm getting over a bad flu, but when I full out I look so good.

Similarly, Sue, who considered plastic surgery stated, "If I should decide to tone the way society wants to see I'd look like a crack head." Both women used strong

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[27] I refer here to the myriad advertising campaigns for weight loss products that deploy the trope of "a happier life with a thinner body" to persuade prospective consumers.

imagery of diseased, emaciated bodies to convey their negative perception of thinner selves. Beyond communicating their personal level of disdain, however, their statements were indicative of West Indian cultural norms about bodies. Hailing from a different socio-political system, these women attached different significance to thinness. While in mainstream U.S. the slender body was associated with beauty and power (Goodman & Walsh-Childers 2004; Bordo 1993), for most West Indians, being skinny was indicative of a lower class status, and denoted unhealthy and diseased bodies to be ridiculed, pitied or scorned, but certainly not admired. As Tamika, a petite participant from Barbados, said, “When I was living back home [in Barbados], I was considered too skinny and I had to eat more…to look healthy. For them to think that you were healthy you had to be bigger built.”

Being conscious of the association between a too-thin body and unhealthiness in their communities (both in the U.S. and in the islands), the women in the research study did not desire to conform to the dominant American expectation of thinness. They opposed mainstream society’s exaltation of the thin body as the standard of beauty, upholding the West Indian-sanctioned voluptuous body instead. Holding to this discourse about the body thus fostered Dayal’s (1996) interpretation of “double consciousness”: It allowed them to oppose the mediated thin ideal, and envision other ways of being apart from the dominant norm. However, their incorporation of the American values of restraint and self-control unto their bodies divulged that their stance was not totally oppositional, but in dialogue with the body politics of their new home.

In sum, the participants seemed to admire smaller women, but only those who were able to maintain a version the “coca cola bottle” shape, and they spoke about losing

weight, but not too much, and only from certain places. Shelly aptly captured this ambivalence when she described the ideal size as "not too skinny and not too big, just well-rounded…supple."

Such ambiguity was indicative of the construction of a more inclusive beauty ideal that embraced a wider range of sizes, similar to what de Casanova (2004) found among her subjects. On the other hand, this state of ambivalence was fostered by television that gave conflicting messages to women about their bodies (Goodman & Walsh-Childers, 2004). As discussed in the previous section, the personal makeover shows that many of the participants watched proliferated inconsistent discourses about the body, concurrently promoting self-acceptance and self-monitoring. Tamika expressed her confusion about the messages from television when she stated that she could not discern what the ideal size was in the U.S. because television condemned women for being too big as well as for being too skinny.

The "not too big, not too small," toned body that they desired drew on both American and West Indian discourses of the body, and constructed an ideal that facilitated alignment with the body politics of both their homelands and the U.S. Furthermore, their subscription to an ideal, even if it was not the one promoted in mainstream America, as well as their discussion of the continuous monitoring of their weight and size, indicated that they still placed importance on external beauty and body surveillance.

Dressing the Part

In their study of Latinas and African American women, Rubin, et al. (2003) found that body ethics (discourses pertaining to the care and well-being of the body) were emphasized over an aesthetic ideal. Similarly, while the women in the present study overtly engaged with and negotiated the ideal body aesthetics of the cultural-political systems in which they participated, their primary concern was proper adornment of the bodies that they had. As Marsha said, "I put on my clothes, I look good, and I always say, 'As long as you clothes is clean, and you looking good [be confident].' Here she referenced the West Indian principle of wearing pristine garments in public, implying that this act, a symbol of her civility, made her confident in spite of other shortcomings in her self-presentation. She thus deployed her pre-migration discourse of dress to give her confidence in the U.S. public. Through comments such as these, the participants' discussion of clothing choices and the public presentation of bodies emerged as a rich site of the strategic construction of their body politics.

For the participants, well-fitting clothing was crucial; regardless of size and shape, it was imperative for women to clothe themselves in a manner that flattered the types of bodies that they had, and that reflected their social position. The style or type of the clothing was not important, so long as it was appropriate for the wearer's body type, age, social roles, and as long as it was worn on the proper occasion. Therefore, while the women spoke openly about their ideal of a voluptuous, toned body and the dissatisfactions they had with their own, what they put on their bodies was just as important to them as actual body size and shape.

On one hand, by emphasizing dress, the participants negated the aesthetical exigencies of beauty of both their homelands and the U.S., inherently declaring that body

size and shape were not the only determinants of attractiveness and femininity. Through the discourse of dress, the women put themselves outside of standards that they did not meet. Furthermore, dress had moral significance for these women, as, more than the actual size and shape of the bodies themselves, clothing choice was used to connote self-worth and integrity of character. For these women, wearing clothing that did not adequately conceal what they deemed unsightly body parts (such as big stomachs or sagging arms); clothing that, in their estimation, exposed too much; or that they considered inappropriate for one's age were indicative of defective upbringing and degenerate cultural values. Shelly, referring to Latinas in her neighborhood, said, "They put on little kid's stuff, and think that they look cute coming out, and they could be having kids with them, and they looking just like that." Janet also had this to say about the scantily clad women she encountered in her neighborhood:

> It come to their background. They used to that thing…Like I would walk on White Plains Road,[28] and then I'll see women in my age group [48], and I'd be like, "Oh my goodness, they need to stop," but that's them, you know. I wouldn't be caught in the rain like that cause I wasn't brought up that way, and I didn't grow my children that way either.

Janet and Shelly (and others in the research study) used their own politics of dress to judge the morals of the women in their communities in the U.S. They regarded those who did not meet their standards, or those who held other ideologies, as being of inferior character. Here the women recuperated their West Indian norms of public attire, a discourse that was reinforced by some makeover shows that promoted the conflation of dress and character, shows that offered up clothing as a means to attain the "correct" image and to reveal one's true moral fiber. Through this recuperation and mediated

[28] White Plains Road is one of the main streets in northeastern Bronx, and is the center of the West Indian community in this borough.

reinforcement of their cultural politics of dress, the women in the research study were able to claim superiority over other women in their social environment in New York City, even those who realized the West Indian and/or mainstream U.S. ideal. In doing so, they challenged the association between ideal body type and social dominance.

Interestingly, however, clothing seemed to become important only after failed attempts to attain the ideal. For example, Janet said,

> No matter how many hours you exercise or change the diet, you just reach a plateau when you lose no more weight and you just have to come to grips and accept yourself, you know, and dress yourself appropriately.

For her, the perfect scenario would still be to achieve the desired body size and shape, but, when all other body improvement projects had failed, dress or fashion could be used to create the illusion of the ideal body. It was in this situation that clothing became important, mainly to conceal and force deviant body parts to fit with the voluptuous, "not to big, not too small" ideal. As Sue stated, "There are clothes that you put on that even though you're big make you look smaller…By watching *Oprah* I've learnt if you wear certain pants certain way it looks like you don't have a stomach." She had thus learned from television the "trick" of using clothing to create the illusion of an ideal body. She also spoke about wearing minimizers to give the illusion of smaller breasts. Natalie, one of the petite respondents, also implied that, when she was not gaining weight, she wore padded bras and other clothing that would amplify her small frame. These responses indicated underlying anxieties about their body size, and highlighted their lingering desires to create the "not too big, not too small," toned bodies that made them pleasing in their community and at least minimally acceptable in the U.S. Their emphasis on attire also reflected the trend in contemporary makeover shows that endorsed the use of

clothing and other consumer goods to create an acceptable image even in the absence of the ideal body.

It was apparent that the women deployed clothing to contest aesthetical ideals of thinness and voluptuousness even as they simultaneously used garments to conceal unacceptable parts, and achieve the image that would make them acceptable in their community and mainstream U.S. society. This observation builds on Rubin et. al.'s (2003) analysis which seemed to conceive of body ethics as primarily resistant of dominant discourses of body aesthetics. Here, a negotiated, rather than oppositional, relationship emerged. The participants strategically selected the discourses of dress of the West Indies, reinforced by mainstream television, to claim superiority over women in their diasporic space, and to challenge dominant ideals and exclusionary practices regarding women's bodies. They deployed dress as social capital to include themselves in discourses of beauty of the West Indies and the U.S. from which their less than ideal bodies had excluded them. However, they also used dress to create the illusion of a voluptuous or "not too big, not too small" body, strategically appropriating the American ideology disseminated by television – namely, that clothes can make any body attractive - to contend with their bodies. In doing so, the women did not present an alternative to the aesthetic systems that emphasize the external body, but rather reinscribed it.

Balancing Self-Confidence and Others' Opinions

Notwithstanding their condemnation of women in their neighborhoods who dressed "inappropriately," the participants confessed their admiration for the women they

criticized, praising and even envying these women's display of a self-confidence that eluded them. According to Kathy:

> As much as it's so inappropriate how they may dress and [Americans and West Indians] might look at them as just putting all their business out there, it takes a certain amount of self-confidence to do that. So you know in a society where we have so many people, including myself, sometimes…you got this self-esteem issue where…you conscious of this, you conscious of that, and they knowing that they have the stomach and they have the arms, they have that confidence; they're like, "This is me, o.k., and I like me. Who cares what anyone else might think." They have a certain amount of self-confidence that might be healthy.

Kathy expressed a yearning for the confidence and fortitude to accept her body and present it as she wished, an attitude that was inhibited by her cultural requirement to vigilantly monitor and control her public image.

Like Kathy, the other women seemed to struggle with conflicting desires to be self-assured and aesthetically pleasing to society in general. On one hand, the women in the research study spoke convincingly about their decisions to be comfortable with their own bodies, and about presenting themselves as they desired, regardless of the disapproval of their families, communities and society in general. Sue said:

> I've done the diet thing; I've done the pill thing; I've done the gym thing, but sometimes you get so tired…and you get complex, and you say, "Listen, this is my body…Take me as I am. It's not what you want, it's what I want."

Similarly, Natalie stated:

> If you're not comfortable with yourself, you're gonna feel that nobody else is, and it's 'til when you get comfortable with yourself, that's when you say o.k. whatever…cause even when I go to church every time, "Oh, you need to put on some weight." I'm like, "That's the box you're trying to fit me in." And then my thing is when I get too big, you're gonna say I need to lose weight, so I never satisfy you so why don't I just satisfy me.

These women recognized that in order to have a healthy relationship with bodies that did not represent the ideal (of neither their cultures nor that of the U.S.), they had to disregard external judgments, and cultivate attitudes of self-acceptance and nurturance.

Rubin, et. al. (2003) found similar attitudes among their African American participants, and asserted that such an ethic created an alternative to dominant U.S. norms. However, it should be noted that this attitude of self-acceptance was indicative of the discourses of individualism and egocentricity prolific in mainstream U.S. society (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Rather than evading dominant beauty norms then, the women in the current study were engaging with mainstream U.S. discourses about the body and its care. In fact, a few women cited mainstream - predominantly African American - television personalities as their role models for confidence in spite of deviant bodies. Sue, in particular, mentioned her admiration for Monique, the full-figured star of the sitcom *The Parkers,* who she thought "wears her [full-figure] well."

Moreover, as with their discussions of grooming, self-acceptance was adopted after their efforts to mold their bodies to fit West Indian or American ideals failed. For example, in the quotes above, Sue took on an attitude of self-acceptance after dieting, taking pills and exercise were unsuccessful in producing desired results. Similarly, Natalie decided to make herself happy after she realized that she would never be able to achieve a weight that would please her biological and spiritual families. Furthermore, Marsha said, "I'm comfortable with me now, and, being comfortable with me, I find out now and then I'm dropping a pound here and there cause now I love me." Self-acceptance thus allowed her to love her less-than-ideal body, but also fostered a mental state that made her "drop the weight." In other words, one of the reasons self-acceptance

was agreeable to her was because it helped her to lose weight. The women thus strategically selected the mainstream American value of personal choice and freedom to assuage their dissatisfaction with bodies that met neither the West Indian nor the U.S. ideal, and to minimize the American and West Indian demand for self-monitoring.

Consistently holding to such a value was not easy for them, however. For one, television gave them conflicting messages, on the one hand offering up women who seemingly personified the mantra of self-acceptance, while on the other reinforcing their cultural norm to be vigilant of what they presented to the public. Moreover, by projecting their body politics unto other women, thus naturalizing it, the respondents simultaneously neutralized the power of the American discourse of self-acceptance, and fostered the fear that they may be subjected to the same judgment that they meted out to other women. Their self-acceptance was thus bridled by their perceptions of what other men and women in their communities and the U.S. thought of them.

All in the Family

Most of the participants admitted that negative comments about their size and/or shape had tremendous impact on their self-esteems and their resolve to be self-assured. Similar to what other scholars have found (see Goodman & Walsh-Childers, 2004; Pompper & Koenig, 2004), it was often the remarks of family members - primarily mothers, but also aunts, uncles and children - that caused the most distress.

For participants who were thin during childhood (back home), their mothers and other family members tried to improve their self-esteem and protect them from the scrutiny of the West Indian community by compelling them to eat more; by putting them

in lots of clothes to disguise skinniness; and, later, by buying special clothing that would enhance breasts and other body parts they deemed lacking. Some relatives' protection was manifested in goading that was supposed to encourage weight-gain. Janet spoke about being teased when she was younger and skinnier by her grandmother who constantly asked her if she was thin because she "lived far from the kitchen."

For those who maintained a small frame into adulthood in the U.S., the encouragement and compulsion to gain weight persisted, as with Tamika who said that her family (in Barbados and the U.S.) always commented negatively about her size, making remarks such as, "You not getting fatter?" that annoyed her, and damaged her self-confidence. For the other women who began to gain weight in the U.S. (due to lifestyle change, childbearing and age), the theme of the remarks became weight loss. For Marsha, who had to contend with her uncle's constant comments about being "big-boned" (which he thought allowed her to be a little "chunky", but still attractive), her confidence was completely shattered when at a family gathering he suggested that she was getting too big to be called "big-boned," and thus no longer attractive.

While intended to mold young girls into women who would be admired and accepted in West Indian society, the vigilance with which their mothers and relatives watched over their bodies fostered self-consciousness and fear of rejection that many were still trying to overcome. Tamika and Natalie both admitted that it was only in recent years that they had learnt to ignore their families (because they continued to "harass" them), and accept their slender frame. Likewise, Marsha, whose uncle crushed her self-esteem, said that she stopped wearing pants after that incident, and even today only has one pair of jeans that she will wear in public.

Mothers and families in general were therefore instrumental in helping these women negotiate the West Indian ideal. However, they also ensured that the respondents did not forget the aesthetic and moral standards required of their bodies, and thus perpetuated the discourses that contributed to their distress. In essence, families functioned as the custodians of cultural expectations of the body, encouraging conformity and deterring deviance.

The participants took this legacy of self-monitoring with them into the U.S. where it was reinforced by mainstream American television. While the vigilance was consistent across the cultures, however, the body politics that were promoted in the U.S. differed from those in the West Indies, and prompted the women to mold a thinner body type. The participants thus wrestled with two diametrically opposed aesthetic systems - the voluptuous, but not too big ideal of the West Indies in which being too thin was deemed unattractive and in need of correction, and the dominant U.S. ideal of thinness in which large, full-figured bodies were perceived as undesirable.

As argued throughout this chapter, the women's struggle with the ideals promoted by their primary groups and those disseminated by U.S. mainstream television resulted in neither completely oppositional nor totally assimilative body politics. Rather, the women strategically deployed elements of each discourse to contend with their own bodies, and to insert themselves into the discourses of the body of both cultures. Admittedly, the theoretical ideal body that they presented, while incorporating the American standard of toned-ness, reflected a West Indian aesthetic, and emphasized the primary groups' endorsement of shapeliness. However, in their everyday lives, it was apparent that the

women moved between the discourses transmitted by each party, strategically selecting elements from each to off-set the effects of either on their self-esteem.

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Conclusion

In this chapter, I argue that, rather than adopting the ideal of thinness prevalent in mainstream U.S. discourses of body aesthetics, the first-generation West Indian immigrant women in this study actively negotiated the ideologies about the body from their homelands and the U.S., creating hybrid body politics. Furthermore, and similar to the African American women and Latinas in Rubin, et al.'s (2003) study, the women in this research study opted to focus on attire and self-confidence rather than body shape and size, a move that challenged mainstream's emphasis on body aesthetics (Rubin, et al. 2003), but also, I argue, reproduced it in a modified form.

Specifically, I contend that the West Indian women in my study interacted with American beauty norms in very complicated ways. They admired smaller women, but only those who were able to maintain a version the "coca cola bottle" shape, and they spoke about losing weight, but not too much, and only from certain places. The women constantly steered the discussion of bodies towards grooming, denying the superiority of the thin ideal, even as they used dress to create the illusion of the ideal body. Self-confidence emerged as an important and desirable trait used to cope with their less-than-ideal bodies, but their self-acceptance was curtailed by their desire to be aesthetically pleasing to mainstream U.S. society, their community and their families. The women deployed all of these attitudes concurrently, using them strategically in their everyday

lives. Their engagement with television both reinforced their West Indian discourses of the body, and taught them mainstream American discourses about the body that they then used to create a space for themselves in American and West Indian body politics.

This research study of the body politics of first-generation West Indian immigrant women in the U.S. is by no means exhaustive, and much more work needs to be done in order to adequately explore the complexities involved in West Indian women's negotiation of U.S. beauty ideologies. For one, based on interviews with only eight women, and being based in New York City, the study is limited in its ability to speak to all West Indian women's negotiations of body politics in the U.S.- neither is it my intention to do so. This chapter highlights trends that exist in this particular sample of women in New York City, that could possible exist in other West Indian communities in the U.S.

Furthermore, the study focused on first-generation emigrants from the West Indies. Given that "the relationship of the first-generation to the place of migration is different from that of subsequent generations" (Brah, 2001), migratory generations develop different diasporic subjectivities, and thus different and varied ways of negotiating the beauty ideals of the receiving country. The patterns discussed in this chapter are therefore not applicable to all West Indian women, and need to be supplemented with similar explorations of West Indian women who were born in the U.S., or who came here at an early age.

In addition, we need to further analyze the impact of age on the negotiation and hybridization of body politics among these diasporics. As Pompper and Koenig (2004) have demonstrated, age and generation are important positionalities that inform how, as

well as the extent to which, women relate to the dominant discourses about bodies. Most of the women in my research study were in their late twenties and mid-thirties, a fact which necessarily influenced their comments. Younger and older West Indian women may not respond in the same way.

Chapter Five
"I Hate Soap Operas:" Second-generation West Indian Women, Television Engagement and Cultural Distancing

In the preceding chapters I examined the media engagement and self-presentation of first-generation West Indian immigrants in New York City. In this final chapter I shift my attention to women of West Indian heritage who were born or largely raised in the U.S., exploring the influence of mainstream television engagement on their struggle with their disparate heritage and birth place (or home), and the ensuing identity that develops. Said differently, I examine the manner in which the daughters of West Indian immigrants position themselves in U.S. society given their affiliation with both West Indian and American culture, and the role of television in reflecting and constituting their particular cultural location.

There has been much scholarly work done on second-generation immigrants in the U.S., particularly as it pertains to their movement away from their parents' culture and assimilation into that of the U.S. In general, these studies indicate that the second-generation struggle with their positions in multiple cultural spaces; they develop hybrid subjectivities that create internal conflict as well as tension with the first-generation. For instance, Romola Dugsin (2001) found that the Americanization of second-generation Indian immigrants led to loneliness, low self-esteem and rebellion. In other words, they were torn between two worlds, and dealt with this conflict by internalizing it or rebelling against the traditions of their parents.

Nedim Karakayali (2005) revised this "two world" thesis by arguing that the children of immigrants construct a new space that is separate from both the worlds of their parents and their diasporic space. He contended that second-generation immigrants interact with family as well as other immigrant groups that do not share their experiences. These interactions with the surrounding environment - as well as their observation of others in their communities who successfully engage with other cultures - create the desire to take part in the culture of their receiving nation. However, their options are not only to choose one or the other, but they can create a distinct identity that differs from that of their parents and that of their diasporic space (Karakayali, 2005).

This chapter expands on Karakayali's (2005) argument, delineating how second-generation West Indian immigrant women construct a space for themselves beyond both the cultures of the West Indies and the U.S. However, my analysis revealed that, while the women positioned themselves outside of both cultures, they were not disconnected from either. Rather, they occupied a liminal space between their West Indian heritage and the culture of the U.S. that concurrently drew on and disposed of elements of each. In this sense then, while the women in the study accepted much of their West Indian heritage, overt moments of challenge to West Indian cultural mores and norms emerged. Accordingly, they exhibited some identity markers that were similar to those of the first-generation immigrant women discussed in previous chapters while concurrently resisting and reworking others.

Furthermore, I contend that their movement between the cultures was not simply borne from a desire for inclusion, or because such cultural intermingling was inevitable, but was the result of the women's strategic negotiation of the cultural spaces they

occupied. More precisely, I assert that second-generation West Indian immigrant women recuperated aspects of the identity of first-generation West Indians in New York City that distinguished them from "deficient" Americans, even as they overtly challenged aspects of West Indian traditions that reflected negatively in American culture. In doing so, these women carved a favorable space for themselves in the racial and cultural system of New York City, circumventing negative perceptions of Americans in the West Indian community, as well as unflattering ideas about West Indians in the American imagination. This space they created could not be claimed by their wholly American or West Indian counterparts, thus making it exclusively theirs.

In addition, and as a further expansion on the work of Kayakayali (2005), I examine the manner in which television is reflective and constitutive of this bilateral and strategic cultural distancing. In her study of working-class, Mexican American adolescent girls in San Antonio, Vicki Mayer (2003) highlighted the role of media in reflecting and helping to contend with the dual identities that her respondents developed. She argued that the discussion of *telenovelas* across the Mexican-U.S. border helped to form a common culture between the immigrants and their family members who lived in Mexico. In addition, she found that one *telenovela* in particular, *Maria Isabel,* resonated with the lives of her respondents as the main character, Maria, embodied the duality that characterized their own experiences in the U.S. (Mayer, 2003). She also noted that, while her respondents perceived *telenovelas* as keeping them connected to their heritage, they distinguished their pattern of viewing and interpretation from that of their Mexican relatives. In doing so, their engagement with *telenovelas* reflected their simultaneous critique and identification with their Mexican heritage (Mayer, 2003).

In spite of differences in the texts being examined - I focus on mainstream rather than ethnic television texts - this chapter substantiates the arguments presented by Mayer (2003), demonstrating that the dual citizenship of second-generation West Indian immigrant women was reflected in their engagement with mainstream television. The women in my study deployed their interactions with television to distinguish themselves from Americans as well as West Indians, making their interaction with television an expression of their liminal and negotiated subjectivities. The respondent's engagement with American soap operas in particular was significant, as this genre emerged as the mediated embodiment of the negative aspects of their dual identity that they denounced. In other words, the women's disengagement with soap operas was expressive of their bilateral and simultaneous distancing from the unfavorable aspects of West Indian and American values and traditions.

Women of the Study

My arguments in this chapter are informed by ethnographic insights garnered from in-depth interviews with nine second-generation West Indian women. I will begin the presentation of the analysis by introducing these women, and delineating what emerged as major characteristics of their identity in New York City.

- **Elizabeth** is in her 20s. She was born in the U.S., but spent her summer vacations as a child in Jamaica, her parents' birthplace. She has visited the island less frequently as an adult. She lives with her young daughter in an apartment in Brooklyn. She speaks with an American accent.
- **Julie** is 23 years old. She was born in the U.S. to immigrants of St. Vincent. She spent summers in St. Vincent when she was younger, and frequently goes there for visits. She now lives in an apartment in Brooklyn, and works as a secretary at a

major hospital in the borough as she studies to be a MRI technician. She code-switches between a West Indian and American accent.

- **Karla** is 31 years old. She was born in England, and moved to the U.S. 22 years ago. She lives with her Barbadian mother and Jamaican father in Queens. She has only been to Barbados once. She is in the early stages of a Master's program in school psychology. She speaks with an American accent.

- **Mia** is 40 years old, and emigrated from Trinidad when she was five years old. She went back to Trinidad 10 years ago. She has three sons, and works in an administrative capacity at a middle school four blocks from her apartment. She is getting a Master's degree in school psychology. She speaks with a faint Trinidadian accent.

- **Millie** is 39 years old. Her parents are Jamaicans, but she was born in England and moved to the U.S. when she was 12 years old. She visits Jamaica frequently, and considers it her home. She studied accounting for awhile in college, and is currently unemployed. She lives in Brooklyn, and speaks with a slight British accent.

- **Monique** is Elizabeth's best friend who lives in Long Island. She is in her mid to late 20s, and was born in the U.S. to Barbadian parents. She has visited the island a few times. She has a Bachelor's degree, and is a middle school teacher. She speaks with an American accent.

- **Shelly** is 33 years old. She was born in the U.S., and was raised by her Jamaican grandmother after her mother died. She spent every summer in Jamaica when she was younger, but has only been back once in her adult years. She lives in an apartment in the Bronx with her two children, and works at an electronic retail store in Manhattan. She speaks with an American accent.

- **Tanya** is 23 years old, and was born in Brooklyn. Her parents are Jamaican, and practiced Rastafarianism. She spent summers in Jamaica when she was younger, but does not visit very often right now. She works at a hairdressing salon, and has a Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science from a university outside of New York City. She speaks with an American accent.

- **Zendra** was born in the U.S. to emigrants of Montserrat. She made frequent visits to her elderly aunt who still lives on the island, but spent a few months there after her surgery to remove a benign brain tumor. In spite of being partially paralyzed, she teaches dance workshops around New York City. She is also pursuing a Master's degree, and recently moved in with her elderly mother. She speaks with an American accent, but switches to the Montserratian dialect when she talks about the people and the culture.

Legal Citizen, Cultural Citizen

In this section I present what emerged as the most prominent feature of the identity of these second-generation West Indian immigrant women. Specifically, I highlight the fact that they experienced their subjectivity on two registers, perceiving themselves as legal citizens of the U.S., but cultural citizens of the West Indies. This discussion of their particular cultural location is pertinent to our understanding of their media engagement. As I will demonstrate, their dual subjectivity created the backdrop against which they interacted with and negotiated television texts, and influenced the manner in which they deployed television in their presentation of self.

In relation to this theme of dual identity, Zendra shared,

> I have very ethnic features, and people automatically think I'm either from Africa or the West Indies. I consider myself American…I call myself Caribbean. If someone ask me …I always say Caribbean, and my mother say, "You were born in America, don't say that." She would always say that, but I say that I am West Indian. I mean my mother has been here in this country for a thousand years, and it's like she came off the boat yesterday. [Interviewer: And she considers you American?] Yes, I have the U.S. passport. I was born here.

Zendra concurrently claimed both an American and a West Indian identity. However, note that in her statement, questions of country of origin, or where she originated from, were answered with declarations of her American citizenship evidenced by an American birth and passport. In terms of self-identification, however, she "calls" herself West Indian, justifying her choice by referring to her mother's maintenance of West Indian-ness in spite of being in the U.S. for several years. She felt that if her mother could still be West Indian after settling in the U.S. for so long, then she, an American citizen, could certainly make similar cultural claims. Zendra's mother used her biological disconnection from Montserrat to undermine her claim to the West Indian culture,

however, indicating the struggle that Zendra and many other second-generation women of this study had with island-born members of the community in New York City; the latter saw the second-generation cohort as different because they were not born in the West Indies.

Elizabeth was clearer in her distinction of legal and cultural citizenship. She said, "For my home life we did not have an American home… I'm an American citizen, yes, cause I was born here, but when it comes to my culture, I don't identify as an American." She thus claimed American citizenship on the basis of birth, but her domestic submersion into Jamaican traditions made her culturally West Indian. Julie also stated,

> I'm American because I was born here and I have a U.S. passport…[I am American] as a citizen, yeah…[On those forms] I'd have to say American, cause I was born here. Like you have to say where you born, right? So I put down black American female. I was born here…If I put down West Indian and they'll wanna go, "Well, where in the West Indies were you born?" And then I go, "Well, I was born in Brooklyn, New York." And they'd go, "Wait a minute. This doesn't add up. Where you from?"

Even though she was born in the U.S., and only returned to St. Vincent for visits, Julie considered herself a St. Vincentian, and an American solely by birth. In her everyday life, she claimed an American identity on documents, and, even then, only to avoid having to explain her complicated location.

Further evidence of their dual-layered identity was found in their conception of home. For many of the women, the U.S. was where they belonged. Karla stated,

> To be honest with you, [when talking about Barbados] I have never used that term, that "I am going home." You know how you hear people say that? Because when I think of home I think of [the U.S.], strangely enough.

In spite of identifying herself by her Barbadian heritage in her everyday life, Karla knew that Barbados was not her home. Her statement was not simply referring to the fact that

she had no desire to live there, but, rather, it implied her disconnection from Barbados. It indicated that Barbados, the birthplace of her culture and the land to which her parents were still very much connected, was not her land; she was inextricably connected to the culture, but she was disconnected from the island itself. Mia also said, “I don’t know how to survive in Trinidad,” indicating that, while she was a self-identified Trinidadian in the U.S., she was removed from the island and its systems. The first-generation immigrant women of my study also demonstrated little (real) desire to return to their homelands, and the majority was firmly established in the U.S. and chose it as their home. However, for those women, the West Indies remained their place of belonging; they thus had a connection to their islands that their second-generation counterparts did not have because of their birth and raring in the U.S.

This observation was substantiated by the fact that the second-generation women spoke of the West Indies as a distant place, a dreamland that embodied all that was good and pure. Julie described St. Vincent as “peaceful and quiet and alive,” a place where she was surrounded by the love of her family, and separated from her routine in New York City. Zendra believed that being in Montserrat was therapeutic, and went there for a few months to “relax…and take in the sunshine” after her major surgery. Shelly similarly believed that “the air [in Jamaica] is different,” and fantasized about moving there, opening a business and walking around barefooted all day. Mille also said that she loved Jamaica, and was comfortable there, and, if she won the lottery, she would move there to live on a piece of land that she already picked out.

The picture of their island that they presented resembled the mediated representations of these nations, and the wonderful, but partially fantastic, conception

disseminated by émigrés. The current respondents had obviously heard and internalized the stories about "home" propagated by their parents and others within their migratory generation. However, unlike those of the first-generation cohort, the women's description of their homelands did not reveal a personal connection to the islands, but rather revealed a nativistic and exoticized fascination that was grounded in American ideology. In other words, their statements were not informed by a sense of connection to the actual islands of the West Indies, but on secondhand narratives and mediated portrayals.

Admittedly, several of the women had visited their homelands, and had spent summers with relatives in the West Indies. However, for most of the women, these visits were about returning to their parents' lands, and the connection they developed was mediated by the history of their families. As Elizabeth said, "[In Jamaica] I felt like I was home because this was where my mom grew up…and I felt comfortable there." She spent summers there when she was younger, and so had memories of her grandmother's house and so forth, but her relationship with Jamaica seemed to be primarily based on the island's connection to her parents' lives and the heritage they passed down to her. For others, these visits and vacations to their parents' countries seemed to serve to deepen their disconnection from the islands as their accents, as well as their certain return to the U.S., distinguished them as foreigners, secured differential – as opposed to bonding – treatment, and precluded their submersion into their heritage.

In sum, the women conceived of themselves as embodiments of West Indian culture, even as they perceived the U.S. as where they were born, and where they belonged. They then claimed a dual-layered identity that embraced legal citizenship to

the U.S. on one hand and cultural citizenship to the West Indies on the other. This legal/cultural identity was indicative of a form of cultural hybridity borne from their strategic location within both American and West Indian cultures. It connoted these women's access to two spheres of citizenship, and their ability to claim either one on their own terms. As women of West Indian heritage, they could align themselves with the identity narratives and cultural legacy that defined West Indians in New York City; as legal American citizens, they could lay claim to American values as well as the benefits conferred to Americans, a sphere and a level of power that evaded their immigrant parents.

Having legal and cultural citizenship in different spheres fostered the construction of a liminal identity, creating a space between two social systems that facilitated participation in, and access to, both. Candidly, liminality also precludes full inclusion into any of the two spheres, a state which can be distressing for its occupants (a point which will be discussed later in the chapter). In spite of its disadvantages, however, I believe occupation of this space allowed these women to negotiate West Indian and American cultural systems, claiming what they perceived as beneficial for their self-preservation, and distancing themselves from what was not. In other words, they drew on West Indian values to distinguish themselves from unfavorable stereotypes of Americans held in the West Indian community, and adopted American cultural norms to separate themselves from the negative conceptions of West Indians in U.S. ideology.

The women's legitimate claim to both American and West Indian discourses had significant implications for their day-to-day presentation of self, and, subsequently, their engagement with mainstream television texts. These movements away from and towards

each culture were manifested in their engagement with, or dissociation from television texts in general and soap operas in particular.

Establishing West Indian Identity

In this section I discuss how second-generation West Indian immigrant women constructed a West Indian identity through the values they claimed as well as through their interaction with mainstream television texts. I demonstrate how their endorsement of the narrative of superiority proliferated by their first-generation counterparts, their dismissal of engagement with television texts and their extreme dislike of soap operas established their identity as productive West Indians in New York City.

As previously demonstrated, the women in the study claimed a West Indian cultural identity. They conceived of themselves as West Indian cultural products, and wanted to be identified as such in New York City. They also wanted to ensure that they raised their children with West Indian values. As Julie said,

> I don't have any kids and I'm not married either. But I'm pretty sure that eventually one day I'll be married and have kids. And I'll try to teach them like the things that I know. Try to teach them wrong and right. Eventually I'd raise them the West Indian way.

Karla, who was raising a seven-year-old girl, also said, "I just pray. Honestly I pray that she just remembers the values that have been embedded and look on the family. I try to keep her close to the family." However, closer analysis of their comments revealed that, despite their insistence on their wholly West Indian cultural identity, they tended to align themselves with particular aspects of the identity of first-generation West Indian immigrants in New York City. More precisely, their West Indian identity was

predominantly expressed in terms of their difference from and cultural superiority to Americans in general. In other words, the respondents tended to claim the West Indian values of hard-work, and the prioritization of education and discipline, distinguishing themselves from Americans in whom they thought such traits were deficient. For instance, Mia stated,

> I think that we raise our kids…just [with] pride. I think that West Indian people on a whole, they very prideful people…we don't want our children doing certain things, and certain values…We don't want our children on the street, and we don't want them hanging [out]…even though I know that…in Trinidad, everybody is "liming", or hanging out…It's different here…and just the respect and the discipline…

Mia thus established West Indians as different from their American counterparts. She thought that West Indians did not want their children "on the street," an activity that was considered a lower-class behavior, and that was indicative of idleness and delinquency. She suggested that West Indians in New York City wanted their children to engage in productive activities, to convey the image of hard-working people that was proliferated in the community and, in a more stereotypical form, on television. Her use of "we" signified her own distinction from the people to whom she was at least legally bound, and explicitly communicated her association with who she thought were the more productive and disciplined West Indians. She admitted that when in their homelands West Indians engaged in "liming," but she considered that activity on the island as different from roaming the streets of New York City. By making this statement, Mia established life in the islands as different from life in New York City, indicating that leisure activity there did not produce the delinquency it did in her new home. Her statement also suggested a shift in West Indian values that occurred with migration, a change – which, as discussed in Chapter Three, was necessitated by the environment of the U.S. – that made

productivity and hard-work essential to West Indian women's self-representation in New York City.

Shelly also shared,

> I think that West Indian people have just totally different values from Americans…They go all out for their men. I hardly ever hear a Jamaican woman bashing her man…You wanna bring him up, and you wanna make him feel like they a man. Like I have [African] American friends…you know, just bashing them and making them feel like less of a man. I think that family runs deep with West Indian people…I don't see that with American people at all…You 18, you can leave… That type of thing.…Like as long as your kids are productive citizens and they going to school, and they doing things…,Jamaican people, West Indian people for that matter, they with you, they stand behind you. But American people,…and I'm talking about myself.…It's so weird coming from me, right?

Shelly thought that African American women emasculated and belittled their male partners, and she disliked what she perceived as the American practice of making children leave the home at 18 years of age, both of which she thought attenuated family bonds. She also highlighted some of the traits that characterized a "good" West Indian in New York City, namely, productivity and education, the absence of which was the only grounds for sending children away from their homes. Shelly's statement also divulged her self-conscious negotiation of her dual-layered identity. She thought of herself as an American in some respect, but aligned herself with West Indian values that distanced her from what she considered the deficient values of Americans. Her self-reflexive comment ("It's so weird coming from me, right?") also demonstrated that she was aware of and a little uncomfortable with her strategic positioning within New York City.

Tanya also said this about the white Americans in her college:

> I think that we take more abuse from the world so it makes us, not numb to it, but able to take it more. If you have life easy the least problem that you get is a big problem. And then [white Americans] party. I have this one friend, she's an art major in college and she can't draw, but she doesn't care. Her mother owns five businesses. She can run one… They are a little wilder than me, the majority. The

> ones that I talk to would say… "I woke up this morning with Josh, and I don't even know how he got into my bed."… The majority of the young white people smoke cigarettes. I only know one black person who smokes cigarettes...I think that our cultures are different; I can't deny that.

For Tanya, white Americans were more financially privileged and thus did not prioritize education as much as she did. Also, in her opinion, the fact that they smoked and engaged in casual sexual encounters was indicative of their weaker moral fiber, and their affluence made them ignorant to the concept of hard-work and productivity. She suggested that her marginalization as a black woman made her more resilient than her white counterparts, while white Americans lack of exposure made them fragile and unprepared for real life. Tanya's statement recuperated the notion of superhuman-ness that has been ascribed to black women in U.S. popular culture, and that was evident in the identity of first-generation West Indian women discussed in Chapter Three. By using this image of the strong black woman, she aligned herself with the island-born women of the West Indian community, and established an essentialized difference from white Americans.

In general, the women considered themselves to be different from and better than Americans by virtue of their cultural heritage. In this sense then, they rehearsed the first-generation cohort's identity narrative of superiority to all things American, aligning themselves with this group and their culture. In doing so, these women set themselves apart from and above Americans. However, given their partial American identity, as well as their claim of some American values, their differentiation was not a complete separation from American culture, but rather emerged as a disconnection from certain aspects of it. Specifically, by partially building their identity on the West Indian value of productivity, they distinguished themselves from the non-hard-working, non-disciplined

Americans that pervaded West Indian cultural ideology in the U.S.

Claiming this West Indian oppositional identity not only set these participants apart from Americans, but also distanced them from the negative aspects of their own American subjectivity. They indicated that, while they claimed U.S. citizenship, they were West Indian cultural citizens, and their West Indian heritage had bestowed upon them cultural traits that prevented their wholesale categorization as Americans. As Tanya said, "I am happy and proud to be West Indian because it makes me feel special and different and I like that… I am not the average American." Monique was even more forthright when she said, "I'm a little happy I'm West Indian, and not just a regular black person…" For both these women who were American citizens, having West Indian heritage made them different from, and more special than, "average" Americans.

The women's value of hard-work and self-discipline was further substantiated by their discussions of media engagement. As with the participants presented in previous chapters, some of the women responded dismissively to questions about television consumption habits, hastily commenting on their preoccupation with work, school and other "important," non-mediated activities. Julie said, "I don't watch too much TV. I'm always at work," and Karla, who was in the early stages of a Master's program, stated, "I don't really watch TV as before…I haven't watched TV." Tanya snubbed the idea altogether, saying, "I don't watch television…If it is on I will stare at it, but I would never turn it on." These women, despite their subsequent discussions of frequently watched shows, downplayed their television interactions. In doing so, they, like their island-born counterparts, deployed discussion of television engagement to reinforce the narrative of hard-work and productivity that permeated West Indian identity in New York City, and

that they believed set them apart from the negative perceptions of Americans.

Soap Operas and West Indian Subjectivity

In general, the participants engaged with various television programs, creating a diverse television diet within and across respondents, similar to that of their first-generation counterparts. The diversity of their tastes as well as the absence of a recurring genre or program in their discussions precluded identifying a pattern in the television fare they enjoyed. However, analysis of what the women said they did *not* engage with revealed congruities that could be linked to their desire to maintain West Indian values.

Most of the women expressed their dislike of soap operas. In response to my question about the television shows she would not watch, Karla exclaimed,

> Soap operas; I really hate soap operas. You couldn't imagine…They are so fake and phony and it's like one woman in the soap opera has slept with every single male in the show. To me I think the acting is so poor.

Shelly made an almost identical statement when she said,

> I hate soap operas. I hate them. I think they're stupid…they have no meaning. I mean, this one's sleeping with this one, …now this one had a baby by this one, but this one's gonna kill this one…It's just stupid. I hate soap operas; I hate them.

Elizabeth also rebuffed soap operas, saying, "Foolishness! White people's foolishness. They die and then two years later they come back…" All three women spoke very passionately about their abhorrence of soap operas, vehemently dismissing these texts because of what they perceived as their ridiculous plots; the erratic sexual encounters, the seeming immortality of characters, as well as the poor acting performances in this genre, irritated them.

Soap operas are "that form of television that works with a continuous open

narrative. Each episode ends with a promise that the storyline is to be continued in another episode" (Bowles, 2000, pp. 121). The main characteristics of U.S. soap operas are "an emphasis on family life, personal relationships, sexual dramas, emotional and moral conflicts…set in familiar domestic interiors with only occasional excursions into new locations" (Bowles, 2000, pp. 119). The characters are also generally more attractive, glamorous and affluent than the typical person watching the show (Bowles, 2000). Given these characteristics, it was evident why the women in my study saw no opportunity for identification in soap operas. They deemed these programs unrealistic, and low in aesthetic and intellectual quality, and unrelated to their identity in New York City.

First, the lifestyles of the characters did not create a fantasy world of escape for the respondents as other scholars have found (see Ang, 1985), but rather these programs alienated them. In general, the participants were attracted to television programs that resonated with their social locations and roles, and that were thus communicative of their positionalities. Shelly said,

> I like *CSI*. I love *CSI*. I like suspense… like "who done it." I look at reality shows too a little bit, but I mostly look at like cop shows and things like that. Documentaries, I like documentaries… I'm...that type of person. I like suspense and I like documentaries. That's mainly what I look at on TV… You know I was trying to be a correctional officer up until a few months ago.

Her interest in law enforcement made programs such as *CSI* pleasurable. Beyond that, her love of these shows was meant to reveal an aspect of her personality or character. Her comment, "I'm that type of person," said in conjunction with her favorite type of shows, divulged that she perceived her engagement with television as a manifestation of her personality, as if expressing her love for suspense-driven shows and documentaries

revealed her character. Margo expressed analogous ideas when she spoke about why she was attracted to the series *Heroes*. She said,

> I like the whole aspect of the little person…coming forth and being able to take care of others…[*Heroes* appeals to me because] I am one of those people who always, always try and take care of people. That's just who I am.

The premise of a few seemingly ordinary people protecting the world resonated with her maternal character, making her engagement with *Heroes* an extension of the type of person she thought she was.

By foregrounding their personal lives as the selection criteria, these women demonstrated that they conceived of television engagement as self-expression, and that it could be used to communicate their social and cultural identity. Based on this discussion then, soap operas would be unattractive to the respondents because, for one, their grandiose settings, which were incongruous with the women's working class and lower-middle class lives, provided little points of identification for them.

Furthermore, soap operas' association with domestic spaces - in terms of the setting of the drama, but also in terms of the way it is perceived in popular ideology - did not resonate with the image that the respondents wanted to construct in New York City. Similar to their first-generation counterparts, the women presented themselves as hard-working and industrious, characteristics that they thought distinguished them from Americans in general. In contrast, the soap opera genre is associated with unproductive labor, and is the quintessential symbol of idleness. Such attitudes may be borne from the mass media/mass culture bias (Ang, 1985) that regards all television fare and dedication to it as unproductive and banal in comparison to the pursuit of "higher" art. Soap operas in particular are often upheld as archetypal television banality, and dismissed as cultural

"trash." In fact, and in spite of its popularity worldwide, soap operas are considered the pastime of housewives and home-bodies, people (usually women) who do not make valuable contributions to the public sphere.

In addition, the genre's continuous, never-ending storylines, and lack of resolution frustrated participants such as Shelly and Kim who expressed their excitement about "who done it" shows that required them to solve mysteries. In this sense then, soap operas did not engage the women's intellect, making them mere unproductive, observers rather than participants in the show. Given my respondents' desire to claim West Indian ideas about productivity, and their recognition of the communicative power of their television engagement, it was necessary for them to denounce this cultural symbol of unemployment and un-involvement in the public sphere. Their disassociation from soap operas was thus a reflection of their desire to present themselves as hard-working, and their effort to reinforce that, while they were Americans, they did not share what they perceived as the deficient values of the U.S.

In sum, by claiming West Indian identity traits, as well as their particular engagement – or disengagement – with television texts, the women aligned themselves with their first-generation counterparts, establishing themselves as West Indians, and also denouncing their affiliation with what they thought was the questionable character of American citizens. Specifically, the participants' promotion of West Indian notions of hard-work, education and discipline highlighted their desire to be distinguished from Americans who were labeled by their community as individualistic, selfish and unproductive. Their engagement with television was expressive of this desire in several ways: First, their dismissal of television consumption, as well as their adamant

disassociation from soap operas, served to reinforce their self-presentation as productive citizens. Furthermore, the very fact that they selected television texts in the same manner as their first-generation counterparts was indicative of their alignment with first-generation West Indians immigrants and their values.

Challenging West Indian Traditions

Notwithstanding the women's claim of a West Indian identity, they actively contested some West Indian norms, specifically those that conflicted with their personal well-being, and those that were evaluated negatively by Americans. This movement away from particular West Indian values was reflected in their disinterest in the programs that their caregivers enjoyed in general, and soap operas in particular.

One respondent who overtly challenged West Indian norms was Karla. She was passionate about teaching her seven-year-old daughter to express herself because she felt that the Barbadian standard that required children to be "seen, but not heard" had hindered her own achievement in American schools. She said,

> In this day and age…she's going to be competing with so many other people. I think that's so important. She's going to have to learn from now to speak up for what she believes to be important within her heart, and what she believes to be right and don't grow up [like me]. I wasn't really made to speak up…[I learned to speak up] in school! Even now I'm sure I'm very reserved, but I'm trying to open up more. It's not easy when you are so used to being some way and all of a sudden you have to change.

Karla implied that she was not allowed to express herself in her West Indian household, and that it was not until she attended an American school that she learnt that there were other, more progressive ways of being. She felt that "in this day and age," or in this

modern time, she as well as her daughter needed to cast off this tradition in order to successfully participate in New York City. She later confessed that she blamed and resented her mother for instilling this custom that she felt held her back in U.S. society.

Shelly also harbored bitterness against her grandmother who, acting according to Jamaican customs, renounced her after she got pregnant at 15 years old. She shared,

> I knew she was gonna treat me like that because it just wasn't something that she was big on, and she let it be known. She taught us different than that. "How come you came out like that…What's wrong with you? I didn't teach you that; I didn't teach you to go sleep around." Not that I was sleeping around, but that's she how she looked at it… God forbid, if my daughter has a baby young… she's 18 now, but if she had a kid when she was younger, I wouldn't talk to her that way… This woman? Huh! "Who's the daddy? ….Where is he? …So that's what you do, you just run the streets and you lay…" It was just so graphic and I felt like this little whore, like God, how could she say that to me?... This is my grandmother, and she's talking to me like that?! You know, this woman who taught me how to kneed dough, and just was there for me.

According to Shelly, this experience with her grandmother scarred her emotionally, and forced her to go on her own when she was 17 years old, indefinitely suspending her schooling, and limiting her career opportunities. Such cases of condemnation of teenagers who get pregnant are also prevalent in American society. However, what is important is that Shelly perceived her treatment as the result of her grandmother's West Indian upbringing. She subsequently detached herself from her grandmother and from what she considered the norm in Jamaican culture, and was determined to be different from her grandmother in this respect.

Zendra also critiqued what she perceived as the laid-back work ethic of West Indians in the islands. She stated,

> For two weeks they had me down [to do a dance workshop]. But I had the American, New York mentality, and everyone down there is so lazy. If I say come down, class start at 10, they would come down like 11:30. And they say, "Oh God, you hurting me; Zendra, you hurting me." And I would get so frustrated, so

> so frustrated. Then I just had to release all a that, and say this is the island. They not used to working like that.

While people from Montserrat living in the U.S. established themselves as hard-working and productive, for Zendra, her counterparts living on the island were too carefree. Her belief about Montserratians reflected the mediated portrayals of the West Indies in general as the lands of fun-loving, laid-back peoples (Du Bois, 2004), and solidified her disconnection from the lifestyle of the island. More significantly, Zendra's statement highlighted her critique of and distancing from West Indians who she felt were not accustomed to systematic and sustained work. She was different from them because she had adopted the business mindset of the U.S.

Clearly, the participants contested the parts of West Indian culture that threatened their personal welfare and interests, thus renegotiating and reworking West Indian norms. However, they were also critiquing and distancing themselves from what seemed to be archaic practices of West Indian culture. Children not being able to express themselves (which is a form of deprivation of rights); the perception that young ladies' lives are irrevocably ruined by pre-marital sex and early pregnancy; and an easygoing lifestyle and, subsequently, bad business sense are all characteristics attributed to life in un- and underdeveloped countries in the American imagination. These and other values have been used to classify and essentialize "third world" countries, such as those in the West Indies, as backward and unprogressive, and their inhabitants and emigrants as simple-minded and dull-witted. In particular, women from these nations are often stereotyped as illiterate, unprogressive people who perpetuate even the most archaic traditions (Phizacklea, 2001). These women then implicitly distanced themselves from what is widely perceived in American discourses as the primitivism of island nations. They

adopted a "New York mentality," the more liberal and open-minded values of the U.S., which set them apart from what they thought were the outdated practices and values of West Indian culture.

Furthermore, in separating themselves from some aspects of West Indian culture the women also partially distanced themselves from their primary caregivers. These mothers and grandmothers, who had instilled within them the West Indian values they held - including the ones they challenged - embodied what it meant to be West Indian. To contest and resist West Indian values was then to detach themselves from their caregivers. This severance from their heritage and their island-born counterparts was reflected in their engagement with television texts.

Soap Operas and the Disclaiming of West Indian Heritage

Most of the second-generation West Indian immigrant women in the study stated that they found no pleasure in, nor interacted with the shows enjoyed by their mothers. When asked if their mothers shared similar predilection for their favorite programs, the women promptly and definitively denied any relationship between their tastes in television fare and that of their mothers, constructing a firm dichotomy between themselves and their émigré caregivers. For example, in response to my inquiry, "Does your mother like to watch the same types of show as you?" Karla said,

> No not at all. She is big on soap operas. *All My Children*. *One life to Live*…Now that she is retired, she watches them during the day…She loves soap operas and she doesn't like what I like, the court shows, comedies…I don't think it's like a reason. I just think that they don't appeal to her. She doesn't like what I like.

Karla conclusively stated that the programs she engaged with did not resonate with her mother, a retired immigrant from Barbados, indicating a difference in personality as well

as positionality that manifested itself in divergent television preferences. Similarly, Shelly answered, “No, no…[My grandmother] looks at soaps and news, and like romance stuff, and I’m not really into that stuff.” She therefore did not identify with the television choices of the woman who raised her after the death of her mother. Mia was also determined to distinguish her television proclivities from those of her mother. In response to the same question she exclaimed decisive, “NO… [She likes] soap operas, and the court shows, and *Law and Order*… I like mystery, but I don’t like *Law and Order*.” Even though she admitted that both she and her mother enjoyed programs of the crime-solving, suspense nature, she ensured that I understood that they did not like the same shows within this genre.

Similarly, Tanya thought her mother just would not appreciate the action and excitement generated by the science fiction, action thrillers she enjoyed. She said,

> [My mother] would ask me questions through the whole movie, and say that she doesn’t get this stupid movie, and say it is stupid. If she did [like it], it would not be on the level that I would.

She suggested that her mother was not able to understand the technological aspects of such movies, and would not be able to follow the plot without her help. In other words, her mother did not, and never would, appreciate the movies she loved, suggesting a perpetual chasm between her mediated predilections and those of her mom as well as an irrevocable difference in mindset. Even Monique, who admitted that she made her mother watch the *King of Queens* comedy with her, suggested that there was a difference. She said,

> I don’t really think she be listening like I want her to. I’ll be like, ‘Ma, you think that’s funny?’ She’ll be like, ‘Yeah,’ but…I don’t think she like really gets into it like I get into it. I feel like she’s like, “I can’t wait for this to go on commercial.

Monique and the other women then denied sharing a common mediated space with their mothers, citing differences in tastes and positionalities: Their mothers and grandmothers occupied separate spheres, and thus could not appreciate the same television programs that they did. The difference in position could be borne from age differences. Being younger, the women in this study had different experiences, points of references and standpoints, and thus necessarily developed different media preferences than their older counterparts. However, the difference in position between the women and their island-born mothers necessarily stemmed from their occupation of disparate diasporic spaces. As second-generation immigrants, the women had indirect relationships to the islands of their heritage, and thought about and participated in their cultures differently than their first-generation counterparts (Brah, 2003; Dugsin, 2001). They subsequently developed different diasporic subjectivities and different ways of engaging with institutions of U.S. society, including media. Therefore, their declaration of distinctive television consumption was at least partially an establishment of difference in diasporic identity.

Mayer (2003) found similar deployment of media engagement among her Mexican-American respondents. She contended that, while her adolescent participants watched the same *telenovelas* as their relatives in Mexico, they distinguished their own "American" viewing patterns from that of their Mexican counterparts, distancing themselves from their ideas about Mexico and Mexican life (Mayer, 2003). Similarly, the statements of difference in television engagement proffered by these second-generation West Indian immigrant women distinguished them from mothers or caregivers who were of a different migratory generation, and who occupied a separate diasporic space in New

York City. The participants were actively questioning and revising some of the West Indian approach to life instilled by their mothers or caregivers, and their disconnection from the television content that their caregivers enjoyed was an extension of their segmented detachment from them.

While the fact of the participants' contestation of West Indian cultural norms was reflected in their claim of different television preferences from their caregivers, the particular aspects of West Indian culture being challenged was evident in the specific shows they rejected. As seen by the quotes presented above, most of the respondents admitted that their first-generation immigrant caregivers loved soap operas. In Chapter Two I discussed the media engagement patterns of first-generation West Indian women, highlighting their affinity for competitive reality shows, and other programs that they felt resonated with their pre-migration lives. The current women's claims that their first-generation caregivers had a preference for soap operas, or shows of that nature, point to some inconsistency in the programs that the women thought their caregivers were interested in, and their caregivers' actual television engagement. However, what is important is not the actual television interactions of their caregivers, but rather the fact that the second-generation women *perceived* soap operas, the television program they loathed, as being favored by their caregivers. By disassociating themselves from the television choices of their caregivers, they then explicitly rejected soap operas...again.

As discussed before, soap operas are characterized by domesticity and unresolved storylines, traits that fostered its association with unproductivity. Soap operas are also known for their slow plot development so that viewers are still able to follow the story even after not watching for years. Furthermore, and in spite of the convoluted and

confusing relationships that develop among the characters, the storylines are very simple - comprising of chance meetings, coincidences and sudden revelations (Bowles, 2000) - and can be understood with little intellectual effort. The latter characteristics substantiate the perception of unproductivity surrounding the texts, but also make the soap opera genre unsophisticated or archaic in comparison to other dramatic television fares (such as *Law and Order*, *24*, and *Grey's Anatomy*.)

By saying that soap operas were preferred by their caregivers, the women then implied that their island-born counterparts were attracted to such unsophisticated texts, an attraction which reflected their own simplemindedness. Tanya explicitly supported this argument when she said that her mother always required explanations of the drama and plots of the shows that she liked, suggesting that her mother did not relate to fast-paced, technological shows, or to the type of cynical address now prevalent in American programming. Similarly, Monique implied that her mother did not "get" the humor of *King of Queens* as she did. They did not believe that their caregivers were dumb; the respondents just thought that they were in a different, more sophisticated place than their mothers and grandmothers.

In sum, the women were challenging and negotiating specific aspects of their West Indian heritage, namely the traditions that they thought were archaic. These characteristics were also found in soap operas. Rejecting their caregivers' soap operas thus reflected the participants' distancing from what they considered the archaic, non-modern mentality of their island-born counterparts and their culture.

The Discontents of Dual Citizenship

Through mediated and non-mediated means, the women in my study constructed a culturally hybrid identity. This creation and occupancy of a liminal space was not experienced unproblematically, however, as many of the women spoke of the difficulties associated with membership in both cultural spheres. Most of the confessions were related to feelings of marginalization. For example, Mia shared,

> I don't know the culture, the history [of Trinidad]; I don't feel a connection. Yeah, I know the food cause I was raised on it. Is like I know the things, because I was raised on it, you know, but… to say a connection…[I'm] very torn, very conflicted. And I thought as I got older it would get better, like I'd find a way to kind of mesh both worlds, and I've found myself being put in situation where I'm still uncomfortable...sometimes I don't like to tell people I'm Trinidadian, especially if they're Trinidadian, cause they expect things of me. I fall so short. I feel very embarrassed.

Mia, who emigrated when she was five years old, expressed her frustration with being of Trinidadian birth, and being expected to fully participate in a culture from which she felt disconnected. In spite of being culturally removed from Trinidad, however, she refused to claim an American identity. Shelly's distress was also borne from feelings of not being West Indian enough. She said,

> It's kinda funny…like family gatherings I feel outcast-ish…because…is like you not…from Jamaica…They talk different to us, like if they speak to us they won't speak to us in patois…they try to put on their American voice…It's crazy…They talk different to us, like you know…how when you go into a room and everybody is talking, and then when you come in everybody shut up? It's kinda like that feeling…it's not exactly like that, but it's kinda like that feeling. They treat you different, even though we're all from the same family, some of us have the same last name, we all know that we're of the same…background and heritage and all that stuff; it is different. It's kinda like racism in a sense, family racism.

Shelly was born in the U.S., but raised with Jamaican values in a Jamaican family. Her non-Jamaican birth, however, isolated her from her island-born family members, and made her perceive herself as less of a Jamaican than they were. This feeling of exclusion was also experienced bilaterally, as Tanya poignantly expressed when she said,

> I always feel out of place because my accent, the way I dress, and the things that I do are different [from Americans]. It is like I am not completely fitting in with the American crowd and not completely fitting in with the Jamaican crowd. I do fit in, but not completely… I never feel like I am home.

In other words, being of two subjectivities obscured full inclusion into any, and hindered the process of constructing “home.”

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that second-generation West Indian immigrant women developed a dual-layered identity as American and West Indian citizens. This identity space facilitated their access to both cultures, allowing them to claim aspects of each that negated the negative perceptions of the other. They thus claimed the West Indian ideals of hard-work and self-discipline, distinguishing themselves from what West Indians perceived as the unproductivity of Americans. Their dismissal of television consumption in general, as well as their loathing of soap operas in particular, was expressive of their desire to present themselves as industrious women. The women also concurrently aligned themselves with liberal, modernized American values, distancing themselves from the primitivism that surrounds West Indians in American ideologies. These negotiations were reflected in their disassociation from the television texts with which their island-born caregivers engaged, and their rejection of soap operas.

The fact that their dismissal of television consumption resembled that of their first-generation counterparts, but that they did not enjoy what their caregivers watched was indicative of their negotiation of West Indian and American cultures. It reflected the simultaneous movements towards and away from the first-generation immigrants and

thus their West Indian heritage. Furthermore, soap operas had a significant role in second-generation women's self-presentation. For them, this genre embodied the negative aspects of the two layers of their identity: It signified the unproductivity that West Indians ascribed to Americans as well as the primitivism attribute to West Indians in American ideology. Disassociation from this genre was thus a manifestation of the women's bilateral cultural distancing, and their creation of a positively-defined, dual-cultured space in the U.S.

Conclusion
Reflections and Future Directions

Drawing on ethnographic insights garnered from in-depth interviews and small focus groups used across three studies, I demonstrated throughout this dissertation the significance of television in the construction and presentation of West Indian subjectivities. First-generation West Indian immigrant women's interactions with television was expressive of their identity as hard-workers and their pre-migration body politics, and was constitutive of their construction of and connection to their islands, their coping narratives, and the discourses of the body they developed. These women's engagement with television also revealed their claim to a primarily West Indian citizenship, only strategically appropriating U.S. mediated ideologies to negotiate New York City. The television interaction of the second-generation, however, was indicative of their liminal identity that drew on both West Indian and American ideologies to evade the negativities of both.

For these two groups of women then, the manner in which they discussed their engagement with television became a signifier of their values and norms. Also, the texts with which they engaged exposed them to the norms of their new home even as they furnished information that the women deployed to reinforce connections to their homelands, and set themselves apart from Americans. In some instances, they appropriated stereotypical mediated representations of their culture to create a space for

themselves within American discourses even as they concurrently deployed West Indian norms to counter the marginalization engendered by such images. Furthermore, they drew on U.S. cultural norms disseminated by television to contend with unfavorable West Indian *and* American exigencies. In essence, their television engagement simultaneously provided an introduction to, a buffer against, and a means of negotiating with American culture. It moderated the construction of their diasporic identity by helping them to adapt to the U.S., to claim agency in the face of displacement, and to navigate the cultural exigencies and negativities of the sociopolitical spaces they occupied.

It is evident that my respondents' engagement with television texts was erratic, unpredictable, full of contradictions, and cannot be articulated in a neat linear model of audience engagement and interpretation. Their interaction with television was also not simply about the merger of cultures, nor was it merely a matter of interpellation and resistance. Rather, these women's engagement with television was about strategically negotiating the cultural milieu of their diasporic space. The very fact that they interacted with American texts was symbolic of their engagement with American society in general, but the manner in which they interacted with television clearly divulged their complicated negotiations of their West Indian heritage and the ideologies of the U.S. In other words, their erratic engagement with mainstream television was indicative and facilitative of their general negotiation of the culture spheres they occupied. Moreover, the women were not simply bystanders, but actively participated in this process, deploying their engagement with television texts to strategically position themselves in American discourses.

Notwithstanding the respondents' agency in their interaction with television,

however, there were moments when the women undeniably reinscribed dominant U.S. ideologies proliferated by television, incorporating them into their identities. In this sense then, dominant television helped in the development of their cultural hybridization, facilitating and contributing to the process. The women's dialogue with U.S. mainstream culture, through mediated means or otherwise, necessarily exposed them to American values and ways of life that became integrated into their identities. More precisely, their appropriation of American mediated representations of themselves; their use of televised conceptions of America and Americans as a counterpoint for their identity, and their segmented concession to mediated American ideologies - all of which were done to strategically construct their subjectivies in the U.S. – signified the incorporation of some aspect of American culture and ideology, and therefore the women's cultural hybridization. Indeed, even their deployment of engagement with U.S. television fare as an expression of their West Indian diasporic identity signaled a moment of hybridization. In other words, the participants' interaction with mainstream television engendered their hybridization by proffering the U.S.-related cultural information, as well as the *mediated practices*, that informed the construction of their diasporic identity.

The preceding analyses have important theoretical and methodological implications for critical cultural audience studies. First, beyond conceiving media and identity as bifurcated, dichotomous spheres that interact with each other from a distance, my research illustrates that media are inextricably embedded in our everyday presentation of self. Audiences' comprehensive engagement with media texts – such as how they talk about their mediated interactions, the actual texts they engage with, the mode of identification with the texts, and how and with whom they discuss the texts - reveal as

well as construct how they want to be perceived in society. This assertion substantiates the work of audience studies scholars such as Stuart Hall, Robin Means Coleman, Chris Barker and Marie Gillespie, but also challenges them, as well as other media scholars, to explore media engagement in a more holistic manner. Second, my work calls critical audience studies scholars to develop research and analytical practices that divulge this intricate and entrenched relationship between media and identity. It encourages the examination of media interaction in a more comprehensive manner, exploring the moment of consumption (what is consumed, where, and how) in relation to extra-mediated moments when the texts are still being engaged (such as in discussions with peers and as reference for public behavior). It is only in looking at media engagement in this holistic manner, examining how we think about and engage with media texts during and after consumption, that we can fully understand how media become a part of who we are and how we present ourselves.

My dissertation also has implications for theorizing about the relationship between media and diasporic identities in particular. The findings indicate that beyond simply facilitating assimilation and/or cultural insulation, mainstream media help diasporic subjects to strategically negotiate the discourses from both their homelands and their receiving nations. They inform the identities that immigrants and their children develop in their diasporic space, and foster their hybridization. Furthermore, my research demonstrates that immigrants', both first and second-generation, engagement with the dominant media is not only a unilateral process of being-made, but also involves a contested process of self-making. I therefore expand and complicate the perceived range of influence of mainstream media on diasporic identity, and demonstrate that first and

second-generation immigrants have an active role in their interaction with the media of their receiving nations.

Furthermore, presenting West Indian women as cultural subjects makes important contributions to ongoing postcolonial feminist discourses. As “third world” subjects, West Indian women are an excellent case study for understanding the complicated “outsider within” positions (Hill Collins, 1998) created when racial and gendered bodies cross ideologically hostile national boundaries. Much of the extant literature on “third world” women, including those written by Western feminists, present them as an essentialized, undifferentiated category, rather than complex social and cultural beings; as infantilized victims who have to be emancipated; and, subsequently, as different from and inferior to their Western counterparts (Ong, 2001; Lazreg, 2001). Even “third world” women who choose to participate in Western circles are forced to speak and have their experiences interpreted within Western standards (Lazreg, 2001; Ong, 2001). In other words, they are forced to “represent themselves in terms that already subsume and contain their representations” (Lazreg, 2001, pp. 287).

These naturalized ethnocentric practices have symbolically silenced “third world” women, and obstructed the development of scholarship outside of the designated paradigm of “oppressed, primitive other.” This tradition persists even in the face of increased “third world” presence in the U.S., or as, according to Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani (2001), “the repressed” return “on the borders of the imperialistic centers” (pp. 486). Studies of “third world” women living in industrialized nations tend to recuperate the victimization paradigm by focusing on their exploitation as personal service workers (maids) and sex workers, and on the masculinist and racist state legislatures that

contribute to their subjugation (see, for instance, Phizacklea, 2001). Others have assumed a different form of political economic analysis in their study of "third world" women by examining the ways in which movement into an industrialized, modern society has affected their status as women (as determined by Western standards), or how their presence has impacted the landscape and culture of the receiving nation.

Scarce are inquiries about "third world" women's agency in the context of a "developed" society. Their negotiation of subjectivities in their new home, particularly as it pertains to their encounters with ethnocentric notions of their peoples, are sparse. Women emigrating from poor, formerly colonized countries to affluent nations are not entering an "ideological vacuum," but have to exist in a society that stereotypes them as "illiterate beasts of burden, bearers of many children, and the guardians of tradition" (Phizacklea, 2001, pp. 322). These stereotypes necessarily inform negotiations of their self-presentation. Studying West Indian women furthers our understanding of how these "third world" women contend with the "controlling images" (Hill Collins, 2004) of women from the Anglophone Caribbean that permeate the U.S., and how these discourses inform the identities that they construct in their new home.

Where Do We Go From Here?

My studies of West Indian women generated several issues of interest that could not be fully explored in this dissertation, and which I hope to address in future projects. One such topic of interest is first-generation West Indian immigrant women's use of accents. They believed their particular inflections and enunciations were major manifestations of their West Indian and national identities, the symbol and expression of

their cultural heritage in the U.S. So, while it was acceptable to use discrete words and expressions from another culture's linguistic repertoire, and though the intensification or lessening of one's own accent was allowed, it was certainly intolerable to completely relinquish the accent of your homeland for another. The women also believed that, lacking any discernable physical distinction, the accent of a particular West Indian island was the only noticeable characteristic that allowed members of their community to immediately and accurately identify each other's nationality. The women therefore employed inflections and enunciations to establish difference from Americans and from other West Indians, concurrently creating cultural and national identity. A forthcoming project is to design a study that specifically addresses this phenomenon so as to delineate a more nuanced discussion of West Indian immigrant women's accents, and to determine their analytical link to their media engagement. In other words, I would seek to ascertain if the women's exaltation of their accents is reflected or is fostered by their interaction with mainstream media.

Another issue of interest borne from my studies is the way in which race influenced the women's perception of class inequalities. Though their marginalized economic status was apparent in many circumstances, when it was highlighted through comparisons to white Americans, the first-generation women of my studies seemed less inclined to acknowledge their low class position. In other words, their encounters with the luxuries enjoyed by affluent white Americans did not seem to make their own disadvantageous positions more salient. Rather, in these moments, the respondents dismissed the overt discrepancies as differences in cultural tastes and values. While the women spoke of discriminations from African Americans, their perception of African

Americans as being in similar economic predicaments may have precluded any recognition of and discussion about class inequality between the two groups. Furthermore, framing class incongruities in cultural terms perhaps made such inequalities easier to deal with, and allowed these West Indian women to circumvent having to admit to themselves the relatively depressing state of their economic situation. However, why were these women disposed to treat class discrepancies between themselves and white Americans as a *cultural* issue, and how is this inclination related to the media with which they engage? How does their interaction with media moderate their perception of class inequalities with white Americans? These are some the questions I wish to explore in forthcoming projects on this issue.

Finally, the preceding research is confined to West Indian women's diasporic identity and engagement with mainstream television in New York City. As such, more supplementary and complementary work that speaks to other groups within this diasporic community as well as their engagement other media forms need to be done. For instance, examining West Indian women in other cities in the U.S. will help us to better grasp the range of diasporic subjectivities that develop among West Indian women in the U.S., as well as to understand the social, political and mediated environments that engender particular expressions of their diasporic identities. In addition, exploring these women's diasporic identities in relation to their engagement with other media texts - such as film, magazines and the Internet - will help to create a more complete picture of their media environment. Such research will also contribute to the assessment of the cumulative (or multiplicative) influence of several media forms on their diasporic identities, and to the identification of the particular influence of each media form on their presentation of self.

Furthermore, analyzing West Indian men's negotiations of U.S. cultural norms, ideologies, expectations, and their relationship to and interactions with media texts will provide an interesting point of comparison, and will help us to more clearly delineate the gendered process in the construction of diasporic identities.

Studying My Community

Conducting research on one's own community can be both rewarding and problematic. On the grounds of a shared cultural heritage, I was allowed greater access than someone who would be deemed a cultural outsider, and was able to see through both serpent and eagle eyes (Anzaldua, 1990), the view from above/outside and below/inside. On the other hand, I also realize that my insider position did not guarantee better knowledge claims, or even complete access to the community (Stacey, 1988; Gorelick, 1991; Acker and Esseveld, 1991). I may have failed to problematize or interrogate certain aspects of the participants' responses because of hyper-familiarity; I could have neglected to make inquires that an "outsider" would make because I have taken some knowledge for granted; or I may have relied too much on my own experiences in/with the culture to interpret their experiences, dismissing or overlooking experiences that do not resonate with my own.

However, we have to move beyond this discussion of the advantages and dangers of studying one's community which implicitly endorses the idea that different vantage points generate better knowledge claims (Narayan, 2003). Rather, it is important to recognize that, far from being a monolithic whole, my identity is constructed around several axes (of gender, race, culture, and class), any one of which renders me an insider

or an outsider in a given context (Narayan, 2003; Minh-ha, 1990; Anzaldua, 1990). Even in my dealings with "my own people," there were contexts when we are "drawn closer" and others when we are "thrust apart" (Narayan, 2003). This was evident in my research projects when the number of years and security in the U.S., and even body type influenced the rapport that I developed with the women as well as their comfort in talking to me. Therefore, my multiple identifications partially neutralized the utility of my so-called insider position in the research situation.

My experiences with these studies also challenged popular ideas about the powerful researcher and her powerless subjects, an issue also raised by Ann Phoenix (2001). My status as a college-educated researcher did not automatically shift the balance of power in my direction. In fact, in most situations my education status (or my having "book-knowledge") made me less knowledgeable and therefore less powerful in the eyes of women who valued "street smarts," and being "gainfully employed." Admittedly, power was firmly placed in my hands during the writing of the preceding report, as I determined how the women were to be represented, but it is important to realize that power shifts between the researcher and her respondents throughout the research process.

Given my fluid identity categories that simultaneously concede and retract power in research situations, it is best to claim situated rather than better knowledge, to "admit the limits of [my] purview from [my particular position]...because from particular locations all understanding becomes subjectively based and forged through interactions within fields of power relations" (Narayan, 2003).

Appendix A
Interview Guide for In-depth Interviews with First-Generation West Indian Immigrant Women

Warm-up Questions

1. Where were you born? Where did you grow up? *Probes*: Who did you live with? Who were your friends? What values did your parents stress?
2. What shows did you watch in your country? *Probes*: When did you watch them? Who did you watch them with?
3. When did you leave? *Probes*: Ever go back to visit? How feel when go back? Do you want to go back to live? Why/Why not? Do you keep in touch with family/friends? How?

Key Questions

4. What did you know about the U.S. before you came here? *Probes:* What did you expect when you came here? What do you think now?
5. How is living here different from living in your country? *Probes:* What do you still do that you did in your country? What do you miss? Is there anything that you do now that people would think is "American"? Any new challenges or advantages to living here?
6. How has your [insert nationality] values influenced your life in U.S.? *Probes:* Has it been difficult living in the U.S. with your values? How do your values make your life better here?
7. Who are your friends here? *Probes:* What do you do together? Do you talk about life here? Life back home?
8. How would you classify yourself in the U.S.? *Probe*: What do you put on forms? How do you think of yourself when around other West Indians? Around African Americans? Around Caucasians? Would you rather be called a "black woman" or [insert nationality] woman? Why? Want to be called American?

9. How would you compare yourself to other women in the U.S.? *Probes*: African American women? Caucasian women?
10. Which shows do you watch?
11. Which one is your favorite? Why? What is it about? *Probes*: Who are the characters? Which ones do you like/dislike the most? Why?
12. How often do you watch it? When do you watch it? Who do you watch it with?
13. Do you talk about the shows after watching? With whom? What do you talk about?
14. Do you have children/daughters in the U.S.? [If yes, ask:] How do you feel about raising her in the U.S.? *Probes:* How is she different from you (in terms of her likes and dislikes, etc.)? *Probes*: What are some of the things you agree on/ disagree about? Do you consider her [insert nationality]? Why/why not? Consider her American? Why/why not?
15. Do you and your daughter(s) watch the same shows? *Probes*: How does what she like to watch differ from what you like?
16. [If have no children] Do you know any [insert nationality] or West Indian woman born and raised in the U.S.? *Probes*: Do you consider them [insert nationality]? Why/why not? How are they similar to you? How different?

Demographics

17. How old are you?
18. Highest level of education?
19. Are you employed? What do you do?
20. Do you own your home? Rent? Live with family?
21. What are your personal goals? Plans?
22. Do you have a significant partner? Do you live together? What does your partner do for a living?

Appendix B
Interview Guide for In-depth Interviews with Second-Generation West Indian Immigrant Women

Warm-up questions

1. Where are your parents/ family from? Where did you grow up? *Probes*: Who did you live with? Who were your friends?

Key Questions

2. How would you describe people of your culture in your parents' homeland? In the U.S.? *Probes*: What are some of the values that your parents stress? How do they think about race? Body image?
3. Do you have the same values and traditions as your family? *Probes*: In what ways do you feel different from your family? Similar to? What is it like having a [insert nationality] mother? *Probes:* What are some of the things you agree/disagree about?
4. How has your [insert nationality] values influenced your life in U.S.? *Probes:* Has it been difficult living in the U.S. with your values? How do your values make your life better here?
5. Have you ever visited your parents' homeland? *Probes*: What was it like? How did it feel being there?

4. Who are your friends here? *Probes*: Are you mostly friends with Americans? [insert nationality]? What do you do together?

5. How would you classify yourself in the U.S.? *Probe*: What do you put on forms? How do you think of self when around other West Indians? Around African Americans? Around Caucasians? Would you rather be called a "black woman" or [insert nationality] woman? Why? Want to be called American?

6. How would you compare yourself to other women in the U.S.? *Probes*: African American women? Caucasian women?

7. Which shows do you watch?

8. Which one is your favorite? What is it about? Who are the characters? Which ones do you like/dislike the most?

9. How often do you watch it? When do you watch it? Who do you watch them with?

10. Do you talk about the show after watching it? With whom? What do you talk about?

11. Do you watch the same shows as your mother? *Probes*: How does what she likes to watch differ from what you like?

Demographics

12. How old are you?
13. Highest level of education?
14. Are you employed? What do you do?
15. Do you own your home? Rent? Live with family?
16. What are your personal goals? Plans?
17. Do you have a significant partner? Do you live together? What does your partner do for a living?

Appendix C
Moderator's Guide for Focus Groups

1. [Give list of shows] What are your favorite shows? Why? What do you not watch? Why? Which shows do you talk about with friends?

2. Ever talk about the bodies of women on TV with your friends? *Probes*: What do you talk about?

3. When you were in your homeland, what did you consider sexy/fabulous/good looking? *Probes*: What do you consider sexy/fabulous/good looking when in U.S.? [If different] How do you feel about the change?

4. Some people feel that people from the West Indies do not have problems with body image. What has been your experience? *Probes*: What are some of the complaints that you have with your bodies (arms, breasts, belly, waist, hips, thighs, bottom?) What about weight? Hair? Complexion? What do you think makes you dissatisfied? Your expectations? Others' expectations?

5. How do you deal with your dissatisfactions? *Probes*: Diets? Eating more?

6. Are there any TV shows that make you feel good/ bad about your body? *Probes*: What do you think TV shows can do to help you feel better about your body? Examples?

7. Anything want to share about body image and/or television that I didn't ask?

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