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**rites of passage influence on cultural identity and learning
among emerging black/african american female adults**

A Dissertation in

Adult Education

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine how emerging Black/African American women, involved in rites of passage, experienced their rites phases of separation, liminality, and welcoming back, and the role these experiences assumed in forging positive cultural identity and development. In particular, the study focused on women involved in African-centered rites of passage as managed by the Ifa/Orisa tradition. This study was grounded in two theoretical frameworks related to adult learning: rites of passage and Black Feminism, as informed by Critical Race Feminism.

The methodology of this study included 10 interview participants, chosen through purposeful criteria of having completed rites of passage, as supervised by a Yoruba Priestess and be between the ages of 18 to 25 at the time of the interview. In addition to the interviews, observations and artifacts provided ancillary sources of data. Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method.

The findings of the study were grouped into five main areas: the orienting context highlighting the significance of female relationships; the separation phase (preparing for learning); the liminality phase (highlighting cultural learning); the welcoming back phase (celebrating learning); and their overall positive changed status. Overall, these findings revealed the role rites of passage assumed in advancing African-centered education, that bolstered concepts of Black Motherhood, Black female power, which served as positive influences on cultural identity development and learning. This study concludes with a discussion of the findings in light of the theoretical frameworks. It also discusses the limitations of this study and offers suggestions for further research, as well as implications for culturally responsive adult education theory and practice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	x
Acknowledgements	xi
CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION	1
Cultural Identity, Rites of Passage, and Personal Background	4
Development of Mate Masie and an African Dance Company	5
Learning about Rites of Passage and the Yoruba Orisa Tradition	7
Further Development of African-centered and Rites of Passage Programs	11
Background to Problem	12
Development as Change Over Time	12
Emerging Adulthood	13
Cultural Identity Development and Rites of Passage	14
Rites of Passage as African-centered Education for Cultural Development	16
Problem, Purpose Statement and Research Questions	18
Theoretical Framework	19
African-centered Rites of Passage	19
Critical Race Feminism	20
Overview of Methodology	22
Significance of the Study	23
Assumptions, Limitations, and Strengths	25
Definition of Terms	28
CHAPTER TWO – REVIEW OF LITERATURE	33
Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks	34
Rites of Passage	35
History and General Background	35
Ifa and the Orisa Traditions	38
Phases of Rites of Passage	42
Separation Phase	42
Liminality and Incorporation	46
African-centered Worldview and Rites of Passage	48

African-centered Worldview	48
African-centered Rites of Passage	50
Critical Race Feminism	53
Critical Theory	53
Critical Race Theory	54
Critical Race Feminism	56
Cultural Identity Development	59
Emerging Adulthood and Cultural Identity Development	60
Critical Perspectives on Cultural Identity Development	62
Black Female Cultural Identity Development and Learning in the United States	65
Sociocultural Influences	66
Ethnocentrism	67
Oppression	68
Masking	70
Cultural Reattachment	72
Culturally Relevant Education	73
African-centered Education	76
Indigenous Education	78
West African Rites of Passage as Indigenous Education and Africentric Pedagogy	79
Bragoro Rites in Ghana	80
Dipo Rites in Ghana	83
Yoruba Rites in Nigeria	84
Empirical Research - Black Female Cultural Identity Development and Rites of Passage	86
Methodology of the Review	86
Findings of the Review	88
Black Cultural Identity Development	88
Rites of Passage and other Support Programs	89
U.S. Based Studies	90
Black/African American Female Rites of Passage in the US	94
Summary, Conclusions, and Gaps in the Literature	98
CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY	101
Qualitative Research Paradigm	101
Assumptions of Qualitative Research	103

Varied Types of Qualitative Research	104
An Interpretive Study and Critical Research	105
Background of Researcher	107
Participant Selection	109
Interview Participant Criteria	109
Data Collections Methods	113
Interviews	114
Interview Data Analysis	117
Documents, Artifacts, and Observations	118
Critical Data Analysis	120
Dependability Strategies	121
Trustworthiness	121
Applicability	122
Summary	123
CHAPTER FOUR FINIDINGS	124
Study Participants	124
Findings	126
Data Display	127
Orienting Context: Significant Relationships	128
Family Tradition	128
Female Role Models	130
Experiencing Separation: Preparing for Learning	131
Ritual Bathing	134
Prolific Uses of the Term “white’ to Refer to Ritual	135
Scarification	138
Experiencing Liminality	142
Group and Peer Learning	142
Group Learning	145
The Learning Environments	146
The Task List	149
Experiencing Welcoming Back	155
Traditional Dance	156
The Bembe	158

The Gelede	159
Positive Changed Status	161
Start of Menses	163
Racial Identity	165
Recognized Membership Status	166
Conclusions	170
CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, and IMPLICATIONS	172
Summary of Findings	173
Intersecting Theoretical Frameworks	177
Rites of Passage	177
Black Feminism, Informed by Critical Race Feminism	179
Research Question 1	181
The Separation Phase, Preparing for Learning	182
Significant Experiences in Liminality: The Cultural Learning Phase	185
Welcoming Back Phase: Celebrating Learning	187
Bembes	188
Traditional Dance	188
The Gelede	189
Research Question 2	190
Orienting Context and Women's Cultural Identity	191
Specific Roles and Rites Relating to Positive Cultural Identity	192
Start of Menses	194
Separation Rituals	195
Liminality and Cultural Learning	197
Racial Identity and Cultural Identity	199
Racial Identity	199
Group Membership	200
Summary	201
Implications for Theory and Practice in Adult Education	202
Implications for Theory	202
Implications for Practice	205
Limits, Strengths, and Suggestions for Future Research	210
Limitations and Strengths	210

Suggestion for Future Research	211
Conclusion	213
Personal Reflections	214
Appendix A – Interview Guide	217
Appendix B – Field Notes	218
Appendix C – Letter to Priestess	222
REFERENCES	224

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Empirical Studies Categorized by Methodology	87
Table 2 Summary of Empirical Study Topics	88
Table 3.1 Interview Participants	112
Table 4.2 Data Display	127

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 Creswell and Creswell (2009) Model for Qualitative Analysis	117
Figure 4.1 Osun's Brass bell	133
Figure 4.2 Odu Osa Meji (Karade, 1994)	139
Figure 4.3 Scarification Markings	141
Figure 4.4 Table of Contents from Egbe Handbook	150
Figure 4.5 Hand dyed fabric	154
Figure 4.6 Orisa Esu	219
Figure 4.7 Osun Worshipers Southern USA	221
Figure 4.8 Elder Priestess of Osun Praying at the River	221

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Sitting here in limbo, but I know it won’t be long . . . Sitting here in limbo, like a bird without song. But they’re putting up resistance, and I know it’s my faith that leads me on.

Sitting here in limbo—waiting for the dice to roll. . . Sitting here in limbo—got some time to search my soul. Well, they’re putting up resistance, and I know it’s my faith that leads me on.”

~Jimmy Cliff

These lyrics to the song “Sitting in Limbo” by Jimmy Cliff (1971) speak of resistance, the feeling of having no voice, and spirituality; all of these are noted by members, scholars, and practitioners involved in rites of passage and African-centered rites of passage. Genep (1960), more than 50 years ago, noted that virtually all human societies have used rites of passage to mark significant transitions in the social status of individuals. West African traditions of adolescent rites of passage exhibit some of the most elaborate rites rituals, when compared to other rites used to mark transitions across various life phases, such as birth, marriage, initiations, and death (Adinku, 2016; Babatunde, 1998; Reagan, 2005). However, some scholars suggest there is a lack of cultural rites that support adolescent development and transition into adulthood in the United States (Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2014; Hill, 1992; Moore, Gilyard, McCreary, & Warfield-Coppock, 2013).

Over the past several decades, and as counter to the lack of these cultural rites in the United States, several Black/African American scholars advanced the importance of African-centered rites of passage to support youth with transitioning successfully into adulthood

(Alford, 2003; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Moors et al., 2013; Pratt-Clarke, 2013; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). While the term African-centered implies references to philosophies and values that adopt an African worldview (Asante, 1987, 1991, 2010; Collins, 1998; Merriweather-Hunn, 2004; Mbiti, 1991; Shockley & Frederick, 2010), there is not just one African worldview or value of African-centeredness. For example, some scholars associate African-centeredness to references of African traditions predicated on traditional African philosophies that predate European and Arab invasions of Africa, European colonization of Africa, and the transatlantic slave trades (Asante, 1997, 1991; 2010; Collin, 1988). Other scholars (Adams, 2012; 2014; Chapman-Hilliard, 2016; Shockley & Frederick, 2010) apply the term African-centered education to describe educational practices that concentrate on African history and African cultural principles, because these teaching practices yield positive impacts on learning and development among Black youth and young adults. According to Chapman-Hilliard (2016), rites of passage can act as vehicles for African-centered education, which might help facilitate the personal development of Black learners. Also, rites of passage models that further African-centered education can act as effective methods in resisting long-standing hegemonic advances of Eurocentric education (hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2006; Moors, et al., 2013).

Comparatively, rites of passage more often support male development and operate within non-formal education than within formal education settings (Alford, 2003; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Hill, 2002; Moors, et al., 2013; Piert, 2007; Pratt-Clarke, 2013). To address this obvious gap in the literature, this proposed study sought to explore the impact of a specific set of African-centered rites of passage and their perceived influence on cultural identity development and learning among Black/African American adult females in the United States. Specifically, this study aimed to retrospectively examine how Black/African American women, involved in rites

of passage, experienced and made meaning of the rites' phases of separation, liminality, and incorporation, how they perceived the influences of these rites on their own cultural identity development, and what learning they associate solely to their rites experiences. While the discussion of what constitutes "African-centered" is further detailed later, this research study associated African-centeredness, rites of passage, and the Orisa tradition, a spiritual tradition of the Yoruba people of Nigeria that predates European and Arab invasions of Africa, and subsequent European colonization of Africa, and the transatlantic slave trades (Asante, 1997, 1991; 2010; Collin, 1988; Colin, 1994). Several scholars (Harvey & Hill, 2004; Moors, et al., 2013; Pratt-Clarke, 2013; Piert, 2007), agree African-centered rites of passage openly uphold African-centered views, promote positive life phase development, and legitimize the transition from one phase of personal development to a higher level of human social and educational development. More important, a basic assumption of this study is the African American experience and ways of making meaning are marginalized in most academic disciplines (Johnson-Bailey, 2001; Reagan, 2005), and in American society (Asante, 1997, 1991; 2010; Sheared, Johnson-Bailey, Colin, Peterson, & Brookfield, 2010), and that socio-cultural influences impact learning and development (Dillard, 2002; Hall, 1992; Illeris, 2009; Tisdell, 2003; Vygotsky, 1986).

Therefore, the following discussion chronicles several lived experiences understood as significant to this researcher's learning, development, and African-centered views, as some scholars (Baumgartner, 2001; hooks, 2015) agree that cultural traditions and values supported by a family and community network cultivates a positive sense of identity. More important, throughout time, an African-centered perspective on Black motherhood symbolizes continuity as

African cultures view motherhood roles as interwoven and supported by community (Hill-Collins, 1990).

Cultural Identity, Rites of Passage, and Personal Background

My parents instilled values of God, family, extended family, and community, raising five children, none of which were biologically theirs, in the small and racially segregated community of Belhaven, North Carolina, and legally adopting me and my brother from two different close family members. Our home, a safe and stable home environment where my mother assumed the primary role of teacher in my development, provided countless learning experiences that seemed to focus emphasis on caring for family, home and community. In addition to being a successful small business owner, my mother assumed the role of community mother, someone considered a valuable resource to young mothers with childcare and other family needs. My father's job required him to be away from home most of the week, however, I recall many weekend cooking and fishing lessons from him. Considering the minimum amount of time available to attend church activities, my religious upbringing was not strict, however, my mother always talked about God's presence and power evidenced throughout all creation. Most memorable, she required us to sit quietly during a thunderstorm, while God was working. My mother exposed me to non-conventional ways of healing, prayer, and spirituality, as I vividly recall our first visit together to the local "root doctor", a person with supernatural powers known to practice Voodoo (Phillips, 2017, p. 11). Voodoo, most commonly associated with traditional and religious practices of West African origin, migrated with the African Diaspora as a result of the Trans-Atlantic slave trades (Huck, 2014; Phillips, 2017). According to Phillips (2017), the secrets of Voodoo are maintained within the family and passed from one generation to the next. While my mother did not offer Voodoo services, she accessed that system of care for various potions

needed for aches and pains of the body and heart, and there were always bottled potions stored under the kitchen sink for colds, flu, stomachache, and various ailments.

Harlem, New York, my summer home up until college age, provided many African-centered learning experiences, including exposure to West Indian and African cultures, African dance and drumming, shows at the Apollo Theatre, meeting and hearing the Last Poets, living in communities of color inhabited by people from across the African Diaspora, and vague memories of curfew as a result of race riots in the late 1960s. One lady in particular that lived in our apartment building, a native West Indian, was memorizing. She was very tall and statuesque, always dressed in African clothing, and adorned with many arm bangles. My uncle gave me my first set of bangles at age six, another pair at age twelve, and the latter pair I still wear today. My uncle, a child of West Indian immigrant parents, explained that the bangles, energized by spiritual leaders, provide protection from negative universal forces within the energies to the individual wearing them.

The Development of Mate Masie and an African Dance Company

Fast-forward to 1998 and graduate school. As part of program requirements in health education and looking at research on programs aimed at the health needs of the African American community, I developed Mate Masie©, an African-centered program designed to reduce teen pregnancy rates amongst girls ages 11 to 18. Simultaneously, I devoted time to the director's role for Imani Edu-Trainer's African Dance Company, a non-profit arts organization, founded in 1993 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to promote community awareness, appreciation, and understanding of West African culture and community enlightenment (Imani, 2017). This non-profit endeavor manifested from the perceived need to fill the void associated with my relocating from North Carolina to Lancaster; an area found to be absent of traditional West African culture

and associated community activities. Relocating separated my seven-year-old daughter and me from those activities prevalent in most Black/African American communities, such as African dance and drumming classes, access to spiritual divination sessions, Kwanzaa and other African-centered celebrations, all primarily supported by an African-centered community-based organization.

Through my work with Imani and in developing Mate Masie©, I came across ideas on rites of passage in literature while researching responsive programs related to similar health concerns among African American populations and the need for culturally relevant health education. Mate Masie©, is actually a term and Adinkra symbol (Chang, 2017) of the Akan people of Ghana, which translates to “What I hear, I keep”. To achieve the goal of reduced adolescent pregnancies, I incorporated activities and ideas related to rites of passage, where participants take part in learning activities spread across a nine-month period (October through June) involving visual arts, ancestral and family history research, journaling, West African dance and drum, and topics on self-identity: Healthy eating, effective decision-making, and goal setting. Aligned with a generalized rites of passage framework, these specific activities connect to the rites phases of separation, liminality, and incorporation, in use by many who write about or develop rites of passage (Moors, et al., 2013).

Separation— during the month of May, participants are secluded for three days at a hotel outside of the city, with no access to television or other electronic devices, and for three days, follow a vegetarian diet. Upon arrival, participants are instructed to bathe in a specially prepared herbal bath of lavender and chamomile to support calmness and tranquility (Reis & Jones, 2017). Participants then dress in all white, in respect to the Ancestors (Karade, 1994). Before group instructions and activities begin, participants sign a Conduct Contract, designed to

create a confidential and safe space conducive for learning and sharing, signifying the beginning of the phase of liminality.

Liminality— considering that this group of adolescents previously met for weekly group dance classes and other topics identified in the Mate Masie® curriculum, liminality resumes at the seclusion site, where learning activities focus on sexuality education and effective decision-making. Time is also allowed for group practice in preparation for their community presentation and incorporation ceremony announcing the completion of their rites. On the third day, we visit a local piercing salon, where participants have their right earlobe pierced, marking the end of liminality and also symbolizing their successful completion of Mate Masie®.

Incorporation—the purpose of the incorporation phase is to bring immediate family, community members and the initiates together to celebrate initiates' successful completion of rites of passage. African clothing, song, dance, libation, and music are included. Rites participants present a group dance they learned and practiced over the past nine months. They also present immediate family members with constructed models of their family tree, designed from textile mediums of their choice. They also thank the community for supporting their rites experience and for accepting them back into the community with elevated social status and responsibilities.

Learning about Rites of Passage, the Yoruba, and the Orisa Tradition

Given the separation from our North Carolina community, and in seeking out culturally affirming activities within our first year in Pennsylvania, we connected to West African cultural organizations nearby in Harrisburg and Baltimore, Maryland. Most importantly, and relevant to this study, through my research on rites of passage, subsequent development of Mate Masie©, and establishing relationships with various Orisa societies, my daughter and I participated in the

rituals required to finalize our induction to the African spiritual system of Ifa, and bond with the Orisa tradition. These rituals, supervised by a Yoruba Priestess, trained in Osogbo, Nigeria, and former resident of Oyotunji African Village (Clarke, 2004; Hucks, 2014; Parnell, 2016), involved divination sessions with an Ifa Priest to inform of our guiding Orisas. A few weeks later, we completed rituals to receive our Ilikes, or beaded necklaces of the Orisa (Hucks, 2014; Karade, 1994).

While established in the United States over 50 years ago, and with developed roots in virtually all the states, Ifa, spread to the Americas during the 18th and 19th centuries by enslaved Yoruba people dominated by the Transatlantic slave trades (Bascom, 1992; Karade, 1994; Hucks, 2014; Olupona & Abiodun, 2016). The Orisa tradition, Orunmila, or the prophet Orisa, and the Ancestors, serve as the three pillars of Ifa, a spiritual system common among the Yoruba people of Nigeria that endorses worship of spiritual forces or deities called Orisa (Aiyejina & Gibbons, 1999; Bascom, 1992; Karade, 1994). Ifa also influences several other African-centered traditions found throughout the African Diaspora, such as Santeria, Candomblé, Palo, and Voudon (Aiyejina & Gibbons, 1999; Hucks, 2014; Karade, 1994). Several scholars (Badejo, 1996; Karade, 1994; Montgomery, 2008; Núñez, 1992) agree that more than 400 Orisa, or human forms of the spirits, sent by Olodumare (Supreme Creator of the Universe), Olorun (Ruler over the Heavens), and Olofi (Ruler over the Earth), exist, and many Orisa found their way to most of the New World as a result of the Atlantic slave trade (Hucks, 2014; Karade, 1994; Montgomery, 2008; Núñez, 1992). The alphabetized list of Orisas below notes the most prevalent Orisas, and their corresponding Ilikes and Ilike colors, awarded most often during Ilike ceremonies performed across the African Diaspora: (1) Esu —black and red; (2) Obatala— white; (3) Ogun— green and black; (4) Osun— amber and yellow; (5) Oya— brown and blue

striped bead; (6) Sango— red and white; and (7) Yemoja— blue and white (Bascom, 1992; Karade, 1994; Montgomery, 2008; Núñez, 1992). Within the Yoruba Orisa pantheon, Esu assumes the important role of the divine messenger of Oludmare, and he is also a guardian, protector, and communicator. He is always mentioned first in any ceremony, because without his permission, the doors to communication with the other Orisa remains closed (Karade, 1994).

The ceremony of receiving Ilekes or sacred beads symbolized belonging to an extended family of worshipers in a particular spiritual lineage (Karade, 1994; Montgomery, 2008; Núñez, 1992), marking my daughter and me as children of Orisas Osun and Oya, respectively. More important, the priestess performing the Ileke ceremony assumes the responsibility of serving as our spiritual teacher and guide (Karade, 1994; Montgomery, 2008; Olupona & Abiodun, 2016; Núñez, 1992). Therefore, our Ileke ceremony formalized our first step of spiritual development in the Orisa tradition, marked by our Ilekes given to us by our newly acquired spiritual leader. Also, the Orisa tradition bases one's spiritual leadership on the number of years of one's initiation into the intricacies of Orisa (Karade, 1994; Montgomery, 2008; Núñez, 1992; Olupona & Abiodun, 2016), and for my daughter and me, we were now under the tutelage of a priestess with more than 20 years of experience. Five years later, my son, identified as a child of the Orisa Shango, completed his Ileke ceremony.

In the spring of 1998, my then 13-year-old daughter entered seclusion, a requirement to complete an African-centered rites of passage process that began one year prior. The rites of passage's phases of separation, liminality, and incorporation, facilitated by the same Orisa priestess that led our Ileke ceremonies, exhibited in the following manner in this tradition:

Separation— she was separated for one week from our home environment and secluded in a room of the Priestess' home in Maryland. Upon our arrival, my daughter was bathed by the

Priestess, dressed in all white clothing and marked with Efun (Asante & Mazama, 2008; Kahan, Page, & Imperato, 2009) before entering the seclusion room, where use of all electronic devices was prohibited.

Liminality – liminality began three days after seclusion and consisted of rigorous reading, primarily on self-care and the Yoruba Orisa tradition, meeting with other Orisa priestesses, and following a strict vegan diet. It also provided time to complete any assignments given during the previous year and leading up to seclusion, such as constructing a family tree, and African-centered research and essays on topics such as African Queens and Black/African American female leaders. I was permitted to meet with my daughter during one afternoon of her liminality period to guide her through two lessons on sexuality education from the *Mate Masie*© curriculum. Also, during liminality, my daughter was approved to get a tattoo of a design she co-created with the Priestess supervising her rites of passage. The tattoo symbolizes Orisas, Obatala, Osun, and Yemoja, and, according to her Ifa divination session conducted prior to the rites of passage, marked her with the Orisas to whom she should pay homage.

Incorporation— completion of my daughter’s rites of passage was celebrated at a larger community event in Maryland organized to incorporate my daughter into that Orisa community. Along with my daughter, this Maryland Orisa community also welcomed a new Ogun initiate. The celebration is called a *bembe* or Orisa party (Karade, 1994; Montgomery, 2008; Núñez, 1992), and included libation, food, and African dancing, drumming, and songs dedicated specifically to the Orisas and the Ancestors. One week following the rites celebration in Maryland, I took my daughter to get her tattoo. One month following, close family members gathered at our home, where she discussed many of her rites of passage experiences, and unveiled her tattoo, symbolizing her connections to the Orisas. She explained that the eight

sunray points and five valley peaks were symbolic of the Orisas Obatala and Osun respectively, and the water symbolized her connections to the Orisas, Yemoja and Osun. Most memorable, she recalled the rigorous reading requirements on African history, the Orisa, and healthy eating and food preparation, required during the seclusion and liminality periods, and always having to ring Osun's bell when she required the attention of the Priestess or needed to leave her assigned quarters.

Further Development of African-Centered and Rites of Passage Programs

In 2006, the Lancaster-based arts organization permitted me to facilitate the Mate Masie© program for eight female adolescents. A primary reason for rites of passage is to orient participants to concepts of African cultural identity and cultural restoration, and to facilitate overall success in life phase transitions (Brookins, 1996; Hucks, 2014, p. 187; Oladunjoye, 2012). Today, the Lancaster-based arts organization continues to provide African dance and drumming, rites of passage programs, and other cultural enrichment activities for children, teens, and adults. These program offerings encourage increased community involvement with youth, improve community relations and provide a better understanding and appreciation of African culture and its contributions to today's society (Imani, 2017). My professional and personal experiences with rites of passage, chronicled here, establish a background and rationale for the expanded study of the impact of rites of passage on cultural identity development among Black/African American adult females in the U.S. Now I move to further discussion of the background to the problem beyond my personal experience, though my personal experience is foundational to understanding my interest in these issues.

Background to the Problem

As the field of adult education associates with social justice issues, this study seeks to explore how critical social problems associated with the concepts of race and gender impact cultural identity development and learning among adult females who identify as Black/African American in the United States and are involved in rites of passage. As such, this study, in essence, is about a particular form of experiential learning. The literature on experiential learning in the field of adult education is broad, and general, and spans everything from Knowles' (1980) discussion of andragogy, to Kolb's model (1994) of experiential learning. Given that most of the general experiential learning literature does not deal with cultural issues specifically, the general experiential learning literature is not reviewed here further. The following section will therefore outline how cultural identity develops and changes, with special attention drawn to cultural identity development and learning among Black/African American adult females. Next, this section considers the importance of African-centered rites of passage, as cultural experiences, to Black adult females and how these cultural experiences influence cultural identity development and learning. The intersection of cultural development over time and African-centered rites of passage is the basis for this research study.

Development as Change over Time

Adult development embraces change that occurs in the biological and psychological domains of human life post the adolescence phase of development and continuing through the end of the lifespan (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007; Clark & Caffarella, 1999). In general, the major literature on adult development and learning refers to Erikson's (1980) and Levinson's (1986) theories of stage development over time and across the lifespan, and Dewey's (1938, 1963) and Lindeman's (1961) progressive theories on learning. These prominent theories

all posit that interactions between individuals and society influence human development (Erikson, 1980; Lustig, 2013; Robinson, 1999), though such earlier stage theories of adult development gave little consideration to the role of culture in development, as more current scholars point out (Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999; Merriam, Caffarella, Baumgartner, 2007).

While stage theories have limitations, such theories combined with narrative perspectives on development and life and a transition model, offered a larger perspective that considered adult development an evolutionary process, beginning with emerging adulthood and continuing to old age. An evolutionary position to adult development is represented in an integrative approach to development and suggests the pronounced impacts of biological, psychological, and sociocultural influences on adult development (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Tisdell, 2003). This perspective brings highlighted attention to social and cultural influences that often intersect, marking noticeable impacts on development. Collectively, these perspectives on identity are significant, as they forge increased understanding of adult development and learning.

Emerging Adulthood

The focus of this particular study was on emerging adults. Throughout the continued study of adult development, some scholars posit that considering the varying meanings or perceptions of what constitutes adulthood across differing cultures, its designation has become obscured (Arnett, 2007; Erikson, 1980; Robinson, 2013). Expanded studies on the complexities of development among individuals between adolescence and adulthood generated the “emerging adult theory” of adult development (Arnett, 2007). This theory primarily applies to young adults in their early to late twenties in developed countries, recognizing that the transition to adulthood, as generally accepted in these populations, is long enough to constitute a separate period in the life phase (Arnett, 2007; Smith & Taylor, 2010). During this phase, many individuals have not

acquired the traditional markers of adulthood: stable housing, completion of education, marriage, career, child-rearing, or sufficient income to become fully independent.

Arnett (2007) explains that emerging adulthood is the period between 18 and 25 years of age, where adolescents become more independent and explore various life possibilities. He further explains that emerging adulthood is described as a new demographic that is ever-changing, some scholars believing that those individuals in their early twenties have always struggled with "identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and feeling in-between" (p. 69). This study aimed at examining the impact of cultural experiences of Black adult females, considered these varying definitions of adulthood. Also considered was the acceptance that connotations of adulthood differ across cultures, thereby obscuring its designation (Erikson, 1980; Robinson, 2013).

Cultural Identity Development and Rites of Passage

Cultural identity relates both to how one defines oneself as well as how others identify you, because we learn something about our identity partly by how others perceive us through cultural identifiers which inform the process of identity development. Robinson (1999) defined identity as "both visible and invisible domains of self-influence and self-construction" (p.5). These domains, or cultural identifiers, include, but are not limited to, ethnicity, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and physical and intellectual abilities (Robinson, 1999). Cultural identifiers often result from social conditions, working against an individual's sense of oneself as a whole being. This constitutes the powerful acknowledgment that the collection of various cultural identifiers manages concepts of oneself (Lustig, 2013).

Cultural identity, broadly defined, is the identity of a group or culture, or of an individual, that is influenced by one's belonging to a group or culture (Hall, 1992; Lustig, 2013; Reagan,

2005). Within the field of adult education and beyond, abundant literature exists to suggest the connection of cultural identity development to learning that advances a sense of belonging to a particular culture or group (Berry & Reese, 2013; Cross, 1971; Hall, 1992; Lustig, 2013; Reagan, 2005; Tisdell, 2003). This learning involves knowledge acquisition about a culture, including learning about traditions, heritage, language, religion, spirituality, and ancestry (Hall, 1992; Reagan, 2005). Hall's (1992) paradoxical view suggests that cultural identity changes and develops over the lifespan. Shifts of cultural identity development reflect periods of one being in a state of limbo, bringing about a previous recognition that rites of passage intentionally provide these periods of liminality in preparation for life changes, shifts, and ongoing development.

The focus in this study was more specifically on Black/African American adult females, and hence it is important to consider Black female cultural identity development and learning in the United States. Given that the literature on cultural identity development and learning is written largely from a critical perspective related to Black females, such perspectives emphasize the impacts of sociocultural elements of race and gender and their influence on cultural identity development and learning (Andersen & Hill Collins, 2015; hooks, 2015; Sheared, et al., 2010).

There are heightened sensitivities to these racial and ethnic influences, understood as prime factors influencing Black female development and learning, particularly for marginalized groups (Andersen & Hill Collins, 2015; hooks, 2015; Sheared, 2010). Understood here are two main scholarly agreements: (1) Hegemonic racism, marked by the domination and oppression of African culture in the New World and throughout the African Diaspora, developed in tandem with the transatlantic slave trade (Asante, 1987; Clarke, 2004; Dillard, 2002; Falola & Childs, 2005; Hall, 1997; Hucks, 2014); and (2) since the period of the transatlantic slave trade, Africans throughout the African Diaspora continue to find means to maintain their African identity, where

shared African culture and spiritual traditions bring fragmented and culturally-related peoples together (Dillard, 2002; Hall, 1997; Hucks, 2014).

Acts of memory and remembering are integral to cultural experiences and cultural identity development for females of African descent (Dillard, 2002; Hucks, 2014). According to Dillard (2002), memory can be thought of as a thing, person, or event that brings to mind and heart an experience and with it, not only the ability to remember but also put back together (p. 3). Likewise, African-centered rites of passage call out marginalized and oppressed African culture, requiring one to remember what we once were taught to forget. Foundational to African culture are cultural experiences, such as rites of passage (Brookins, 1996; Hill, 2002; Hucks, 2014; Reagan, 2005; Warfield-Coppock, 1992).

Of particular relevance to this study on rites of passage and cultural identity development is Berry and Reese's (2013) conceptual discussion on cultural identity and cultural experiences, such as rites of passage. These scholars suggest that cultural identity connects individuals to how they define self, as connected to culture. Further, Berry and Reese (2013) told that cultural experience, defined as events specific to a group of individuals with shared beliefs, values, traditions, customs, practices, and language, alters how people interact and view the world. They offered that cultural experiences have a substantial impact on one's cultural identity. This study engaged the memories of Black adult females to solicit their stories detailing their perceptions on how rites of passage experiences influenced their cultural identity development.

Rites of Passage as African-Centered Education for Cultural Identity Development

Rites of passage can be a form of adult education for cultural identity development. As discussed above, and examined further in chapter two, rites of passage typically involve the phases of separation, liminality, and incorporation, each with its distinct educational activities,

and rituals. Scholars associate rites of passage with African-centered education and indicate that learning centered on African history and cultural principles demonstrates positive impacts on development among Black youth and young adults (Chapman-Hilliard, et al., 2016; Monges, 1999; Moors et al., 2013; Nobles, 1990; Pratt-Clarke, 2013; Sheared, 2010). African-centered (discussed earlier in this chapter), and also referred to in the literature as Afrocentrism, Africentrism, and pan-Africanism, all echo the same purposes, theories, and concepts (Sheared, et al., 2010). While African-centered, Africentric and Afrocentric are often used interchangeably. Appropriate applications and uses of these terms determine their interchangeable roles of subject and theory (Sheared, et al., 2010). For example, African-centered describes a subject or program also framed by African-centered theory. However, an important discrepancy exists with the terms African-centered, Afrocentric, and pan-Africanism, as these do not denote what some refer to as Black studies or Black philosophy (Sheared, et al., 2010).

Scholars within and beyond the field of adult education have produced abundant literature exploring how cultural identity development relates to learning that fosters a sense of belonging to a culture or group (Cross, 1971; Hall, 1992; Lustig, 2013; Tisdell, 2003). Cultural learning involves knowledge acquisition about culture, including learning about traditions, heritage, language, religion, spirituality, and ancestry (Hall, 1992; Reagan, 2005). Cultural identity, broadly defined, is the identity of a group or culture. For an individual, self-identity is influenced by one's belonging to a group or culture (Hall, 1992; Lustig, 2013; Reagan, 2005).

Colin (2000) suggested that because knowledge is culturally grounded, an African-centered worldview needs to be at the center of the development of all programs or sociocultural and socio-historical analysis of African peoples. Moreover, and of particular reference to this study, lies Africentrism (Colin, 1998, 2000) as an interpretative framework used by African-

centered scholars, grounded in African-centered knowledge, to support analysis of impacts of racism on Africans and members of the African Diaspora (Colin, 2000a; Ford, 2010; Sheared, et al, 2010; Tolliver, 2010).

Reagan's (2005) work on education could easily be conceptualized as relating to Black women's cultural identity development. He included rites of passage and initiation rituals among his detailed review of seven non-Western and marginalized approaches to education. He reminded us that rites of passage engage learning and knowledge acquisition through cultural restoration; they also transfer cultural values from one generation to the next. It is the opinion of this researcher that the learning associated with rites of passage promotes cultural identity development and learning, benefiting the communities these learners represent.

Problem, Purpose Statement, and Research Questions

As the discussion above indicates, there is a wealth of literature on various aspects of cultural identity development, rites of passage, and African-centered approaches to teaching and learning. There are some data-based studies in these separate areas which will be discussed further in chapter two. There are also two research studies on African-centered rites of passage which associated positive impacts of African-centered pedagogy, culturally relevant education, and rites of passage frameworks on fostering positive cultural identity development, learning, and thriving transitions for adolescents (Pratt-Clarke, 2013; Monges, 1999). However, thus far there are no studies that focus on the experiences and learning of emerging adults (ages 18-25) who have gone through Orisa rites of passage programs, and how they feel such experiences have affected their cultural identity development. Given this lack, the purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how emerging Black/African American women, involved in rites of passage, experienced their rites phases of separation, liminality, and incorporation, and the role

these experiences assumed in forging positive cultural identity and development. The research questions guiding the study were: (1) What are females' experiences with these culturally specific rites of passage; and (2) What roles do these rites of passage assume in forging positive cultural identity development and learning?

This study investigated learning and meaning making at the intersection of cultural identity development and rites of passage. Specifically, theoretically outlined by rites of passage framework, study participants' interviews aimed to explore perceptions of their experiences of each phase of rites of passage (separation, liminality, and incorporation).

Theoretical Frameworks

This study relied on an African-centered rites of passage framework, along with concepts extending from the Black Feminist framework. While detailed in the next chapter, they are discussed briefly below.

African-centered Rites of Passage and Cultural Identity Development

Rites of passage, understood as ceremonies or events that mark an important phase for an individual, involve ritual activities and teachings designed to strip an individual of their former roles and prepare them to transition into new elevated ones (Gennep, 1960). Rites of passage also help participants feel positively about their culture, and hence aim to increase their cultural identity development (Adinku, 2016; Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2014; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Piert, 2007; Pratt-Clarke, 2013). Significant to this study is an acceptance that hegemonic racism developed in tandem with the transatlantic slave trade, marked by the domination and oppression of African culture in the New World and throughout the African Diaspora (Asante, 1987; Hall, 1997; Hill-Collins, 1999; Hucks, 2014). According to Hucks (2014), since the period of the transatlantic slave trade, Africans throughout the African Diaspora continue to find means to

maintain their African identity, and shared African culture and spiritual traditions, bringing fragmented and culturally related peoples together. Despite hegemonic New World influences, which marginalized and oppressed African culture (Hill-Collins, 1999; Hucks, 2014), African traditions and culture support the development and practice of African-centered rites of passage in the United States (Harvey & Hill, 2004; Monges, 1999; Moors et al., 2013; Olade, 2011; Piert, 2007; Pratt-Clarke, 2013; Reagan, 2005). An African-centered rite of passage assumes an African worldview and conveys varying facets of African culture to African descendants in the African Diaspora (Alford, 2003; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Monges, 1999; Moors et al., 2013; Olade, 2011; Piert, 2007; Pratt-Clarke, 2013).

Spirituality and interconnectedness are primary tenets of African-centered rites of passage (Alford, 2003; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Monges, 1999; Moors et al., 2013; Olade, 2011; Piert, 2007; Pratt-Clarke, 2013), and rites of passage literature points to the need for continued support to ease life-phase transitions (Adinku, 2016; Babatunde, 1998; Foster, 2017; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Moors et al., 2013; Monges, 1999; Pratt-Clarke, 2013; Genep, 1960). Given that rites of passage legitimize the successful transition from one phase of personal development to a higher level of human social and educational development, of particular focus of this study were the perceptions on how rites of passage intersect with spirituality to foster interconnectedness and learning to influence cultural identity development.

Critical Race Feminism

Linked to Black Feminist perspectives, notions from critical race feminism (Closson, 2010; Rodriguez, 2016; Wing, 1997), and perceptions of Andersen and Collins (2015), hooks (1984), and Dillard (2002) informed the design of this study. Critical race feminism promotes the use of storytelling (Closson, 2010), and places women of color in the center, rather than the

margins of any discussion or debate (Wing, 1997). Critical race feminism, referred to as a framework (Rodriguez, 2016), has potential with constructing a viable rationale to study perceived impacts of rites of passage on cultural identity development and learning among females that identify as Black in the United States.

Literature supports that racial and ethnic identities among Black females, as influenced by negative social and cultural influences, manifest through negative treatment and media messages received from others because of their race and ethnicity, impeding identity development (hooks, 2015; Andersen & Collins, 2015). Andersen and Collins (2015) coined the term “matrix of domination”, which defines a framework applied to the examination of how social issues related to race, class, and gender intertwine, and how it is their intersection that creates a power dynamic to further advance oppression of marginalized populations (p. 4). In *Black Looks* (hooks, 2015), an analysis of literature, film, and popular culture revealed significant acts of negative representations of Black people, and how black is made to look in media. Scholars agree that it is the intersection of social issues related to race, class, and gender that bear the greatest negative impact on adult development (Andersen & Collins, 2015; Johnson-Bailey, 2001). At the core of this study was the examination of how rites of passage interact with oppression and marginalization that operates alongside racism. Dillard’s (2002) *Endarkened Feminist Epistemology advances Black Feminism* and articulates how reality is known when based in the historical roots of global Black feminist thought. *Endarkened Feminist Epistemology* differs, from a cultural standpoint, from White feminism as it overlaps culturally constructed notions of race, class, gender, and other identities (p. 59). More important, *Endarkened Feminist Epistemology* connects with mind, body, and spirit, all of which are

prominent characteristics of rites of passage. Collectively, these frameworks and related concepts were instrumental in post-interview analysis and making meaning of the data.

Overview of Methodology

This study used a qualitative methodology (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2016), to examine how Black/African American women, involved in rites of passage, perceive their experiences of separation, liminality, and incorporation. The details of the methodology of the study will be discussed in chapter three, however, here is a brief overview of the methodology. Qualitative research methods generate rich, detailed data from a small participant population, and are often used within the field of adult education to examine various aspects of adult teaching and learning, including perceptions of how individuals construct knowledge and make meaning of their experiences (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Most noteworthy, qualitative research is a form of inquiry examining information conveyed through language and behavior in natural settings and is used to capture meaningful data not expressed in quantitative data about beliefs, values, feelings, and motivations that underlie behaviors (Creswell, 2014, Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2016). Also, central concepts of qualitative research include purposefully selecting research sites, individuals under study, documents, or visual materials for the proposed study (Creswell, 2014). This study investigated learning and meaning making at the intersection of cultural identity development and rites of passage, and scholars agree that the purpose of qualitative research is to understand how participants make meaning of something or understand a process (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Hence, the best approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how rites of passage experiences influence cultural identity development and learning from the perspectives of participants is a qualitative research method, which employs the researcher as the primary instrument (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2016).

The main types of data collection in qualitative research are typically interviews, observations, and analyses of documents and artifacts. The primary means of data collection for this qualitative study was interviews. Interviews used for this study sought to solicit stories from participants that detailed their personal and intimate rites of passage experiences. To hear these stories, the participants were asked to claim their voice (Creswell, 2014). To facilitate their storytelling, this study used a combination of semi-structured and open-ended interview questions. This combined interview strategy also involved the use of an interview guide. The interview guide best supports qualitative inquiry, and facilitates a natural flow of stories (Patton, 2016). The interviews for this study centered on participants' experiences of rites of passage, and expanded details of the methodology will be further explained in chapter three.

Significance of the Study

This study upheld the role of experience in adult learning and development and sought to expand the understanding of the perceived influence of rites of passage experiences on cultural identity development and learning. Also, as the field of adult education associates with social justice issues, this study sought to enhance our understanding of critical social problems associated with the concepts of race and gender, and their impacts on cultural identity development and learning among adult females in the United States, who identify as Black/African American or of African descent.

This study adopted two distinct categories and areas of study. First, this study targeted those individuals classified as "emerging adults," specifically identified as those between the ages of 18 and 25 for the purposes of this study. In American society, the ambiguity about when one becomes an adult contributes to the void in clearly established rites of passage (Arnett, 2001); outside of major transitions, such as marriage and funerals, there is a lack of cultural

rituals that support successful adolescent transitions into adulthood (Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2014). Therefore, in response to the lack of cultural rituals, African American scholars advance African-centered rites of passage across the African Diaspora. African-centered rites of passage serve to legitimize the transition from one phase of personal development to a higher level of human social and educational development (Alford, 2003; Goggins, 1996; Graham, 1999; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Hill, 2002; Moors, et al., 2013; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). While significant literature exists on African-centered rites of passage, participants from such studies predominately ranged in ages 11 to 18 (Foster, 2017, 2016; Monges, 1999; Olade, 2011; Pratt-Clarke, 2013). By contrast, this study sought to address gaps in the literature on cultural identity development of those identified as “emerging adults” or those individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 involved in African-centered rites of passage.

Second, this study sought to examine the perceived experiences of emerging African American adult females, involved in African-centered rites of passage, which precisely align with the Yoruba culture and the Orisa tradition, as practiced in the United States. Cultural experiences or events, either individually or collectively engaged, are identified by a specific group of individuals with shared beliefs and traditions, and substantially impact one's cultural identity (Berry & Reese, 2013; Hucks, 2014; Reagan, 2005).

In adult education, understood is the importance of, and link between, development and learning. Also, the field of adult education associates with social justice issues and this study examined an oppressed population, the African American female (Andersen & Hill-Collins, 2015; Closson, 2010; hooks, 2015), and marginalized educational practices of the African-centered rites of passage (Reagan, 2005). This study on Black/African American females' cultural identity development and learning, points out numerous scholarly perspectives that

emphasize the impacts of sociocultural elements of race and gender and their influence on cultural identity development and learning (Andersen & Hill Collins, 2015; Closson, 2010; Dillard, 2002; hooks, 2015; Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2012; Sheared, 2010). Equally important, racial and ethnic influences exhibit as prime factors affecting Black female development and learning (Andersen & Hill Collins, 2015; Dillard, 2002; hooks, 2015; Hucks, 2014; Sheared, 2010). Therefore, this study aligned adult education and social justice issues and sought to enhance our understanding of critical social problems associated with the concepts of race and gender, and their impacts on cultural identity development and learning among females that identify as African American in the United States.

As a scholar, rites facilitator, and identified member of Yoruba Orisa tradition, I have experienced significant influences that shape my cultural identity. My professional and personal experiences with African-centered rites of passages support the need for expanded study of the impact of cultural-specific African-centered rites of passage on cultural identity development among Black/African American females involved in African-centered rites of passage.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Strengths

The research supporting this study and the purpose of this study directed the underlying assumption that a connection exists between an African-centered rite of passage, governed by the Orisa tradition, in which an individual is involved, and that individual's own cultural identity development. This is supported anecdotally in this researcher's experience and draws upon the notion that the African-centered rites of passage provide a viable process for learning and development across the lifespan. While this is foundational to an understanding of the African-centered rites of passage as a teaching method, significant literature primarily examines this phenomenon from the adolescent male rites participant's perspective, overlooking female

perspectives and experiences. This study sought to bridge this gap by examining the experiences of emerging adult Black/African American females.

In addition, this study rested on the assumption that rites participants engage in reflection on their own rites experiences. While this may not be an automatic and universal process, it was an integral component of this study. Considering that this study involved retrospective research, an assumption exists that rites participants recall vivid experiences regarding their rites experiences and are able to describe how their rites experiences influenced their development and learning. Also, other significant assumptions of this research uphold that cultural identity shifts and changes over time, as Hall's (1992) paradoxical view suggested that cultural identity changes and develops over the lifespan. Therefore, it was assumed that study participants would tell stories that associate shifts in their cultural identity because of their involvement with an African-centered rite of passage. Shifts of cultural identity development reflect periods of one being in a state of limbo, bringing about a previous recognition that rites of passage intentionally provide these periods of liminality in preparation for life changes, shifts, and ongoing development.

Secondly, it was assumed that participants would discuss details relating their perceptions of involvement with the Orisa culture, as literature in the field of adult education suggests a connection of cultural identity development to learning that promotes a sense of belonging to a particular culture or group (Berry & Reese, 2013; Cross, 1971; Hall, 1992; Lustig, 2013; Reagan, 2005; Tisdell, 2003). This learning involves knowledge acquisition of a culture, including learning about traditions, heritage, language, religion, spirituality, and ancestry (Hall, 1992; Reagan, 2005).

Limitations and Strengths

A measurable limitation of this research design is that all factors influencing cultural identity cannot be addressed in this study, as cultural identifiers include but are not limited to factors such as ethnicity, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, and physical and intellectual abilities (Robinson, 1999). This limitation acknowledges that a collection of various cultural identifiers manages concepts of oneself (Lustig, 2013). However, this study maintains that the participants selected for this study are the sum of their backgrounds and experiences, each having their own cultural identifiers that often result from socio-cultural conditions, such as racism and other prejudices that work against an individual's sense of oneself as a whole-being (Lustig, 2013).

There are no practical means of controlling the negative impacts of sociocultural influences, and neither was this the intent of this qualitative study. Rather, a recognized strength of this study is it provided a space for the study participants to tell their stories about their rites experiences. Specifically, this study highlighted voices from emerging Black/African American females involved in rites of passage as managed by the Orisa tradition all understood as marginalized segments of our American populations. Their accurate accounts of their rites of passage experiences held insight about specific experiences they felt as predominant factors influencing their development and learning.

Definition of Terms

These key terms, acronyms, and selected Yoruba words*, used throughout this study, establish a common language.

African-centered	Centeredness to African traditions predicated on traditional African philosophies that predate European and Arab invasions of Africa, European colonization of Africa, and the transatlantic slave trades (Asante, 1997, 1991; 2010; Collin, 1988; Hayes & Colin, III, 1994). African-centered describes a subject or program also framed by African-centered theory (Sheared, et al., 2010). African-centered, Afrocentric, and pan-Africanism, do not denote what some refer to as Black studies (Sheared, et al., 2010).
African-centered Rites of Passage	Rituals and ceremonies centered in African tradition and culture by which age-class members or individuals in a group successfully come to know who they are and what they are about and the purpose and meaning of existence as they proceed from one clearly defined state of existence to the next stage of life (Goggins, 1996).
Afrocentrism	The intellectual and philosophical foundations which African people create their own scientific criterion for authenticating African reality; African peoples' self-conscious acts of creating (African) history; the utilization of the African experience as the core paradigm for higher-level human function and liberty; and the continuing quest for an indigenous African-centered historical and cultural anchor (Nobles, 1990).
Afrocentric	Pro-African; it is the uncovering of one's true self; it is the pinpointing of one's center. African genius and African values created, reconstructed and derived from our history and experience in our best interest. Afrocentric refers to the place and people of Africa (Asante, 1998).
*Aborisa	A devotee of orisa who has received ilekes (Karade, 1994)
*Ase	The quintessential power that Olodumare used to create the universe and all life forms (Badejo, 1996).
*Aso Egbe	Cloth of association. Families and organizations frequently wear attire made in the same colors and patterns (Badejo, 1996).

*Ajubono	Religious teacher (Karade, 1994).
*Awo	Those individuals of the priestly order (Karade, 1994).
*Babalawo	Father of secrets as in secret knowledge and the sacred Ifa texts; also a spiritual advisor (Badejo, 1996).
*Bata	Sacred drum of the orisa worship (Karade, 1994).
Black/African American	Refers to American-born Blacks only. “Blacks or African Americans are people having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. The Black/African American population include people who marked their race(s) as ‘Black, African American, or Negro’ or reported entries such as African American; Sub-Saharan African (e.g., Kenyan and Nigerian); or Afro-Caribbean such as Haitian and Jamaican” (Centers for Disease Control, 2015, Blacks or African American Populations section, para. 1).
Candomble	Yoruba religion combined with Catholicism as practiced in South America (Karade, 1994).
Cultural identity	Broadly defined, is the identity of a group or culture (Hall, 1992).
Culture	The characteristics, shared behavior, and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, ancestry, religion, heritage, social habits, music, art, traditions, and heritage (Hall, 1992; Reagan, 2005).
*Ebo	Animal, food, plant sacrifices to one’s ancestors or to the orisa (Badejo, 1996; Karade, 1994).
*Egbe	A “society” or “family”, abstract in nature, that expands earthly occupations to include the spiritual realms. An Ebge or society connects the human spirit to “society” or “family” in the spiritual realms. Ebge rituals communicate agreements between the human’s spirit and his society within the spiritual realms. A society or organization(Badejo, 1996; Folola, T., & Akinyemi, A. (Eds.). (2016).(Badejo, 1996).
*Efun	White chalk-like substance taken from the earth for religious consecration (Karade, 1994).
*Egun	An ancestor (Karade, 1994)

Ethnic	“Of or relating to people grouped according to a common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin” (Wright, 2015, p.5)
Initiation	A public recognition that the individual is now passing from childhood to adulthood. As long as a person has not gone through initiation, he is regarded as a child; therefore, he is not given full responsibility at home and in the community. Once the initiation has taken place, he/she is ready to enjoy full privileges and should acquire various responsibilities both in their immediate family and in the larger community or nation (Mbiti, 1991).
Nguzo Saba	Seven principles used with the celebration of Kwanzaa (Karenga, 1984), that represent an African moral belief system. The seven principles are Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujimma (collective work), Ujaama (cooperative economics), Kuumba (creativity), Nia (purpose), and Imani (faith) (Karenga, 1984).
*Esu	Orisa that serves as the custodian of Ase and guardian of the crossroads (Badejo, 1996).
*Fun	The color white
*Ifa	The cosmic intelligence of Yoruba cultural expression (Karade, 1994).
*Ikin	Sacred palm nuts used by the babalawo in worship and divination (Karade, 1994).
*Ile	A house, room, home, abode, or dwelling (Crowther, 1852; Karade, 1994)
*Ilekes	Spiritual beads consecrated to the orisas and presented to novices ceremoniously (Karade, 1994).
*Iya	Mother (Badejo, 1996).
*Iyalosa	A generic name for any priestess (Badejo, 1996).
Lucumi	Yoruba religion combined with Spanish Catholicism on the island of Cuba (Karade, 1994)
*Obinrin	Woman or female (Badejo, 1996)

*Odu	Sacred text of the Yoruba that form the basis for the Yoruba Ifa divination system used to guide daily life, personal and societal growth, and interactions among all life forms (Badejo, 1996; Lewis, 2018)
*Omo	Child (Badejo, 1996).
*Opele	The divining chain of the babalawo (Karade, 1994).
*Ori	Head. One chooses an ori or head which means that one chooses a destiny (Badejo, 1996).
*Orisa	Angelic emanations of the Creator manifesting through nature (Karade, 1994).
*Oriki	Praise poetry or praise name (Badejo, 1996).
*Orumila	The prophet of the Yoruba religion (Karade, 1994).
Rites of passage	Rituals and ceremonies used to mark transitions across various life phases, such as birth, puberty, marriage, initiations, and death (Reagan, 2005).
Ritual	Procedures that allow human beings to access the sacred. Rituals have the capacity to transform individuals and to sustain community (Heinze, 1995).
Root Doctor	Works in the mystical world of Voodoo or Vodoun; use of potions and of African origin (Phillips, 2017).
Spirituality	Ways in which the Ancestors in Africa, and later in America, conceptualized to explain the universe and their relationship to it and subsequently govern their relationship to each other (Hill, M., 1992).
Voodoo	A Black religious cult practiced in the Caribbean and the southern United States, combining elements of Roman Catholic ritual with traditional African magical and religious rites, and characterized by sorcery and spirit possession (Hucks, 2014; Phillips, 2017).
Vodoun	Meaning spirit in the Fon and Ewe languages, is practiced by the Fon people of Benin, and southern and central Togo, as well as in Ghana, and Nigeria. Vodoun is a primary source of religions with similar names found among the

African diaspora in the Americas, such as Haitian Vodou; Dominican Vodú; Cuban Vodú; Brazilian Vodum; Puerto Rican Vodú (Sanse); and Louisiana Voodoo (Hucks, 2014).

*Yeye

The good mother, Osun (Badejo, 1996).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how emerging Black/African American women, involved in rites of passage, experienced their rites phases of separation, liminality, and incorporation, and the role these experiences assumed in forging positive cultural identity and development. The research questions guiding the study were: (1) What are females' experiences with these culturally specific rites of passage; and (2) What roles do these rites of passage assume in forging positive cultural identity development and learning?

In order to explore the impact of rites of passage and their perceived influence on cultural identity development and learning among Black/African American adult females in the United States, it is important to understand literature on rites of passage, cultural identity development, and learning as they relate to Black adult females, as well as to explore what research studies have been conducted relative to this topic.

This chapter also recognizes the importance of experience in adult learning and development and references several scholars in adult education that mark experience as a critical component to adult development and learning. Experiential learning views one's experiences as storehouses of abundant resources for learning and upholds that adults tend to learn by drawing from their previous experiences as discussed by foundational scholars in the field of adult education (Dewey, 1938; Knowles, 1980; Lindeman, 1961) and summarized more recently (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). But given that experiential learning is a huge body of literature in the field, and the relevance of cultural experiences, such as rites of passage rituals, that transmit African cultural values to cultural identity development is a form of experiential learning, the

following discussion focuses more on these cultural aspects of learning rather than the wider body of literature on experiential learning.

This literature review begins by discussing the theoretical framework of the study as grounded in the rites of passage literature and given the focus on black women's experience, on critical race feminism. The next section focuses on the cultural identity development literature in general, and black female cultural identity development in particular. The third section focuses on reviewing the data-based studies that have been conducted relative to the topic. Finally, the chapter ends with a summary and discussion of gaps in the literature.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

As noted above, experiential learning is one of the central tenets of adult education and adult learning. John Dewey, a social reform agent and one of the most influential thinkers in the twentieth century, posited progressive views and educational practices upholding that central to learning are learner interaction, stimulation, and environment (Dewey, 1938, 1963). Learning, as viewed by Dewey (1938, 1963), is a lifelong process, which engages the adaptation and application of prior experiences to new settings.

Equally significant is Dewey's (1963) recognition that not all experiences are "genuinely or equally educative" (p. 25). He explains that some experiences are "mis-educative", meaning some experiences have the propensity to dwarf future experiences and learning (p.25). Dealing with racism can be one such experience that can dwarf future experience and learning. This is why it is critical to draw on a theoretical framework for this study that focuses on experience that can be life giving and positive for Black women. Hence, the theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the Rites of Passage literature, particularly as related to Black women's experience, and in critical race feminism. Each of these are discussed below.

Rites of Passage

The rites of passage literature serves as the primary theoretical framework of this study. Although rites of passage designate starting and ending points (Gennep, 1960), this study will explore perceptions of experiences and their influence on learning across the rites phases of separation, liminality, and incorporation. Detailed below, first, is some history and general background on rites of passage. Next is discussion of the Orisa and Ifa rites of passage traditions, on which this study will be based. Third is a consideration of the phases of rites of passage, and finally is a consideration of rites of passage in relation to African-centered concepts, and their association with the evolution of rites of passage in American society.

History and General Background

Rites of passage, as historical practices of Egyptian pharaohs, date back to circa 2000 BC (Harvey & Hill, 2004; Hill, 2002; Monges, 1999; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). These first documented rites of passage were rooted in ancient Kemet (Egypt) society requiring its novice complete an intensive process before being considered for initiation, reserved only for priests who had supernatural powers due to their training in the Higher Mystery Systems (James, 1954, 1986). Ancient Kemet's mission emphasized education supporting the development of good character and qualities that placed the initiate in harmony with other people, nature, and God (Hilliard, 1986; James, 1954, 1986). According to James (1954, 1986), an initiate's training period involved many years of training in the Mystery System. Specifically, control of thought, control of action, devotion to purpose, faith in the initiator's ability to teach the truth and faith in one's ability to distinguish the real from the unreal were emphasized for Kemet initiates (Harvey & Hill, 2004; Williams, 2013).

Within many cultures, rites of passage serve as markers of transition and personal development across the lifespan (Babatunde, 1998; Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2010; Robinson, 2013; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Hill, 2002; Peteet, 1994; Reagan, 2005). In some societies, such as the Yoruba of Nigeria and the Dipo of Ghana, several rites rituals performed over a life-span form a series, beginning with the rite of birth, followed by the rites of adulthood, marriage, eldership, and ancestral rites (Babatunde, 1998; Hill, 2002; Moolla, 2012; Reagan, 2005). Rites of passage, often referred to as life cycle rituals, are explicit moments in which cultures create, organize, transmit, and bestow meaning (Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1974).

Rites of passage, significant in many cultural traditions, date back centuries (Alford, 2003; Moors, Gilyard, McCreary & Warfield-Coppock, 2013; Pratt-Clarke, 2013; Turner, 1974; Gennep, 1960; Williams, 2013). Historically, aboriginal cultures founded sophisticated rituals and trials for young males to test their courage and readiness to move forward into manhood. By contrast, young females learned the secrets of healing practices and communicating with the Ancestors (Williams, 2013). Secrets function to create social boundaries based on sex and age, “with recognized and acceptable forms of behavior within them” (Ottenberg, 1989, p. 104). While secrets, or privileged knowledge, can sometimes uphold inequality, secrecy serves as a device for communicating as well as a means for creating hierarchy between the initiated and the uninitiated (Ottenberg, 1989). Clearly, within many cultures who practice rites of passage, established boundaries exist between the initiated and the uninitiated, with the initiated serving as the keepers and transmitters of secrets. Some scholars consider secrecy as a potent resource linked to the making of powerful spiritual entities and religious knowledge (Murphy, 1980; Turner, 1974).

Throughout time, some rites' rituals existed in the forms of hunts, scarification, and circumcision. While rites of passage manifest in different forms, and many African American youth experience very similar aboriginal rites practices (Williams, 2013), several scholars postulate that within American society, rites of passage lack their original intent and sacredness (Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2010; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Moors et al., 2013; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). Further, some scholars suggest that because of this observed deficiency, many youths turn to acts of self-initiation (Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2010; Hill, 1992; Moors, et al., 2013), evidenced by under-age and binge drinking, elaborate body piercings and tattoos, and an incline in gang fellowship.

To counter a recognized lack of cultural rites of passage in American society (Brookings, 1996; Hill 1992; Warfield-Coppock, 1992), scholars adapted the traditional rites of passage model with African-centered concepts to develop various multi-disciplinary approaches to rites of passage (Brookings, 1996; Hill 1992; Monges, 1999; Moors, et al., 2013; Piert, 2007; Pratt-Clark, 2013; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). While key tenets of these adapted rites also focus on self-development and self-esteem, reflecting an African-centered view, their significant focus directed to African spirituality and history shows potential for empowering African-American girls and women (Pratt-Clark, 2013; Monges, 1999; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). Furthermore, Richards (1990) suggested that people of all ethnicities in the United States rely on spirituality, and she maintains that "Africa survived the middle passage, the slave experience, and other trials in America because of the depth and strength of African spirituality and humanism" (p. 207). The Orisa/ Ifa tradition offers the rites of passage from a spiritual perspective.

Ifa and the Orisa Traditions

This particular study is grounded more specifically in the rites of passage linked to the Ifa and Orisa traditions of West Africa, as practiced by some African Americans in the U.S.. Specifically, this study identified participants involved in rites of passage initiatives sanctioned and supervised by priestesses initiated to the Orisa tradition. Bearing in mind that this study sought to explore African-centered rites of passage among those involved with the Orisa tradition, the following discussion directs attention to the West African spiritual tradition of Ifa, noting the Orisa tradition as its foundation (Abiodun, 2016; Aiyejina & Gibbons, 1999; Karade, 1994).

Classified as an indigenous African spiritual tradition, conceptualized by the Yoruba people of Nigeria, West Africa, Ifa tradition also influences several other African-centered traditions that are practiced in the Americas, such as Santeria, Candomblé, Palo, and Voudon (Abiodun, 2016; Aiyejina & Gibbons, 1999; Clarke, 2004; Hucks, 2014; Karade, 1994; Olaitan, 2016). In South Carolina, the Oyotunji African Village (OAV) continues to exist since its conception in 1970, and remains the only African village in the United States (Clarke, 2004; Hucks, 2014; Parnell, 2016). Residents of OAV practice a form of African spirituality known as Orisa-Vodun—a term coined by the founder of the village, His Royal Majesty Osejeman Adefunmi I (Clarke, 2004; Hucks, 2014, Parnell, 2016). Literally translated from Yoruba as “Oyo rises again”, Oyotunji stands as an African American reinterpretation and revival of the ancient Oyo empire of southwestern, present-day Nigeria (Clarke, 2004; Hucks, 2014).

Over time, OAV’s resident occupancy declined; scholars associate this decline to relocation by many families, extending from OAV’s founding membership, to “satellite communities”, in areas such as Atlanta, New York City, Savannah, Georgia, and Gainesville,

Florida. These OAV affiliates and residents, frequently travel to Ifa communities in Nigeria, to inform various protocols for OAV's ceremonies, rituals, and Egbes, such as its women's and ancestral societies, or Egbe Moremi and the Egungun Society, respectively (Clarke, 2004; Hucks, 2014; Parnell, 2016).

Ifa communities reflect the Yoruba's use and appreciation of color as classical ornaments, and observe their chromatic system that assigns colors across three categories; white, red, and black (Karade, 1994; Oluwole, Ahmad, & Ossen, 2013). "Fun fun" can be translated to white, which when worn, shows respect to the Ancestors (Karade, 1994) and is associated with peaceful feelings, purity, and kindness, and those wearing white attire are individuals expected to demonstrate good behaviors. Other icy colors like turquoise, blue, silver, and chrome fit this category (Oluwole, Ahmad, & Ossen, 2013). The second category, red, or "pupa", relates to fiery characteristics, and includes the colors orange, gold, and dark yellow. "Du du" or black, the last category, includes earth tones and leafy dark greens. These colors represent down-to-earth characteristics.

Ifa communities also understand and rely on these three pillars as Ifa's foundation: Orunmila, (second in command to the Supreme Being), the Ancestors, and the Orisa (Abiodun, 2016; Aiyejina & Gibbons, 1999; Karade, 1994). First, the Supreme Being, known as Olodumare, is believed to be without gender and remains uninvolved with the daily affairs of the living. Further, it is believed that Olodumare arranges our Universe to provide all things needed by mankind to attain fulfilled lives (Abiodun, 2016; Aiyejina & Gibbons, 1999; Karade, 1994). Olodumare's benevolence shows in the creation of Orunmila, and is believed to be the Prophet Orisa of Wisdom and source of knowledge and divination; Orunmila understands all aspects of humankind and carries Ifa, or wisdom of Olodumare, to the Earth (Bascom, 1992; Karade,

1994). Divination is the assessment of life occurrences and assists one with maintaining balance and achieving our life's destiny or the life instructions provided to humans upon their descent to Earth (Abiodun, 2016; Aiyejina & Gibbons, 1999; Karade, 1994).

Second, ancestral veneration, to include Egungun or ancestral masquerade, is considered essential to Ifa religion (Bascom, 1992; Karade, 1994; Olaitan, 2016). Such veneration directs one to remember and pay homage to the Ancestors or the "egungun" (Karade, 1994, p. 74) for their sacrifices that provide for our existence; Ifa religion upholds that our ancestors return as our children (Adefarakan, 2008, 2012; Karade, 1994). The Yoruba Egungun ancestral masquerade practice dates back to the early seventeenth century, honoring the ancestors and their living descendants (Willis, 2017). Primarily, the function of the Egungun practitioners includes performing elaborate rituals involving prayers, drumming, and dance (Willis, 2017). Further, during festivals and other important occasions, such as the changing of seasons, political events, births, weddings, and other life-cycle events, these masquerades parade through the compound, street, and market (Willis, 2004).

Following in the eighteenth century, Gelede emerged among the Ketu Yoruba, where it rapidly spread to other Yoruba groups (Babatunde, 1998; Willis, 2017). As a result of the nineteenth century Atlantic slave trade, it also spread throughout the African Diaspora to places like Sierra Leone, Cuba, Brazil, and the United States (Hucks, 2014; Kruger, 2010). As a common modern-day practice, at annual festivals or following the death of an important member of the society, men perform Gelede in honor of women, performing an ensemble of song, dance, masks, and costumes (Kruger, 2010).

Researchers of the twentieth and twentieth-first centuries, identify Gelede as, above all, honoring women or a mystical power harnessed by female and male elders (Babatunde, 1988;

Drewal & Drewal, 1988; Kruger, 2010; Willis, 2014; 2017). Specifically, Gelede appeases spiritually powerful women, elders, ancestors, and gods, and represents a vastly visible artistic expression of Yoruba belief that women, particularly elderly women, possess extraordinary powers comparable to or greater than those of the gods (Kruger, 2010; Willis, 2014; 2017).

Third, Ifa religion is interdependent of all life, where every life source forms, and elements of nature, such as rocks, rivers, flowers, thunder, rain, and wind, are honored for having life energies (Bascom, 1992; Karade, 1994). These natural energies or cosmic universal forces comprise the Orisa, with each Orisa having their own functions and qualities. For example, the Orisa Osun, or Deity of the Rivers, cultivates culture and provides the Universe with abundance and sweetness and aids in making one's life journey pleasant; Oya manifests as an Orisa of air and wind and provides protection to women and children; and Yemoja, the Orisa symbolizing motherhood, serves as mother to all Orisa (Adefarakan, 2008, 2012; Aiyejina & Gibbons, 1999; Karade, 1994). Ori refers to one's spiritual intuition and destiny, personified as an Orisa. Ifa religion posits that all human beings are capable of self-healing through connecting and working with the Orisas (Adefarakan, 2008, 2012; Aiyejina & Gibbons, 1999; Karade, 1994). Orisa worshippers rely on divination to assess energy forces and offer various forms of sacrifices, such as prayers, time, food, objects, and sometimes animals, to achieve enhanced development (Adefarakan, 2008, Karade, 1994). Moreover, the Orisa tradition reminds mankind of their integral parts of creation, and places top priority on personal levels of balance which must be maintained as it exists between all of Olodumare's creations (Aiyejina & Gibbons, 1999; Karade, 1994).

Phases of Rites of Passage

Most rites of passage, including those in the Ifa tradition, have three phases: separation, liminality, and incorporation. Rites of passage often accompany life phases of birth, adolescence, initiation, marriage, eldership, and death (Gennep, 1960). Additionally, over the last half-century, the importance of rites of passage rituals for marking the successful transition from one position in a social structure to another is well-documented by anthropologists (Babatunde, 1998; Brookins, 1996; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Hill, 1992; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). The three phases of rites of passage are discussed below with particular attention to the transition from adolescence to young adulthood.

Separation phase. As the first phase in a rite, the potential initiate engages in the separation phase. Specifically, rituals of separation mark a changed social status; for example, during puberty rites, separation marks the change from being a child to a young adult (Turner, 1974; Gennep, 1960). Examples of separation rituals include moving the initiates geographically away from their physical home, and stripping them of clothing, hair, or other physical markings of their previous selves (Babatunde, 1998; Grimes, 2000; Pratt-Clarke, 2013; Turner, 1974; Gennep, 1960).

Separation rituals often require assorted forms of body modifications (Babatunde, 1998; Garve, et al., 2017; Gennep, 1960). Body modifications, observed in historical and current forms, and performed for a variety of reasons in many societies, include piercings, tattoos, scarification, female genital cutting, male circumcision, cranial and foot binding, branding, ear shaping, and modern plastic and aesthetic surgeries (Garve, et al., 2017). While there have been many critiques of some of these historical or current day practices (Garve, et al., 2017), the point here is that body modifications have typically been a part of a rite of passage.

While Mbiti (1991) viewed separation rituals as trials for the initiates, where pain establishes boundaries between the old and the new, some scholars connect separation rituals and body modifications (Moolla, 2012; Turner, 1974; Genep, 1960) to the “hardening theory” (Garve, et al., 2017; Ludvico & Kirkland, 1995), emphasizing that rites of passage support the progression from one developmental phase to another. Critically important to this study is the understanding that body modifications serve as visible marks of one’s successful transitions (Garve, et al., 2017).

While the following summarizes the practice of body modifications as espoused by the hardening theory, specific implications to this study center on the use of body modifications associated with rites of passage rituals linked to redefining and marking cultural identity. This study examined the use and perceived impacts of body modifications as experienced by Black adult females involved in rites of passage as practiced in the United States. The hardening theory upholds that mutilations of varying forms, such as ornamental piercings, scarifications, and even circumcisions (though not the focus of this study), experienced in early life provide resilience against stress, and enhance development (Babatunde & Oyeronke, 2011; Garve et al., 2017; Ludvico & Kirkland, 1995). Further, the hardening theory postulates that any physical and emotional stress wielded on young children will allow the individual to endure stress later in life. Further, scholarly claims assert young people have the innate need for rituals to mark their transition into adulthood (Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2010; Brookings, 1996; Hill 1992; Warfield-Coppock, 1992; Williams, 2013). These assertions hold particular bearings to this study which examines how adult women perceived rites rituals aimed at marking their identity and the meaning they derived as a result of these rites experiences.

Acts of body modifications, practiced by Egyptian pharaohs, date back to circa 2000 BC (Greif, Hewitt, & Armstrong, 1996; Monges, 1999; Nadler, 1983). From a more current viewpoint, over the past 30 years, body modifications of tattooing and piercing reflect increasing prevalence in popular culture. In fact, in the United States, tattoo parlors assume a prominent position among the largest growing businesses (Carroll & Anderson, 2002), where recent estimates of prevalence of body piercing and tattooing among young adults, range from 22-30% for those between 18 and 29 (Dickson, Dukes, Smith, & Strapko, 2015). Moreover, body modifications become particularly appealing among adolescents, as during this phase of development they struggle for identity and control over their changing bodies (Larson & Martin, 2012, Martin, 1997). Body modifications are understood by some as markers of identity, primarily because people often state the desire to feel unique as the number one reason for undergoing body modification procedures (Dickson et al., 2015; Larson & Martin, 2012).

Today, body piercing is sometimes studied along with tattooing, partly because people with tattoos often obtain piercings in a tattoo parlor or self-inflict (Larson & Martin, 2012). Piercing, however, is perceived as less extreme than tattooing, primarily because removing the body jewelry will typically cause the pierced hole to heal (Greif, Hewitt, & Armstrong, 1996). While ear piercing for women remains mainstream, piercing eyebrows, nose, cheeks, or other areas appears to symbolize one's disaffection from society, much like tattooing (Sanders, 1988). Larson and Martin (2012) suggested that tattoos and piercings can be considered forms of self-mutilation, and align with this study, as these "self-mutilations", understood as acts of self-initiation, might occur due to the observed lack of cultural rites of passage in the United States (Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2010; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Hill, 1992; Martin, 1997; Warfield Coppock, 1992). Larson and Martin (2012), as further discussion, noted that without positive

rites of passage rituals, appropriately mediated by the sponsoring community, adolescents resort to constructing their own rituals that oftentimes include forms of body modifications or self-mutilations (Harvey & Hill, 2002; Hill, 1992; Larson & Martin, 2012). While this study examined perceptions about rites rituals involving body modification as markers of identity, it also considered the critical importance of a sponsoring community in the planning and delivery of appropriate and effective rites of passage.

According to Babatunde and Oyeronke (2011), tribal scarification is common in West Africa, and ritual scarification is the culturally sanctioned process of cutting the skin, resulting in patterned scars, post healing. Members of the Yoruba in Nigeria obtain facial scars called “kolo”, expressing a variety of feelings, such as mourning and grief, as well as religious beliefs (Garve, et al., 2017). Molla’s (2012) dialogue about Wole Soyinka, a Nigerian playwright, poet, and achiever of the Nobel Prize in 1986, referred to the social and cosmic aspects of scarification, also categorized as a body modification practice among the Yoruba. Molla’s (2012) discussion is relevant to this study that examined influences of Yoruba culture on rites of passage as practiced in the United States. Specifically, scarification is described as a rite of passage and action that literally and metaphorically “opens” the person up socially and cosmically enabling self-identity through the Yoruba social code (Molla, 2012, p. 28). Literally, scarification opens the skin; metaphorically it opens the road to life’s journey (Molla, 2012, p.28). This inference appoints specific aspects of the Ifa tradition, as scarification is overseen by Ogun, a key figure in the trinity of the Ifa Pantheon (Abiodun, 2016; Fabre, 1985; Hucks, 2014). Ogun, referred to as the God of Iron, serves as the patron deity for all metalworkers and body artists (Molla, 2012, p. 28), and works in concert with two other warrior deities, Eshu and Ochosi, completing this Ifa trinity (Abiodun, 2016; Fabre, 1985; Hucks, 2014). However, scarification, once practiced widely by

traditional societies, is increasingly becoming uncommon due to associated health problems such as keloids and Hepatitis B. Further, some scarification practices such as female genital cutting that were once practiced widely remain highly contested and controversial. Such practices carry negative connotations for some individuals, while others uphold its significance. These arguments have been discussed by numerous scholars (Akudinobi, 2005; Babatunde, 1998; Mbiti, 1991; Nnaemeka, 2005; Peteet, 1994; Walker, 1992; World Health Organization, 2000), and it is important to note that the World Health Organization is one of the biggest critics of such practices. While there are many criticisms of the practice of female genital cutting, there is a recognition of a need for culturally appropriate rites of passage, as Nnaemeka (2005) discussed. Further discussion of this is beyond the focus of this study, which focused on separation rites and body marking as practiced in the Ifa tradition in the U.S., which do not involve genital cutting. This study contributes to this body of knowledge through an examination of how and if body marking or modifications serve as cultural imprints for adult Black females involved in rites of passage, guided by the Orisa tradition, in the United States.

Liminality and incorporation phases. The liminal phase of rites of passage focuses on the concept of liminality. “Sitting in Limbo” (Cliff, 1971), the words to the song featured at this dissertation’s opening, also bring to mind the concept of “liminality” and the liminal phase of rites of passage (Gennep, 1960). The liminal phase occupies the space between the separation and incorporation phases of rites of passage. Liminal refers to their state of waiting for instructions to reincorporate into society, but now in a changed and elevated social role (Brookins, 1996; Grimes, 2000; Hill, 1992; Gennep, 1960; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). Focused on development and the successful transition to the rites phase of incorporation, initiates receive intense training during the phase of liminality (Brookins, 1996; Foster, 2017; Grimes, 2000; Hill,

1992; Genep, 1960; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). Periods of liminality vary from one to twelve months (Brookins, 1996; Foster, 2017; Hill, 1992; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). Considering rites of passage are appropriate across the life-span, the liminal phase offers a wide range of learning topics and interventions, such as career readiness, self-identity, decision-making, financial literacy, marriage, childbirth and spirituality (Babatunde, 1998; Brookins, 1996; Foster, 2017; Hill, 1992; Warfield-Cappock, 1992). The primary focus and intent of rites of passage is supporting the successful transition from one life-phase onto another of higher social status and responsibility. Upon successful completion of this rites phase, the initiate reemerges and is incorporated into their social and cultural fabrics, but now with a newly defined identity and a changed social status (Brookins, 1996; Grimes, 2000; Hill, 1992; Genep, 1960; Warfield-Coppock, 1992).

The incorporation phase generally includes elaborate celebrations involving family and community, and according to hooks (2015), cultural traditions and values, upheld by a family and community network, instill a positive sense of identity. Addressed in a subsequent section of this chapter, are other sociocultural influences that impact identity development, with emphasis on identity development among Black adult females. As noted earlier, rites of passage evolved in the United States, as evidenced by, but not limited to the terms, African-centered, Afrocentric, or Africentric, often attached to rites of passage programs (Alford, 2003; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Pratt-Clark, 2013; Monges, 1999; Moors et al., 2016; Piert, 2007). However, before debating the concept of an African-centered rites of passage, accounts of the terms African-centered, Africentric, and Afrocentric first highlight how these serve as conceptual frameworks in education and inform adaptations to rites of passage in the United States.

African-centered Worldview and Rites of Passage

Rites of passage, as conceptualized in this study, are related to the notion of an African-centered worldview. Scholarly assertions reinforce that African-centeredness is rooted in the past, and advocates that teaching from an African-centered perspective involves accentuating Africa's prominence prior to colonizing upheavals there, resulting from Europeans and invasions by Arabs (Asante, 1987, 1991, 2010; Merriweather-Hunn, 2004; Karenga, 1998; Mbiti, 1991; Shockley & Frederick, 2010; Warfield-Coppock, 1992; Winters, 1994). It is important to note that African-centered positions do not hold claim to anti-European views, but rather propose an African worldview or a lens for Africans and those who identify as being of African descent, when seeking to explain experiences proactively (Asante, 1997; 1991; 2010; Karenga, 1998; Shockley & Frederick, 2010) in a context of post-colonial oppression through racism. Furthermore, scholars within the field of adult education note that many forms of knowledge are culturally grounded (Colin, 2000); thus, an African-centered worldview needs to be at the center of all development of programs or sociocultural and sociohistorical analysis of people of African descent (Sheared, et al., p. 349) to help people develop a positive cultural identity and to combat the endemic racism that is part of the larger culture in many parts of the world, including the U.S.

African-centered worldview. "African-centered", also referred to in the literature as Afrocentrism, Africentrism, and pan-Africanism, all echo similar purposes, theories, and concepts (Sheared, et al., 2010). African American scholars in adult education suggest that Africentrism, as an interpretative framework used by Africentric scholars, grounded in African-centered knowledge, supports analysis of impacts of racism on Africans and members of the African Diaspora (Colin III, 2002a; Ford, 2010; Sheared, et al, 2010; Tolliver, 2010).

Even though the terms, as Sheared et al. (2010) noted, *African-centered*, *Africentric* and *Afrocentric* are seen as interchangeable by many, appropriate applications and uses of these terms determines their interchangeable roles of subject and theory. For example, African-centered describes a subject or program, also framed by African-centered theory. However, an important discrepancy exists with the terms African-centered, Afrocentric, and pan-Africanism, as these do not denote what some refer to as Black studies or Black philosophy (Sheared, et al., 2010). Also of great importance to articulate is that when one initiates a debate related to philosophers of the African Diaspora, they speak in a respected voice regarding African-centered as both a subject and theory (Sheared, et al., 2010, p. 344).

Colin III (1988) in discussing the term Africentrism, defined it as:

a sociocultural and philosophical perspective that reflects the intellectual traditions of both culture and a continent. It is grounded in these seven basic values (the Swahili term is provided first, followed by its English translation): Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Kuumba (creativity), Nia (purpose), and Imani (faith). (p. 3)

While an Africentric model related to teaching and education is more complicated than these seven principles, adult education scholars, grounded in an African-centered knowledge base, consider how such principles can be incorporated to facilitate positive cultural identity development while analyzing the impacts of sociocultural and intellectual racism on Africans, African Americans, and members of the African Diaspora (Sheared, et al., 2010, p. 345). In addition, Asante (1988), suggested that African-centered, as a framework or form of inquiry, represents a “transgenerational and transcontinental approach to Afrocentric study of African phenomena” (p. 19-20). The African-centered lens, applied to this study, frames an investigation

of potential sociocultural impacts of race on learning and cultural identity development among Black females in the U.S., as mitigated through rites of passage.

African-centered rites of passage. Several scholars credit the African-centered rites of passage movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s with increased interests and efforts led by community activists, educators, and parents, aimed at the development of more formalized methods of socializing Black youth that emphasized cultural reconnections (Brookins, 1996; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Hill, 1992; Moors, et al., 2013; Pinckney et al, 2011; Warfield-Coppock, 1992; Whaley, McQueen & Oudkeri, 2017). During the period of time from the late sixties to the early seventies, a cultural nationalist movement for Black pride and community control resonated across America, fueling increased community interest in the use of rites of passage, and the traditional naming ceremonies for infants and for adults who wished to adopt African names (Clarke, 2004; Hucks, 2014; Moors, et al., 2013). During these time-periods, youth advocates, scholars, and practitioners focused pointed attention to planning, implementing, and evaluating African-centered rites of passage programs to address a recognized lack of cultural rites of passage in American society (Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2010; Brookings, 1996; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Hill 1992; Moors, et al., 2013; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). Over time, and evidenced by nuanced and varying multi-disciplinary approaches to rites of passage, African-centered rites of passage merged with the traditional rites of passage model with African-centered concepts (Harvey & Hill, 2004; Pratt-Clark, 2013; Monges, 1999; Moors et at., 2013; Piert, 2007).

Seemingly, interests in the African-centered rites of passage continue to flourish, as evidenced by significant numbers of published books, pamphlets, scholarly papers, and articles explaining the use of rites of passage ceremonies and rituals for African American youth in

support of their ongoing development and success (Moors, et al., 2013). These publications demonstrate the growing interest in communities and families to implement rites of passage to assist their youth with successful transitions into adulthood (Monges, 1999; Moors, et al., 2013; Pratt-Clark, 2013; Piert, 2007). Programs advanced by many African American families for their own children, and sponsored by community organizations and institutions that include rites of passage, reflect a continued need for and interest in this age-old tradition (Foster, 2016; Moors, et al., 2013; Pratt-Clarke, 2013). The following list represents select African-centered rites of passage initiatives and scholarly publications, described as sharing a common mission to advance or reinstitute cultural heritage, while supporting and strengthening African American families and communities:

1. Aims of Modzawe in New York;
2. Mandala Center in Harlem;
3. Artist Collective of Hartford;
4. Simba Society in Chicago;
5. Sunrise Society in Philadelphia and Chicago;
6. New York Urban Coalition in New York;
7. *The Orita for Black Youth: An Initiation into Christian Adulthood*;
8. *Bring the Black Boy to Manhood: The Passage*;
9. Sojourner Truth Adolescent Rites Society or STARS; and
10. Bititi's Harvest® (Foster, 2016; Moors, et al., 2013; Pratt-Clarke, 2013).

In spite of this growing list, several scholars agree that rites of passage efforts and supporting literature directed towards female development is scant as compared to literature dedicated to male development (Moore, et al., 2013; Pratt-Clarke, 2013; Monges, 1999; Foster, 2016;

Whaley, McQueen & Oudkerk, 2017). This sentiment reflects in the above list of rites of passage initiatives and literature, as only two of the ten programs, STARS (Monges, 1999) and Bititi's Harvest® (Foster, 2016), direct their cause toward female participants. To address this variance, and to add diversity among the literature, this study examined rites of passage experiences among Black adult females, or females that identify as of African descent.

Although evolved, diverse in nature and greater utilized, the purpose of rites of passage rituals as tools for supporting individuals through life-cycle transitions remains an unchanged focus. However, scholars and practitioners agree that initiates and the communities in which they live require more uniform rites ceremonies and methodical programs that educate communities about rites of passage (Moors, et al., 2013). These strategies are critical so that rites and their associated rituals continue to uphold another intended purpose of validating our cultural heritage and strengthening Black communities (Hill, 1992; Moors, et al., 2013). Key tenets of the African-centered rites focus on self-development and self-esteem, and reflect an African-centered view, as demonstrated by a specific and significant focus directed to African spirituality and history (Hill, 1992; Monges, 1999; Moors, et al., 2010; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). Later in this chapter, select empirical studies on African-centered rites of passage that demonstrate potential for empowering African-American girls and women are discussed (Pratt-Clark, 2013; Hill, 1992; Monges, 1999; Warfield-Coppock, 1992; Whaley, McQueen & Oudkerk, 2017). Given that this study examined perceived rites experiences among Black adult females, literature that foregrounds the experiences of Black women is important from a theoretical perspective. Hence, we now move to a discussion of critical race feminism.

Critical Race Feminism

There are many theoretical perspectives that foreground the experiences of Black women (Andersen & Hill-Collins, 2015; Dillard, 2000, 2012; Reagan, 2005), but here these collective discourses are referred to as critical race feminism. Critical viewpoints, to include critical race feminism, seek counter stories to power influences in the critique of existing social structures, and provide additional frames of reference and analytical lenses for this study (Brookfield, 2005; Sheared et al, 2010). The following discussion points to scholarly consensus on critical theories' pronounced roles across academic disciplines, directing critiques of societal actions, like the analyses of educational scholarship and educational enterprises (Closson, 2010; Merrian, Cafferella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Zou, 2002), and will focus on the multiple theoretical influences of critical theory, critical race theory, and critical race feminism.

Critical Theory

Critical theoretical frameworks appropriately support this study examining the association with Black adult females involved in rites of passage in the U.S., where both rites of passage and Black females wear labels of marginalized and oppressed (Andersen & Hill-Collins, 2015; Brookfield, 2005; Closson, 2010; Reagan, 2005; Wing, 2003). Moreover, critical theories seek out power influences in the critique of existing social structures and resultants of power dynamics related to race and gender (Brookfield, 2005), providing frames of reference for this study.

Much of the evolution of critical theory follows doctrines first outlined by Max Horkheimer in 1937 and originally used by the members of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, where the term took on a radical and emancipatory form of Marxist social theory and research (Brookfield, 2005). The term now refers primarily to Marxist studies done or

inspired by the Frankfurt School and its modern-day representatives such as Jurgen Habermas (1985) and Paulo Freire (1970), who was not so informed by the Frankfurt School but was informed by neo-Marxist thinking as a point of analysis. Paulo Freire (1970) is credited with the first applications of critical approaches in education and his best-known work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, upholds what is known as the underpinning of critical pedagogy (Brookfield, 2005).

A key component of critical theory is the identification of systems of power and oppression and a distinctive quality of critical theory is its concern to provide people with knowledge intended to free them from oppression (Brookfield, 2005; Freire, 1970; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Also, scholars associate critical cultural theory to the identification of systems of power and oppression as privileged in varying forms of media (Andersen & Hill-Collins, 2015; Hall, 1997). More important, the intersection of socially constructed norms, such as race and gender, encourages and stimulates power and its tendency to suppress and oppress culture and cultural identity development among marginalized groups (Andersen & Hill-Collins, 2015; Hall, 1997). Intersectionality, discussed later in this chapter in the section dedicated to sociocultural influences on cultural identity, remains profound to this study.

Critical Race Theory

Derrick Bell (1992), also referred to as the father of critical race theory (CRT), served as a civil rights attorney prior to becoming law faculty at Harvard University. However, after more than 20 years at Harvard University, Bell resigned in protest that the University had never hired an African American female to join law faculty during his tenure there. While CRT evolved beyond its origination in legal scholarship to education, its central concept is racism, and it supports the analyses of educational initiatives (Bell, 1992; Closson, 2010; Crenshaw et al. 1995; Cross, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1994). Moreover, Bell's emphasis in CRT is on civil rights

debates, activism, and active storytelling, which all remain central parts of CRT (Closson, 2010). CRT serves as both a movement and a framework, merging “strategies derived from critical theory but relates directly to race, and scholars rely on CRT to analyze various segments with the educational enterprise” (Closson, 2010, p. 174). This study, informed by CRT, reflected the impact of race and CRT’s evolution, promoting two common interests of this theory:

- (1) an understanding of White Supremacy in America, created through an examination of professed ideals, such as, the rule of law and equal protection; and
- (2) a desire to change the existing relationship between racial power and the law (Crenshaw et al, 1995 p. 175).

Quoting Closson (2010), these five tenets of CRT weigh positively on its primary intent to deconstruct racism:

- (1) The use of counter storytelling;
- (2) The permanence of racism;
- (3) Whiteness as property counters the law ratifying Black slaves as property;
- (4) Interest convergence or the status quo will change only when the interests of Blacks and Whites converge; and
- (5) A critique of liberalism that challenges assumptions about race and the law, in that the law is colorblind, the law is neutral, and change must be incremental so that is palatable to those in power (p. 176).

Among these five tenets of CRT, counter storytelling is the most widely used element of CRT, and within CRT, the goal of counter storytelling seeks to rearrange legal scholarship to shift views on color-blindness and race-neutral concepts (Closson, 2010). However, for the purposes of this study, CRT as a framework seems appropriate for the analysis of counter storytelling in

an effort to explore power constructs related to concepts of race and ways in which Black adult women experience being socially underprivileged.

Critical Race Feminism

Critical race feminism (CRF) places women of color in the center, rather than the margins of any discussion or debate (Pratt-Clarke, 2010; Wing, 2003; Rodriguez, 2006), providing a viable framework for this review of Black female cultural identity development and learning in the U.S. involved in rites of passage. CRF feminism places women of color in the center and supports the analysis of counter narratives and storytelling (Closson, 2010; Rodriguez, 2006; Wing, 2003). Critical race feminism's framework supports this proposed analysis of narratives from Black/African American adult females about their rites of passage experiences, how they made meaning of their rites experiences, and their perceptions on how their rites' experiences influenced their learning and development. CRF, referred to as a framework and movement (Rodriguez, 2006), has the potential to support a viable examination of the stories about perceived impacts of rites of passage on cultural identity development and learning, shared by adult females that identify as Black in the U.S.. Rodriguez (2006) used narratives to tell her personal stories of experiences in struggling with racism, and similar stories from other women. For these women, and marginalized others, storytelling or counter-storytelling (Delgado, 1988/1989) possesses potential to serve as powerful sites of resistance. More important, narrative showed as productive means for the women in this study to explain how they resist dominance in college and university environments (Rodriguez, 2006), thereby providing opportunities for these women to redefine themselves.

Within the vein of CRF, Black feminist theoretical concepts and critical cultural theories posed important positions to this examination involving African American adult females

(Dillard, 2000, 2012; Hill-Collins, 1996). Dillard's (2012) concepts of Black Feminist thought following Hill-Collins (1990), specifically, Endarkened Feminist Epistemology, addressed concepts of power, intersectionality, and entangled identities, all relevant to this study aimed at investigating development and learning among Black adult females. Among Black feminist scholars, Dillard (2012) stands apart when considering her concepts of Endarkened Feminist Epistemology, which conveys how one experiences reality when based in the historical roots of global Black feminist thought (Dillard, 2012, p. 59). Explicitly, and of specific bearing to this study, Dillard (2012) told that Endarkened Feminist Epistemology differs culturally from White feminism as it overlaps culturally constructed notions of race, class, gender, and other identities (p. 59). Endarkened Feminist Epistemology reiterates the prolific negative impacts of power when it intersects with socially constructed identifiers such as race, class, and gender. Further, Dillard (2012) calls out the importance of women of African ascent to remember those things we learned to forget (p. ix). She argues that while colonization fueled the entanglement of diasporic genealogies, these strongly influence the identities of women of African "ascent" throughout the world (p. x). This announcement also brings to our attention the critical importance of the Black females' experiences, good, bad, and indifferent, and how these experiences shape identity development and learning.

Also considered here is the work of Hill-Collins (1999) who tells that power wields dynamic and potentially negative influences on Black female identity and development, when experienced at the intersections of race, class, and gender. Her study (1987) of motherhood-daughter relationships in Black culture, upholds significant concepts of "motherhood", from an African perspective, that inform an Afrocentric view on Black motherhood (p.4). According to Hill-Collins (1987), the following viewpoints on an Afrocentric perspective on Black

motherhood, assume relevancy to this study on Black female learning and development: (1) Motherhood in African religions, philosophies, and social institutions represents continuity; (2) African cultures view motherhood roles as interwoven and supported by community; and (3) African-centered views on motherhood suggest that the experience of motherhood impacts Black females with a base of self-actualization, status in the Black community, and cause for social activism.

According to Hill-Collins (1987, 1999), slavery disrupted this described West African family structure, exposing slaves to Western views on race and gender, thereby identifying all Africans as inferior beings. Slavery introduced challenges for Blacks as how to best continue traditional Afrocentric values under powerful and oppressive regime of racism (Clarke, 2004; Hill-Collins, 1987; 1999; Hucks, 2014), resulting in an African-centered view of Black motherhood to include “blood-mothers, other-mothers, and women-centered networks” (p. 4). More important, the African-centered view of motherhood, whether “blood-mother, other-mother, or community other-mother, can be invoked by Black women as a symbol of power” (p.6). According to Hill-Collins (1987), girls’ identity with their mothers, and feminine behaviors results from girls’ connections with adult female role models, emphasizing how an African-centered view of motherhood is actualized through Black mothers’ activities as role models. More important, these concepts of Black motherhood underpin learning and development experiences transferred in rites of passage and their associated rituals (Koukoui, Hassan, & Guzder, 2017; Monges, 1999; Piert, 2007; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). More important, Black mothers in Black communities, perceived widely as powerful figures, contribute positively to the rites process and the communities they represent (Koukoui, Hassan, & Guzder, 2017; Monges,

1999; Piert, 2007). Addressed later in this chapter are the critical and powerful roles African and Black mothers occupy in rites of passage.

Specifically, the aforementioned discussions focus our attention to power, evidenced and asserted through concepts surrounding gender and race, primarily because in the U.S., African American females have historically been labeled as inferior, assuming the bottom rung on the societal ladder (Andersen & Hill-Collins, 2015; Closson, 2010; Dillard, 2000, 2012; hooks, 2015; Wing; 2003). Therefore, this study deems Black feminism, informed by critical race feminism, as necessary for the analysis of stories about learning and becoming adults solicited from African American females involved in rites of passage.

Cultural Identity Development

The second section of this literature review focuses on cultural identity development. Scholars within and beyond the field of adult education have produced abundant literature connecting cultural identity development to learning that fosters a sense of belonging to a culture or group (Cross, 1971; Hall, 1997; Tisdell, 2003). This learning involves knowledge acquisition about a culture, including learning about traditions, heritage, language, religion, and ancestry (Hall, 1997, Reagan, 2005). Cultural identity, broadly defined, is the identity of a group or culture, or of an individual, that is influenced by one's belonging to a group or culture (Hall, 1997; Reagan, 2005).

Berry and Reese (2013) conceptually discussed cultural identity and cultural experiences and suggested that cultural identity connects individuals to how they define themselves as connected to culture. Accordingly, cultural experience, defined as events specific to a group of individuals with shared beliefs, values, traditions, customs, practices, and language, alters how people interact and view the world, and thus affects cultural identity.

Robinson (1999) defined identity as “both visible and invisible domains of self-influence and self-construction. These include, but are not limited to, ethnicity, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and physical and intellectual abilities” (p. 5). These cultural identifiers (ethnicity, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and religion) result from social conditions and affect an individual's sense of oneself. Further, literature about life changes and development refer to Erikson's (1980) psychosocial stage development theory across the lifespan, but also points out that Erikson does not take cultural issues related to identity development into account at all (Tisdell, 2003).

Cultural identity development takes place over time and cannot be separated from other aspects of development at a given age. For example, from a legal standpoint, the age of 18, or the age of majority, delineates adolescents from adults and is deemed the age by which an individual becomes responsible and accountable for their actions (Robinson, 2013; Arnett, 2000, 2015). In addition, the age of majority grants many American citizens legal rights to participate in adult-like activities, such as marriage, leaving school, alcohol consumption, voting, smoking, and sexual consent; however, the legal age granting these permissions to others varies from 15 to 21 years (Aamodt & Wang, 2013; Robinson, 2013; Arnett, 2000, 2015). Some scholars consider this age as the age of emerging adulthood. It is this age that is most relevant to this research study.

Emerging Adulthood and Cultural Identity Development

Chervinko, Strom, Kinney and Bradley (2005) noted that personal definitions of adulthood are formed by social norms, differ across ethnic groups, and are shaped by standards set forth by a culture. These cultural-specific social norms viewed as being a required criterion for adulthood influence the lives of individuals within that culture (Robinson, 2013). In addition, societal issues related to race, class, and gender also factor into the socio-culture impacts on

adult development (Arnett, 2000, Robinson, 2013; Smith & Taylor, 2010). For example, emerging science on brain development suggests that most people do not reach full maturity until the age of 25; however, females' brains develop, on average, two years earlier than that of males (Aamodt & Wang, 2011). Levinson's (1986) theory of adult development referred to the age range of 16 to 21 as the transition period to adulthood. He offers that adult development embraces a set of psychosocial phases through which adults must pass as they move through early adulthood and midlife, and that each of these phases is created by the challenges of building or maintaining a life structure, formed by social norms.

In realizing the complexities of development among individuals between adolescence and adulthood, expanded scholarly studies on development generated the “emerging adult theory” of adult development (Arnett, 2000, 2010). This theory primarily applies to young adults in developed countries, recognizing that the transition to adulthood there is long enough to constitute a separate period in the life phase (Arnett, 2000, 2016; Smith & Taylor, 2010). Arnett (2000) explained that emerging adulthood is the period between 18 and 25 years of age, where adolescents become more independent and explore various life possibilities. In addition, emerging adulthood is described as a new demographic that is ever-changing, and that some believe that those individuals in their early twenties have always struggled with "identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and feeling in-between" (p, 69). According to Arnett (2000), emerging adulthood is a time of life when many different directions remain possible, when little about the future has been decided for certain, and when the scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life course (p. 69).

As noted, adult development intersects with cultural identity development. As many discuss, there are multiple perspectives on adult development, some of which include biological perspectives that focus on the aging of the body, behavioral perspectives, and sociocultural and integrative perspectives (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Tisdell, 2003). Most relevant to this discussion are sociocultural perspectives and integrative perspectives (Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999; Tisdell, 2003). These perspectives bring highlighted attention to social and cultural influences that often intersect, offering noticeable impacts on development. Collectively, these perspectives on identity are significant, as they forge increased understanding of critical perspectives of cultural identity development, to include the impact of intersectionality on identity development.

Critical Perspectives on Cultural Identity Development

Critical perspectives on cultural identity development theory, first and foremost focus on the influence of race, gender, social class etc. on cultural identity development, and also the role of such power relations and their effects on identity. Of critical importance to this study are race and gender, and their intersections, and the significance of these influences on identity development (Anderson & Collins, 2015; Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999; Cross, 1971; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003). This continued discussion explores these critical concepts related to cultural identity development among Black American females.

First, it is important to note that Black racial identity development (BRID), as a component of cultural identity, is often theorized in models that describe linear stages through which Black individuals move from a negative to a positive self-identity in the context of their racial group membership (Cross, 1971; Phinney, 1996). Cross (1971) used a five-stage model to describe a Black person's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors as he or she moves from a White

frame of reference to a positive Black frame of reference: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization/commitment. Cross (1971) and Phinney (1996) detailed sociocultural influences on identity formation, with specific attention drawn to ethnic minorities.

According to Cross's (1971) model of Black racial identity development, African Americans evolve from having a negative self-view in which being Black is degraded to having a positive self-view in which they are secure with being Black. The model included five distinct stages through which Black individuals progress. First, the pre-encounter stage describes the identity before the conscious thought of cultural identity perspective. Second, the encounter stage exposes individuals to an experience that suddenly and sharply calls race into perspective, and invokes racial consciousness. Third, the emersion stage makes the individual susceptible to a racialized worldview while taking on an apparent pride in their Blackness. Fourth, the internalization stage is marked by an individual's comfort with a strong enough sense of his own racial/ethnic identity to be able to forge relationships with members of other racial/ethnic groups. Finally, the identity transition is the final stage where a balance of comfort in one's own racial/ethnic identity, as well as the racial/ethnic identities of others, is reached (Cross, 1991).

While Cross's (1991) model, developed initially in 1971 and updated over time, is now quite dated, it has been widely referenced in relation to understanding cultural identity models of development. Phinney (1996) proposed a model of ethnic identity development that can be applied to all ethnic minorities. In the initial stage, ethnicity is unexamined and is not noticeable for the individual, who typically is a child or young adolescent. The second stage is a period of immersion in which individuals become interested in knowing more about their ethnic group, often leading to a desire to understand history, traditions, as well as the current situation of their

group. During the final stage, ethnic minority individuals ideally have developed a secure, positive sense of themselves in relation to their ethnic group, together with an acceptance of other groups. Phinney (1996) reminded us that it is important to understand that for many ethnic minorities, “identity formation has to do with developing an understanding and acceptance of one's own group in the face of lower status and prestige in society and the presence of stereotypes and racism” (p. 144).

Critical cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1992) and his work on culture is widely cited in the cultural identity development literature, and he discusses it in two primary ways. First, Hall (1992) defined cultural identity as a focus on shared culture, which originates from shared history and ancestry that an individual has in common with other people. However, within the scope of shared historical and cultural experiences, which provides individuals a continuous frame of reference during shifting divisions in individual history, “shifts in identities” are observed (Hall, 1992, p. 274). Hall's (1992) second perspective on cultural identity acknowledged that while there are many points of similarity, there are also many differences that comprise what we have become due to historical and societal interventions. Most important, Hall suggested that "cultural identity belongs to the past and the future, and while cultural identities have a history, they are also constantly transformed and fluid" (p. 274), and hence always changing.

Hall (1992) pointed out that social issues related to race, class, and gender, singularly or collectively, “motivate shifts in cultural landscapes and give way to a ‘crisis in identity’ and shifts in personal identities” (p. 274). Huck (2014), more recently and in following Stuart Hall, highlighted one of Hall's quotes on the fluidity of cultural identity, restating “cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture, where one can make some

final and absolute return” (Hall as cited in Huck, 2014, p. 9). Huck (2014), further suggested cultural identity development, informed by African cultures and religions, is a means by which marginalized, but culturally related, people are brought together to facilitate their cultural identity development. Hence, now we move to a discussion of black female cultural identity development and the role of learning and adult education in the process.

Black Female Cultural Identity and Learning in the United States

The literature on cultural identity development and learning upholds a critical perspective related to Black females, placing emphasis on the impacts of sociocultural elements of race and gender, and their influence on cultural identity development and learning. Specifically, racial and ethnic identities are understood as prime factors influencing Black female development and learning, and scholars insist that heightened sensitivity to these enhances teaching among adult educators and learning among marginalized populations (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999; Cross, 1995; Tisdell, 2003).

Additionally, the following two key positions on Black female cultural identity development and learning are gleaned from the literature: (1) Black females are often seen as a marginalized population in the U.S. (Johnson-Bailey, 2001; Andersen & Collins, 2015, hooks, 1994); and (2) Racial and ethnic identities are often influenced by social and cultural influences tied to cultural traditions and values (Baumgartner, 2001). Noteworthy is the connotation that cultural traditions and values, upheld by a family and community network, instill a positive sense of identity (Baumgartner, 2001; hooks, 2015).

Conversely, the literature supports that racial and ethnic identities among Black females are also influenced by negative social and cultural factors, manifested through negative treatment and media messages received from others because of their race and ethnicity, which impedes

identity development (hooks, 2015; Andersen & Collins, 2015). Andersen and Collins (2015) informed that social issues related to race, class and gender, evidenced in media, and their impact on the experiences of people in American society, have been well documented by anthropologists and social scientists. In *Black Looks* (hooks, 2015), an analysis of literature, film, and popular culture revealed significant acts of negative representations of Black people, and how black is made to look in media.

Sociocultural Influences

Broadly speaking, identities, often influenced by social and cultural factors, have significant bonds with cultural traditions and values (Baumgartner, 2001). The sociocultural perspective includes the social and cultural aspects that manifest as forces impacting growth and development across the lifespan, calling attention to societal issues related to, but not solely limited to, race, ethnicity, and gender and their impact on identity development (Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Baumgartner (2001) tells that the sociocultural perspective views the individual as a reflection of the society they represent, and that their development is shaped by any existing discriminatory or oppressive social forces. Further, scholars suggested that the sociocultural perspective is over-shadowed by more prominent orientations to learning (Baumgartner, 2001; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Finally, scholars (Baumgartner, 2001; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007) asserted that the contextual/sociocultural approach views individuals as unbreakable from the society in which they live; they develop in ways intrinsic to themselves but molded by the power of discriminatory forces of society within which they function.

This position ignites interest to further investigate how impacts of sociocultural influences, mediated by rites of passage, influence cultural identity development and learning.

Such examinations would focus on perceived learning experiences and their potential impact on positive identity development to counteract and deconstruct concepts of race and racism, in addition to serving as mediator against other discriminatory forces such as ethnocentrism, oppression, and masking.

Ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism refers to prejudicial attitudes toward other ethnic groups (Reagan, 2005). Ethnocentric viewpoints, as sociocultural influences on cultural identity development and learning, reinforce marginalization and oppression of other non-dominant systems of knowing (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). Phinney's (1996) study on racial and ethnic identity development suggested that ethnocentrism and ethnocentric notions have negative impacts on identity formation among ethnic minorities as their identity formation is influenced by prejudicial attitudes such as racism, stereotypes, and other understandings that connect minority class with low status in society (Phinney, 1996). Decades after Phinney's attention to racial identity formation and ethnocentrism, Reagan (2005), a scholar of adult education, focused attention on two types of ethnocentrism—cultural and epistemological. Cultural ethnocentrism refers to ethnocentrism as it exists among scholars as observed when they allow biases and prejudices to inform their work, while epistemological ethnocentrism refers to the power of dominance observed in a study (p.5).

According to Reagan (2005), blatant ethnocentrism is seldom apparent in current scholarly dialogue; however, a common practice is the use of one's society and sociocultural practices as the norm used to examine and measure other societies. Lastly, Reagan (2005) advised that scholars attempt to examine non-Western educational practices, but through a lens that distorts what they see and are trying to understand. More important, he notified that this

distortion is not restricted to education but is a common criticism of Western scholarship in general (p. 5).

While Reagan (2005) encouraged scholars to examine non-Western educational practices, he also reminds of ethnocentrism's capacity to distort what they see and are trying to understand; more important, he notifies that this distortion is not restricted to education but is a common criticism of Western scholarship in general (p. 5). More important, he suggested that educators in the U.S. and other Western countries have little knowledge of non-Western educational traditions and attributes this dilemma to ethnocentrism of the West; ethnocentrism fuels beliefs that Western educational practices are the norm, and other traditions are not worthy of inclusion in the education curriculum (p. 3). This discussion of ethnocentrism calls for expanded approaches to educational practices and learning that consider marginalized and non-dominate ways of knowing.

Oppression. Scholars associate oppression with combinations of prejudice and institutional power which creates a system that discriminates against some groups, often called targets, and benefits other groups, often called agents or dominant groups; examples of these systems are racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism (Freire, 1970; Grossberg, 1992; Hardiman & Jackson, 1997; hooks, 1984; Storey, 1998). Further, these systems enable dominant groups to exert control over target groups by limiting their rights, freedom, and access to basic resources such as health care, education, employment, and housing (Freire, 1970; Hardiman & Jackson, 1997; hooks, 1984). Oppression is viewed as a situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry (Freire, 1970).

Oppression functions at these four levels to identity development: (1) at the personal level impacting values, beliefs, and feelings; (2) at the interpersonal level affecting individual

actions and behaviors; (3) at an institutional level impacting rules and policy; and (4) at a cultural level, affecting concepts of beauty and truth (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). Writers within cultural studies rely on cultural race theory to connect cultural studies with the theories of identity and of the politics of difference (Grossberg, 1992; Storey, 1998).

Paulo Freire's (1970) writings on oppression have significantly influenced the fields of education and counseling. He is considered a major founder of liberation pedagogy and based his theory on his experiences with teaching peasants and disenfranchised persons in Brazil. In his best-known work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) discussed the "banking" concept of education in which a knowledgeable teacher projects an absolute ignorance onto others, who are passive recipients of information, as an instrument of oppression. Such education attempts to control thinking, promote passivity, and stifle creativity.

Targets of oppression are people subjected to exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, and violence, and are maintained in their place by the agent of oppression's ideology, which supports oppression by denying that it exists and blames the conditions of oppression on actions of the targets (Freire, 1970, Hardiman & Jackson, 1997; hooks, 1984). Agents of oppression are members of the dominant social groups in the U.S., who knowingly or unknowingly reap unfair advantage over members of groups that are targets of oppression; agents have the power to define themselves as normal, whereas targets are likely to be labeled as substandard, or defective (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). As noted in this review, oppression has the potential to stunt, and perhaps distort, identity development. This discussion supports expanded examination of oppression and its perceived impact on cultural identity development and learning among Black females in the United States, involved in rites of passage.

Scholars agree that it is the intersection of social issues related to race, class, and gender that bears the greatest oppressive impacts on adult development and learning (Dillard, 2012; Johnson-Bailey, 2001; Anderson & Collins, 2015). Intersectionality refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power (Davis 2008, p. 68). Crenshaw (1991) proposed intersectionality as a concept to assist in examining the multidimensional oppressive situations, struggles, and voices of Black and minority women, who felt they were invisible within mainstream, middle-class, feminist discussions. Finally, intersectionality arranges an account of how oppression manages itself, and demands recognition that not all women experience their womanhood in the same ways, and that many women face multiple forms of oppression (Hill-Collins, 1999b).

Intersectionality supports expanded thinking about gender and feminism and calls attention to intertwined oppressions (Hills-Collins, 1999b). The term “matrix of domination”, coined by Andersen and Collins (2015) defined a framework applied to the examination of how social issues related to race, class, and gender intersect, and inform it is their intersection that creates a power dynamic to further advance oppression of marginalized populations (p. 4). This position is critical to our expanded understandings around oppression and its negative influences on cultural identity development and adult learning among Black females.

Masking. Masking, defined as a need to conceal one’s identity, is perceived as a survival technique that African Americans have used since chattel slavery to survive its racist and patriarchal structure, and still operates in today’s society (Rodriquez, 2006). Applying critical race theory, Rodriquez (2006) explored how females of color resist dominance while working in college settings, and how masking functions to subordinate African American and Latina women

there. While Rodriguez (2006) contended that masking our inner selves serves as a defense against racist educational institutions in which we try to maneuver, it also perpetuates low self-esteem. hooks (2003) warns that:

When masking one's low self-esteem it becomes easier to project problems onto poor Black folks. Self-esteem is the confidence in our ability to think; confidence in our ability to cope with the basic challenges in life; and confidence in our right to be successful and happy; the feeling of being worthy, deserving, entitled to assert our needs and wants, achieving our values and enjoying the fruits of our efforts. (p. xii)

Rodriguez (2006) used narratives to tell her personal stories, as well as stories of other women's experiences in struggling with racism. For these women, and marginalized others, storytelling or counter-storytelling (Delgado, 1988/1989) can serve as powerful sites of resistance. Additionally, writing counter-stories can serve as a tool for unmasking and challenging dominant stories that uphold racism (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Rodriguez (2006) acknowledges these critical tenets of stories:

1. Stories act against complacency;
2. Stories about oppression can guide us through understanding oppression; and
3. Stories in a sense heal us (p. 1069).

Furthermore, narrative provided a productive means for the women in this study to explain how they resist dominance in the universities they worked

This research study used the analysis of story segments to unveil how rites of passage experiences provide counters to social issues stemming from racism and power directed at Black adult females in the U.S. As reflected in the literature, social issues related to race and gender collaborate to set up oppression for marginalized populations and cultural practices in the U.S..

Cultural reattachment, labeled as another counter to racial and gender oppression and marginalization impacting those of African descent, is discussed next.

Cultural Reattachment

Concepts of cultural reattachment show promise with advancing positive identity development and learning for people of African descent. As specified by Shockley (2007), cultural reattachment is “a process whereby people of African descent begin to adopt aspects of an African culture (e.g., Wolof or Akan), and “Africentric education is defined as the adoption of Africentric ideology and cultural relevancy” (p. 104). Educational disparity is an impenetrable problem in the U.S. where the education system is accused of inadequacies related to properly addressing the cultural and educational needs of Blacks (Hilliard, 1997). “Cultural reattachment Africentric education” is “the adoption of Afrocentric ideology and cultural relevancy for use within classrooms” (Shockley, 2010, p. 1213). Akoto (1992) suggested that innovations targeting improved academic outcomes for Black students have fallen short of affording an educational experience that enables members of the Black community to advance and take control of the mental and physical spaces they claim as their own. To address deficits in educational experiences for Black learners, Shockley (2007) offered that teachers knowledgeable of “cultural imperatives”, advanced by “cultural reattachment Africentric education”, are better prepared to serve Black learners (p.105).

Shockley (2007) defined Africentric educationists as those individuals who feel the outcomes for Black children improve when they are a part of Black communities that understand the urgent need for Blacks to attach to African cultures. According to Shockley (2007), the concept of identity development is a primary cultural imperative of African-centered education. Identity is primary because if the Black child does not know who he or she "is", that child cannot

know his or her purpose (p.105). This principle of African-centered education is important because it molds the African child together with his community (p.105).

Reflecting on identity development across the lifespan, Kolb's (1984) and Dewey's (1938) progressive educational position maintained that lifelong learning is constructed on prior experiences, and identity is constructed through cultural reattachment. Africentric education focuses on positive identity development and learning for those who identify as Black and seek an African-centered approach to learning and development.

Chapman-Hilliard, Beasley, McClain, Cokley, Nioplias & Taylor (2016) studied culturally empowering spaces, such as rites of passage, and linked positive development to ethnic identity-related processes, showing that learning focused on African history and cultural principles improves critical consciousness among Black youth and adults (Belgrave et al., 2000). These Afrocentric scholars suggested that culturally empowering spaces and empowering learning contexts, including African-centered pedagogy, is critical to Black learners' success (Chapman-Hilliard, et al., 2016). Culturally empowering spaces: (a) act as safe space, (b) stimulate a sense of connectedness, (c) provide a source of validation, (d) engender resilience, (e) foster intellectual stimulation, (f) encourage empowerment, and (g) can serve as a home base (Grier-Reed, Madyun, & Buckley, 2008). Culturally empowering spaces, organized for informal and formal learning, serve as counter-spaces challenging notions of inferiority, and foster positive development and learning (Chapman-Hilliard, et al., 2016).

Culturally relevant education. Scholars postulate that Afrocentric education and culturally relevant instruction, such as Black Studies and Pan-African Studies, are important for Black learners and their academic achievement and personal development, and should therefore be embraced as effective methods in disputing long-standing hegemonic advances of Eurocentric

education (Chapman-Hilliard, et al., 2016; Gay, 2010; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2006; Moors, et al., 2013). While Afrocentric education has been talked about for decades as a conceivable resolution to racially fueled social problems faced by Black students in the U.S., it has not been assessed in mainstream discourses (Adams, 2014; Kunnie, 2016; Sheared, et al., 2010; Shockley & Frederick, 2010).

Kunnie (2016) linked lingering social issues in the U.S., such as underdeveloped individuals and communities, and the marginalization of Black women, to racism. To counteract these social ills, and to stop the continued exploitation of Blacks that lingers in the U.S., this author calls for the expansion of Afrocentric education and Black studies in schools, colleges, universities, and communities, and defines Black studies as:

Educational programs of liberation that correct the historical record that denies Black civilization, transform the existing education status quo that distorts the reality of Black life and culture, and necessitates a return to the wellspring of African ancestral wisdom, language, and culture. (Kunnie, 2016, p. 360).

Additional benefits of Afrocentric education, specifically, Black Studies, were detailed and discussed previously. Adams (2014) showed that Black Studies programs have a positive impact on student academic success and racial identity formation. In an examination of empirical studies on students who studied courses in or graduated from Pan-African Studies (PAS), Adams (2014) informed that “exposure to PAS, represents Cross’s (1991) stage of encounter in his Stages of Black Identity Development, whereby students are able to define their racial identity and salience” (p.29). Further, PAS motivates students to develop their racial identity by empowering a voice that establishes a platform for their academic engagement and performance as well as personal identity and cultural appreciation (Adams 2012, 2014). In addition, Adams

(2014) associated PAS to what Freire (2006), and hooks (1994), termed as liberatory education, and calls attention to the need for institutions of higher learning to design educational opportunities to support Black student intellectual development.

Culturally responsive teaching “uses the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2010, p. 31). Further, Gay (2010) explained that culturally responsive teaching rests on six dimensions:

- (1) Culturally responsive teachers are socially and academically empowering by setting high expectations for students with a commitment to every student’s success;
- (2) Culturally responsive teachers engage cultural knowledge, experiences, contributions, and perspectives;
- (3) Culturally responsive teachers validate every student’s culture;
- (4) Culturally responsive teachers seek to educate the whole child;
- (5) Culturally responsive teachers are transformative of schools and societies; and
- (6) Culturally responsive teachers liberate from oppressive educational practices and ideologies that are typically taught in schools (p. 38). Additionally, Gay (2010) offered that teachers need to understand how and why culture and difference are vital beliefs for culturally responsive teaching, as these are critical to humanity (p. 38).

Ladson-Billings (1994) defined culturally relevant pedagogy as one “that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 17). Ladson-Billings (2006) expanded on culturally relevant pedagogues, offering a focus on cultural competence. Cultural competence “refers to helping students to recognize and honor their own cultural beliefs and practices while acquiring access to

the wider culture, where they are likely to have a chance of improving their socioeconomic status and making informed decisions about the lives they wish to lead” (p. 36).

Significances and connections to Afrocentric rites of passage are the understanding that culturally relevant pedagogies accept that students must learn to circumnavigate between home and school, and educators must find ways to support marginalized students with constructing the knowledge needed to succeed in a school system that oppresses them (Ladson-Billings, 2006). More recently, Ladson-Billings (2014) asserted that pedagogy should always evolve to meet the ever-changing needs of students. Of equal importance, Ladson-Billings (2014) calls out to educators and reminds them that “any scholar who believes that she has arrived, and the work is finished, does not understand the nature and meaning of scholarship” (p. 82). Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (2014) posits that in adopting culturally relevant pedagogy, the emphasis shifts from focusing on only one racial or ethnic group, and encourages scholars and researchers to consider global identities across education to include arts, literature, music, athletics and film.

African-centered education. Referenced in major literature on adult development and learning among Black females in the U.S., exist theories on an African-centered or African world-view, and Africentrism (Brookfield, 2005; Colin III, 2002a; Ford, 2010; Sheared, et al, 2010; Tolliver, 2010). Several scholars recognize Cheik Anta Diop (1974) for the foundation of the Afrocentric idea in education (Asante, 1987, 1991, 2010; Brookfield, 2005; Karenga, 1982; Shockley & Frederick, 2010; Winters, 1994). Diop’s historical research methods are described as multifaceted as they consider history, physics, and philosophy (Asante, 1987, 1991, 2010; Karenga, 1982; Shockley & Frederick, 2010; Winters, 1994). Diop’s (1974) scholarship focused on retrieving ancient Egyptian history as a part of Black African history (p. xi). His research methods explained the role of Blacks in world history, and advocated that teaching from an

Afrocentric perspective highlights that mankind and civilization began in Africa and asserted the greatness of Africa prior to European colonization and Arab invasions (Asante, 1987, 1991, 2010; Karenga, 1982; Shockley & Frederick, 2010).

Diop's contributions to scholarship include his role in The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) sponsored conference on the peopling of Ancient Egypt, and in 1974 he was a vice-president of the UNESCO committee responsible for the General History of Africa (Chiek Anta Diop, 1974, p.ix). Diop's (1974), impressive endeavor to reconstruct African history is supported by his theory offering a basic global division of peoples into two kinds: The Southerners (or Negro-Africans), and the Aryans, a category covering all Caucasians, including Semites, Mongoloids, and American Indians (p. x). Further, Diop offered that each grouping has a cultural outlook based on climate, where the Aryans, exposed to a harsh climate, developed patriarchal systems and a propensity for war. In contrast, the Southerners developed a matriarchal system and peaceful practices (p. x). According to Wallerstein (1961), Diop theorized that:

the ancient Egyptians, who were Negroes, are the ancestors of the Southerners.

Diop argues, if the ancient Egyptians were Negroes, then European civilization is but a derivation of African Achievement but notes that this theory was not original with Diop. Other scholars, such as W. E. B. DuBois, had earlier presented the argument that the ancient Egyptians were Negroes (p.130).

As stated by Shockley (2007), Molefi Asante's concepts of "Afrocentricity" establishes him amongst Africentric educationalists. Asante (2010) argued that Afrocentricity seeks to move Africa from the periphery of the West to reclaim African cultural origins. Asante is credited with several significant academic accomplishments including the following:

1. As a distinguished scholar, he has authored more than 55 books and 300 articles in 25 different journals;
2. Asante was the first director of The Center for Afro-American Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles from 1963–1979, followed by a 30-year tenure as editor for the *Journal of Black Studies*; and
3. Currently, Dr. Asante is a professor at Temple University where he founded the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) program in African-American studies (p. ix).

Indigenous education. Scholars concerned with the marginalization of Indigenous knowledge, advance that Indigenous educational experiences are absent in academic curricula (Adams, 2012, 2014; Asante, 1987; Reagan, 2005). Specifically, Reagan (2005) classified rites of passage as Indigenous educational practices. He also notified that most books and courses on the history and philosophy of education include few references to Indigenous educational ideas and practices in Africa, the Americas, and Asia. As an adult education scholar, Reagan (2005) called for expanded considerations to educational customs, primarily related to Indigenous and non-Western education. Explicitly he suggests that, although Indigenous and non-Western education practices relish centuries of use throughout the world, past traditions and histories of Western educational customs dismiss or delegitimize their epistemological value (p. 62). Purposely, he called for expanded diversity of thinking, practices, and approaches to Western educational practices within the field of education.

These scholars postulate that the potential for valuable insights, gained from a critical examination of the uniqueness of non-Western educational traditions, lacks a voice. They direct a challenge to the Western academy to expand educational traditions, calling for the study of Indigenous knowledge construction, and alternative approaches to educational thought and

practices (Reagan, 2005). Moreover, Reagan (2005) signals that ethnocentrism, which is the tendency to view one's cultural group as superior to others, challenges one's ability to approach such an expansion of educational thought and perspectives without bias.

West African Rites of Passage as Indigenous Education and Afrocentric Pedagogy

Important to this literature review is Reagan's, (2005) recognition of rites of passage and the process of initiation as forms of Indigenous education. Equally important is the position assumed by some scholars that the primary reason for Afrocentric rites of passage is to orient the participants to concepts of African cultural identity and cultural restoration, and to facilitate overall success in life phase transitions (Brookins, 1996; Hucks, 2012, p. 187). Furthermore, Reagan (2005) aligned Indigenous education and rites of passage with culture, informing that culture contributes to the creation of knowledge. He defines culture as "that pattern of knowledge, skills, behavior, attitude, ideas, as well as, material artifacts produced by human society and transmitted from one generation to another" (p.30). Further, and of specific relevance to this chapter, is Reagan's (2005) examination of traditional African educational thoughts and practices, that include African rites and initiations, as detailed in his discussion of seven non-Western and marginalized approaches to education (p. 62). As rites of passage engage learning and knowledge acquisition through cultural restoration and transfer cultural values from one generation to the next (Reagan, 2005), understood is learning arranged through cultural practices fosters cultural identity development and learning, thereby benefiting the communities these learners represent.

Rites of passage in West Africa primarily align to specific life phases of birth, puberty, marriage, and death, and most traditional West African societies consider these phases as being natural processes for every person (Adinku, 2016; Babatunde, 1998; Crentsil, 2015; Steegstra,

2005). In addition, initiation into secret societies, priesthood, or rise to other elevated statuses such as chief, queen, or king, all require rites of passage (Abiodun, 2016; Aiyejina & Gibbons, 1999). Within the phenomenon of rites of passage, scholars also highlight the important connections assumed by family and community in one's development (Adinku, 2016; Babatunde, 1998; Crensil, 2015; Mibiti, 1974). For example, Mibiti (1974), emphasized the importance of a child's birth in African societies, and tells that the birth process begins long before the child is born. This announcement bolsters the significant roles that family and community assume in the child's social development, thereby accentuating the interdependence of individual development to family, community, and society. Rites of passage govern a cyclic pattern of development across the lifespan. From a traditional African viewpoint, rites of passage uphold communities as sacred organizations, protected and governed by the deities and ancestors. The following discussion investigates these aspects in this review of two rites of passage traditions in Ghana and a third tradition in Nigeria. In addition, literature reflects a decline across West Africa in puberty rites of passage rituals requiring female genital cutting (Babatunde, 1998; Crensil, 2015; Steegstra, 2005). Puberty and fertility rites practiced among the Ashanti and Akan people of Ghana, and the Ketu people of Nigeria, discussed next, address changes and rates in these practices, pointing first to the prevalence of this specific ritual, followed by a decline in its use.

Bragoro Rites of Passage in Ghana

According to Crensil (2015), the Bragoro rites of passage in Ghana, historically completed by girls after the onset of menstruation, is one of the few rites of passage performed solely by women, serving to prepare young girls for adulthood (Crensil, 2015). Bragoro, once performed on every girl, included the rites of separation performed in the context of Gennepe

(1960) and required measures of female genital cutting. Today, only traces of Bragoro remain and while ritual practices underwent vast changes overtime, the following discussion, offered in the context of Genep (1960), highlight Crentsil's (2015) account of Bragoro rites' rituals of separation, liminality and incorporation. According to Crentsil (2015), the puberty rites serve spiritual and material roles, in that the spiritual aspect is a time when the gods and ancestors are consulted for good health and prosperity for the initiate, her family and her community. Preferred days of the week to begin rites rituals are Monday or Tuesday, and the queen-mother announces the start of the ceremonies. Ritual bathing follows along with libations to the Supreme Being, the earth goddess, other deities, and the ancestors. Shaving the initiate's head occurs, symbolizing a ritual rebirth into a new state from girlhood to adulthood, which is publicly recognized. The initiate then completes ritual bathing at the river, and offerings to the river gods, petitioning for fertility.

Liminal activities include the sharing of secrets of womanhood, by the clan officiating the river rituals. According to Ottenberg (1989), secrets function to create social boundaries based on sex and age, "with recognized and acceptable forms of behavior within them" (p. 104). While secrets, or privileged knowledge, uphold inequality, secrecy serves as a device for communicating as well as a means for creating hierarchy between the initiated and the uninitiated (Ottenberg, 1989). In addition, some scholars consider secrecy as a potent resource linked to the making of powerful spiritual entities and religious knowledge (Murphy, 1980; Turner, 1974). This position holds relevance to this study as initiate participation requires affiliation with membership in the Ifa religious tradition. Specifically, this study identified participants involved in rites of passage initiatives sanctioned and supervised by Ifa priests. Incorporation, marked by a banquet organized by the initiate's community begins immediately

after the river ceremonies. The community banquet symbolizes reincorporating the young adult back into the community, but in an elevated social role (p. 243).

Crentsil (2015) emphasized the impacts of modernization on the fading of Bragoro. She debated modernization or a “super-culture” (Crentsil, 2015, p. 232), and makes clear that her study’s intent assumes a neutral position regarding the practice of Bragoro, while offering insights on the potential impacts of the fading of Bragoro on self-identity, ritual lineage and social relations. Modernization, or super-culture in Ghana, evidenced by increased prevalence of non-traditional religious practices, such as Christianity and Islam, Western education, and urbanization, all link to the demise of Bragoro. Specifically, slavery and colonization, identified as primary culprits, continue to contribute to the manifestation of modernization or super-culture, fueling the erosion of traditional cultural practices (Hucks, 2014; Hall, 1997; Hall, 1997). Furthermore, anthropologists, and other scholars on indigenous cultures, project that the evolving super-culture will eventually displace small and weak cultures (Devy, Davis & Chakravarty, 2013).

Crentsil (2015) told that because of the persistence of HIV/AIDS in Ghana, recent public interest resulted in calls to the government for the reinforcement and performance of Bragoro as part of HIV prevention measures. Specifically, in 2013, Ghana’s traditional rulers or chiefs, called for the reintroduction of Bragoro, as one of a myriad of strategies considered by this society to help youth abstain from pre-marital sex and multiple sex partners (Crentsil, 2013). While traditional rulers agree that a breakdown of traditional structures exists regarding sexuality in their society, resulting in increased vulnerability to HIV, public views of many Ghanaians also suggest that the loss of indigenous practices, such as Bragoro, not only threatens traditional

values, but also contributes to declining moral standards in local communities (Crenstil, 2015, p. 232).

Crenstil's (2016) assessment that a super-culture, as evidenced by control and privilege for highly developed cultures of advanced countries, oppressed less powerful countries and cultures. This oppression, coupled with the acknowledgment of culture as power, provide critical frameworks for this study. The concept of a super-culture offers a plausible explanation for the ebb and flow of the Bragoro rites of passage in Ghana. Also, the concept of a super-culture and culture's goal to maintain social order among its members, appropriately aligns with this study that addressed power dynamics that oppress and marginalize less dominant cultures that support rites of passage in the U.S.

Dipo Rites of Passage in Ghana

Similar to Bragoro rites of passage (Crenstil, 2015), the Krobo people of Ghana practice the Dipo initiation rites in support of young girls' transition into adulthood (Adinku, 2016; Steegstra, 2005). The Krobo, believed to be the largest of the seven Dangme ethnic groups of southeastern Ghana, originally migrated there from Eastern and Western Nigeria, and remain one of the few ethnic groups in the country that celebrate puberty rites (Akinku, 2016). In the past, Dipo, conducted in February, lasted from one to three years; today, Dipo coincides with Easter holidays, lasting about three to seven days (Adinku, 2016). Discussed next are scholarly accounts of Dipo rites' rituals of separation, liminality and incorporation (Adinku, 2016; Steegstra, 2005).

Following an announcement made on behalf of the Earth goddess, "Nana Kloweki", parents present their daughter to the clan priest presiding over the rites (Adinku, 2016; Steegstra, 2005). Specifically, rites can only begin on a Thursday or Sunday, days identified as sacred for the Earth goddess. Separation rituals for Dipo initiates include having most of their heads

shaved, leaving only a little hair at the middle, and then tying raffia around their neck, thereby marking their initiation status (Adinku, 2016; Steegstra, 2005). Ritual bathing follows, along with shaving the remaining hair from their head. Libation and prayers petition the gods' blessings for the girls and their families. A goat presented to the Dipo priest for slaughter, and the goat's blood, used to wash the girls' feet, symbolizes the casting away of bad omens (Adinku, 2016).

Liminality is marked by a week of confinement for the Dipo initiate, where they learn traditional practices of the Krobo women. Initiates take part in scarification of some traditional marks to the back of their hands indicating completion of the rite to adulthood, and elephant skin is tied around their heads to ensure fertility. Incorporation back into the community, marked by the initiate being escorted out of confinement richly dressed and adorned in silk cloth and beads, while the community sings and dances, serves to welcome the initiate back and celebrates her successful completion of Dipo and elevated status in the community.

Yoruba Rites of Passage

Rites of passage traditions among the Ketu offer a historical perspective of the origin of Ketu along with a detailed and modern-day account of this practice. Ancient Nigerian folklore of the Oyo Empire posits Ketu's origin as one of the 16 original kingdoms in Oyo. This Yoruba Empire, established in the fifteenth century, advanced to become one of the largest West African states, currently referred to as the Republic of Benin (Law 1977; Parrinder, 1956). The transatlantic Slave Trade, largely supported by tribal wars, connects Ketu to the African Diaspora, resulting in a number of Ketu citizens falling victim to slavery. Ketu contributed to Yorubaland becoming one of the most important slave-exporting regions in Africa during the nineteenth century, displacing enslaved Yorubas, and their culture, widely throughout the

Atlantic world (Clarke, 2004; Hucks, 2014; Law, 1977; Ojo, 2008; 2013). Perhaps the Yoruba were among the first African presence in the U.S. in association with the voyage of a Dutch ship that arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, and exchanged its cargo of 20 Africans for food (Bennett, 1984).

Babatunde's (1998) review of the female fertility rites among the Ketu of Nigeria, offered that these rites aim to:

- (1) prepare girls for marriage, purposefully marking the transition and passage from “youth asexuality to adult sexuality”;
- (2) serve as the cultural route which females navigate to access community affairs in the Ketu’s patrilineal society; and
- (3) relate to procreation, since it is marriage oriented (p.45).

However, the rationale connecting the Ketu fertility rites to procreation contradicts Genep's (1960) view that initiation rites granted social puberty by incorporating initiates into adult society and he claims: these are rites of separation from the asexual world, followed by rites of incorporation into the world of sexuality and, in all societies and all social groups, into a group confined to persons of one sex or the other (p. 67). Further, he states that he does not “see any relation between circumcision and procreation” (p. 73).

Babatunde (1998) implied that Genep’s observations do not appear to have a connection to the Ketu, offering that, first, Genep notes the wide variability in the age of the initiates, whereas the Ketu always perform circumcision about the twentieth year as an introduction to marriage and procreation. Next, acknowledging the relevance of the reduction of sexual excitability through circumcision to procreation, it is challenging to comprehend the suggested un-relatedness by Babatunde. One would have thought that since in those societies, where the aim

of marriage is procreation, not solely loving companionship, every attempt made streamlines this aim by cutting away what may distract attention from that aim. Seen in this light, circumcision becomes necessary to show that the sexual act is a means to an end. It is a means to achieve the highest goal of those societies, to bear children, and is not considered an end-in-itself (p. 45-46).

Babatunde (1998) made clear that the Ketu fertility rites do not form a single, finished sequence of events where girls divest their childhood roles at the beginning of the rites and, after a liminal period, are invested with adult status. Instead, a series of occurrences make up the Ketu fertility rites that begin with betrothal, proceeded by circumcision and marriage, and later to the birth and naming of the first child. Furthermore, while each part of this series includes rituals of separation, an unknown period of liminality, and a post-liminal period of inclusion, none of these elements alone is sufficient to mark the status of adulthood (Babatunde, 1998. p.103).

Empirical Research on Black Female Cultural Identity Development and Rites of Passage

Data-based research studies related to black female cultural identity development and rites of passage are reviewed below. This section includes an examination of studies related to black cultural identity development, rites of passage and other support programs in the transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood, black female cultural identity development, and black female rites of passage.

Methodology of the Review

A search was conducted for empirical research articles on Black/African American female cultural identity and rites of passage. While LionSearch served as the primary search tool, Google Scholar, a cross-disciplinary search engine linked to Penn State University library's subscriptions, the Electronic Human Relations Area Files (eHRAF World Cultures), Historical

Abstract, and ProQuest Digital Dissertations also supported this search. The first elements applied to the search included: African-American women, Black African/American females, African-American females, African-American girls, African girls, African women, African females, Yoruba, and Nigerian women. Second elements used included rites of passage, Black cultural identity, puberty, and coming of age. Combining some of the first elements and second elements, and applying search filters of full text, scholarly and peer-reviewed journal articles, education, and a publication time period from 2005 to 2017, multiple searches were conducted. After reviewing publication abstracts, 11 scholarly journal articles were used for this review. These 11 articles consisted of two qualitative research studies, three quantitative research studies, three mixed-method research studies, and six theoretical articles. Table 1 provides the methodology approach for these studies.

Table 1

Empirical Studies Categorized by Methodology

Methodology	References
Mixed Method	Foster, 2016 Pratt-Clark, 2013 Shaw, Conti, & Shaw, 2013
Qualitative Research	Nwoke, 2012 Piert, 2017
Quantitative Research	Belgrave, et al., 2004 Chapman-Hilliard et al., 2016 Whaley, McQueen & Oudkerk, 2017
Theoretical Research	Arnett, 2000, 2015 Guiffrida, 2003 Harris, 2016 Moors, et al., 2013 Pinckney, Outley, Blake & Kelly, 2011 Reagan, 2005

Findings of the Review

The findings of the review indicate four primary themes of findings or discussion. These are summarized in Table 2 below, and focus on: black cultural identity itself; rites of passage and other support programs; black female cultural identity; and black female rites of passage.

Table 2

Summary of Empirical Study Topics

Topics	References
Black Cultural Identity Development	Chapman-Hilliard, et al, 2016 Guiffrida, 2013 Arnett, 2015
Rites of passage and other support programs in the transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood	Harris, 2016 Moors, et al., 2013 Piert, 2017 Shaw, Conti, & Shaw, 2013 Nwoke, 2012
Black Female Rites of Passage in the U.S.	Whaley, McQueen & Oudkerk, 2017 Foster, 2016 Pratt-Clark, 2013 Reagan, 2005

Black Cultural Identity Development

Two of the pieces—one study (Chapman-Hilliard et al., 2016) and one conceptual piece (Guiffrida, 2003)—deal specifically with black cultural identity development. Prior discussions on culturally empowered learning established that the existence of culturally empowering spaces and empowering learning contexts, including African-centered pedagogy, are critical to Black learners' development and success (Chapman-Hilliard, et al., 2016; Guiffrida, 2003). African-centered rites of passage programs are one way of providing culturally empowering spaces that should contribute to cultural identity formation (Chapman-Hilliard, et al., 2016). In their quantitative study, Chapman-Hilliard, et al., (2016) assessed the impact of Culturally

Empowering Courses (CECs) and academic motivation among 218 (157 females, 61 males) Black collegians to explore how these impact students' cultural identity development and academic outcomes. CECs are defined as courses that focus primarily on experiences of people of African descent, and include African and African Diaspora history courses and Black Studies courses (Chapman-Hilliard, et al, 2016). In their 2016 study, participants ranged in ages from 15–45, and 87% were 18–22 years old. The main findings of the study indicate, when examining cultural identity, students exposed to CECs showed higher cultural identity scores, (e.g., race centrality and ethnic identity) compared to non-CEC students (Chapman-Hilliard, et al, 2016). Further, CEC involvement led to more self-determined motivation and higher-earned grade point averages compared to students who were not involved in CEC (Chapman-Hilliard, et al, 2016).

The Chapman-Hilliard, et al, study established that participation in African-centered coursework contributes to positive cultural identity development for students. Further, this study connects to Arnett's (2000, 2015) emerging adult development theory as a significant number of those participating in the study met age criteria of emerging adults (age 18 to 25). This age of development is marked by adolescents becoming more independent and willing to explore various life possibilities but is also found to be a time where individuals struggle with "identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and feeling in-between" (Arnett, 2015, p, 69). The acknowledgment of emerging adulthood as a separate and recognized life phase further supports the participation of rites of passage during this time of life given that rites of passage focus on marking transitions from one life phase onto another, as explained in the next section.

Rites of Passage and Other Support Programs

A second set of studies reviewed focus on the transition from one life phase to the next, with a focus on the transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood; two of the studies were

conducted in the U.S. (Piert, 2007; Shaw, Conti, & Shaw, 2013), while one is based in Nigeria (Nwoke, 2012).

US-based studies. One qualitative study (Piert, 2007), focused specifically on a rites of passage program, and one mixed methods study (Shaw, Conti, & Shaw, 2013) examined an urban transition program targeted at at-risk youth. The studies both support the use of rites of passage or other support programs as positive factors in achieving a successful transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Shaw, Conti and Shaw's (2013) study examined at-risk youth as they transitioned from adolescence to adulthood (p. 34) while participating in a high school program designed to facilitate a smooth transition. The researchers identified the following at-risk factors: race, chemical dependence, teenage pregnancy, poverty, and detachment from school and society. Their mixed-methods research study involved 161 youth, 89 males and 72 females, ranging from 11 to 23 years old, where 69.2% were African American, who participated in the urban life skills program "A Pocket Full of Hope". The program was designed in the framework of a traditional rites of passage program to empower students by creating learner-centered environments that will allow them to develop their full potential in adulthood (Shaw, Conti and Shaw, 2013). The program applied adult learning concepts including "self-directed learning, perspective transformation, real-life learning, learning-how-to-learn, and empowerment" (p.36). Across all populations, the self-reflection and adult-learning concepts supported positive identity development and translated into higher graduation rates. The results of the Shaw, Conti and Shaw (2013) study support the idea that adolescents benefit from formal programs designed to facilitate the transition from one life phase (adolescence) to another (adulthood).

Piert's (2007) qualitative study examined how Black young people perceived their rites experience in a high school rites of passage program, and points to the impact of mother-daughter learning, African-centered learning, and counters to racism. Rites of passage and African-centered frameworks informed the interpretation and analysis of the study data. Piert's (2007) study involved seven former high school students from the Marcus Garvey Preparatory Academy (MGPA), a K-12 charter school in Westville, Michigan, which had been through the rites of passage program. These students participated in in-depth interviews, lasting 60 to 90 minutes, focusing on their experiences at this African-centered school, and their rites of passage program in particular. The findings indicated the rites of passage experience emerged as a significant component of the educational experience, and narratives relayed the stories of the participants. Study participants expressed confidence in the lessons from their rites of passage in supporting their continued transition into adulthood.

Mother-daughter learning emerged as a prominent theme in Piert's (2007) study, which connects to Harris's (2016) discussion. Harris (2016) also discussed learning among Black mothers and their daughters, stating that raising a Black daughter sensitizes Black mothers to issues related to Black womanhood. The obvious issue relates to "being Black" and the potential negative impact of the social representations of Black women in larger society, which must be addressed Black mother-to-daughter" (Harris, 2016, p. 37). As race remains a primary factor impacting identity development, Black mother-to-daughter learning discussed by Harris (2016) offers opportunities to counter racism and influence positive identity development. Similarly, participants in the Piert (2007) study indicated the female initiate's mother serves as the primary task-master in the first rite of passage in recognition of the important role that Mother-daughter learning plays in identity development, particularly for Black females.

In addition, taking into account the rites of passage framework in Piert's (2007) study, the phases of separation, liminality, and incorporation varied between male and female participants. In the separation phase, for example, males experienced separation through a wilderness field trip. During these trips, lasting one week, young men participated in rigorous activities involving strength training, relationship building, bonding, expectations of manhood, sexuality education, and fatherhood (Piert, 2007, p. 177). Female students also completed a week-long program, but experienced symbolic seclusion, marking separation, by restricting verbal communication with their fathers and brothers in the home. Additional time in the presence of their mothers and other female family-elders replaced the restriction on male-female communication.

Scholars and practitioners agree that initiates and the communities in which they live require more uniformity in rites ceremonies and methodical programs (Moors, et al., 2013). The Piert (2007) and Shaw, Conti and Shaw (2013) studies provided evidence that rites of passage programs and similar support programs positively impact cultural identity development and long term success for participants. In order for rites and their associated rituals to continue to uphold the intended purpose of validating our cultural heritage and strengthening Black communities, uniformity in, and increased access to, rites of passage is critical (Moors, et al., 2013).

Nigerian study. In her qualitative study, Nwoke (2012) studied the impact of rites of passage on cultural identity and personality development among Ogoni adolescents in Nigeria. She postulates that cultural identity occupies a significant stance for the Ogonis, primarily because their ethnicity links to migration pattern, strongly influenced by slave trades to the Niger Delta region of Nigeria from 1400 to 1800. After the British's abolishment of slavery, the resulting population in the Niger Delta region represented a medley of ethnic groups. Therefore, as language determines ethnicity, identity varies significantly in Nigeria, and the quest for

identity is a primary cultural function. Her study considered Schrest and Wallace's (1967) proclamation that an individual's personality is the end product of an interaction between biological and experiential factors, and that "experiential factors are culturally determined" (p.100). This proclamation, understood to associate experience and learning, holds relevance to this study on cultural identity development and learning value of experience. The Ogoni's rites of passage practice, or the "ceremony of coming of age," must be completed by every male and female before he/she can speak at public meetings and other village events (Nwoke, 2012, p. 103). The ceremony for females, referred to as "koo", and "yaa" for males (Nwoke, 2012, p.103), occurs from the age of 10 to 25 years. Nwoke (2012) reports that separation and liminality activities occur over a three-month period, where initiates are confined to "fattening rooms", (p.103), to complete several traditional rituals. Nwoke (2012) detailed how rites of passage phases manifest, explaining that among the Ogonis, a matrilineal society, a strong affinity exists toward mothers, and during confinement and liminality, this "cultural value", exhibits as primary.

In addition, the initiates receive instruction on personal and social relationships, food production and preparation, marriage, clothing assembly and personal adornment, marketing and trading skills, crafts, child-bearing, and childcare (Nwoke, 2012, p.103). A public ritual requires that the initiates perform in the city or village square, marking the initiates' incorporation back into society as adults. Nwoke's (2012), qualitative study focused exclusively on the impact of cultural values systems on personality development of Ogoni adolescents, and explored ethnic identity formation, as a result of completing the coming of age or rites of passage rituals among 16 Ogoni adolescents (8 males and 8 females). These youth were arranged by these age brackets: Junior adolescents age 13-15 years (3 males and 3 females with M = 14 years); Senior

adolescents age 16-18 years (3 males and 3 females, M= 17 years); and Late adolescents age 20 – 35 years (2 males and 2 females, M= 22.5 years).

Study participants completed semi-structured interviews, exploring initiation and rites of passage into manhood and womanhood. Arranged around the emerging themes, narratives from female study participants relay these individual perceptions about their rites of passage experiences and its influence on their identity. The themes focused on their recognition of the rich cultural value system of the Ogoni; the effects of the rites of passage, which is compulsory for every person, on personality development; and the significance of the cultural value and educational development in Ogoniland. Consensus exists among respondents that the cultural value system of “koo” and “yaa” impacts educational development in Ogoniland. Further, the study found that the rites of passage impacted the personality development of the “yaa” and “koo” members. Understood is the profound way in which the “koo” and “yaa” rites of passage rituals are embedded within the Ogoni society. Nwoke (2012) promoted this study as the first qualitative study of its kind to “shed light on the impact of the cultural value system on personality development of Ogoni adolescents (p. 110). She added that the sample of study participants, derived from a snowballing sampling technique, came from the same general locality. Therefore, these findings may be symptomatic to this particular locality.

Black/African American Female Rites of Passage in the US

The search for empirical studies on rites of passage for females in the U.S. produced very few results, as much of the empirical literature focuses on males. However, four current studies that rely on the rites of passage framework to develop interventions and school and community-based programs to address development needs of Black/African American youth are reviewed below (Belgrave, et al, 2004; Foster, 2016; Pratt-Clark, 2013, Whaley, McQueen & Oudkerk,

2017). The following review reflects the understanding that these four empirical studies examine concepts of cultural identity and rites of passage (Pratt-Clark, 2013) and postulate advantages of incorporating culturally sensitive education to influence positive development for Black/African adolescents (Belgrave et al., 2004; Foster, 2016, Whaley, McQueen & Oudkerk, 2017).

Foster's (2016) study, outlined select research used to identify and address the lack of cultural sensitivity in sexuality education, along with other social factors, such as race, socio-economic status, and gender, resulting in the disproportional impact of HIV on Black/African adolescents. This research supported the development of an intervention targeting HIV education. In addition, Foster (2016) told that the intervention's development hinged on the following: (1) Black/African American urban youth share a "cultural construction" embedded in Afrocentricity (p. 87); and (2) Afrocentric rites of passage have been a long-standing tradition with Black culture where often inferences of adolescent sexuality are "taboo" (p. 32). Connecting these two observations that affirm the importance of cultural knowledge associated with African-centered education, Foster (2016) relied on an Afrocentric rites of passage framework and augmented sexuality education to create Bititi's Harvest®, described as a "contemporized Rite of Passage (cROP) for urban-based, Black/African American, adolescent females 13-21 years in a school setting (p. 36).

While this discussion does not include empirical data on a rites of passage program, provided is the empirical process and outcome completed by Foster (2016) to affirm the need for Bititi's Harvest®. Community-based participatory research and focus group methodology with 17 Black/African American middle and high school students explored the perceived need and interest in the co-creation of Bititi's Harvest. Primarily, data collected through a knowledge survey, focus group interviews, and exit journal packets informed this study. The knowledge

survey examined participants' knowledge of facts about HIV, AIDS, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Study participants ranged in ages between 13 to 20 years. Eleven of the study participants identified as Black/African American, two identified as heterosexual and Hispanic ethnicity, one identified as multi-racial (Black/African American and White), two identified as bisexual and Black/African American ethnicity; and one identified as Queer and Black/African-American. Scores of accuracy with identifying factual material on the survey ranged from 62 to 100 percent (p. 109-127).

Foster's (2016) study upheld the adaptation of the African-centered rites of passage framework to develop various multi-disciplinary approaches to rites of passage (Moors, et al., 2013; Piert, 2007; Pratt-Clark, 2013) that show potential for supporting positive development of African-American girls and women (Pratt-Clark, 2013; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). Informed by an Afrocentric rites of passage framework, public health, and educational leadership, Bititi's Harvest®, provides viable strategies and interventions aimed at delivering culturally relevant sexuality instruction. This initiative, described as a gender and culturally specific intervention, relies on a rites of passage framework to address the lack of cultural sensitivity in sexuality education. Quantitative methods informed of participants' HIV knowledge and HIV risk, and emergent themes developed from focus group methodology included data addressing adequacies of sexuality education, inclusivity, and empowerment.

Whaley, McQueen and Oudkerk's (2017) quantitative study replicated a study of Africentric socialization of Black males with girls of African descent from the same community. The study involved 10 girls with 11 boys from the same neighborhood serving as a comparison group for gender effects (girls ages, $M = 12.40$, $SD = 1.69$ and boys $M = 12.08$, $SD 1.48$), and tested outcomes from a 15-week Imani Rites of Passage curriculum, adapted for girls, that

covered topics on cultural knowledge/identity development, communal relations building, self-control/social skills, and academic excellence. Study participants completed scholarly-reviewed assessments on racial socialization, Black identity, self-esteem, self-perception/academic competence, and violent behavior index. Statistical analysis of the data revealed that race-related experiences change race-related attitudes, impacting ethnic-racial identity. For these girls, a direct path emerged from Africentric socialization to ethnic-racial identity; these findings are consistent with the cognitive-cultural model of identity, or defining one-self by one's actions.

Belgrave et al., (2004) conducted a quantitative study to examine the effectiveness of a cultural intervention, the Sisters of Nia, a program for girls in early adolescence, designed to increase cultural values and beliefs. This program, guided by a curriculum, provided small-group intervention focused on the cultures of being female and of African descent, covering topics including: introduction to relationships, Africa and African culture, critical thinking, leadership, creativity, personal healing, education awareness, and African American women in leadership. Each session began with a unity circle, symbolizing connectedness, and the girls were instructed on pouring of libation and calling out names of our Ancestors. Program staff were referred to as "mzees", a Kiswahili term for respected elder. Fifty-nine Black/African American girls, ranging in ages 11 to 13, participated in a 15-session cultural program or in an activity comparison group, completing scholarly-reviewed scales to assess global African American identity, aggression, gender roles, and violence. Girls in the comparison group attended tutoring once a week for 30 weeks. Baseline and assessment data were collected via paper-pencil questionnaires, administered by Sisters of Nia program staff. Study findings show favorable increases in cultural variables, however, only two of the study's findings approached significance. This was attributed

to the small sample size, and the fact that the study sample only included one ethnic group, indicating that the study findings could not be generalized.

Summary, Conclusions and Gaps in the Literature

This literature review centered on learning and cultural identity development among adult Black/African American females involved in African-centered rites of passage in the U.S. While abundant literature exists on experiential learning, adult development, and rites of passage, there are notable gaps in the literature pointing to: (1) disproportionate amounts of literature on rites of passage directed at females, as compared to males; (2) disproportionate amounts of literature and studies directed at “emerging adults” (Arnett, 2000, 2015), as compared to studies involving adolescents; (3) a lack of studies focused on African-centered rites of passage curricula; (4) a lack of studies on African-centered rites of passage models that rely on the Ifa tradition of spirituality/religion; and (5) a lack of studies that examine adult females’ discussions on the perceived meanings and influences on cultural identity and learning gained from participation in various cultural experiences during their rite’s phases of separation, liminality, and incorporation.

There is a body of literature within adult education indicating research as a social construction and a cultural effort, examining educational research and leadership and the power of education in adult development (Dillard, 2000; Johnson -Bailey, 2000; Tisdell, 2003; 2006). Although this literature does not specifically address cultural identity development among adult Black/African American females, or rites of passage, it does address how education affects Black women’s development (Johnson-Bailey, 2000), and/or the associations of spirituality, religion, cultural identity, educational research and leadership, and emancipatory education, in adult development. Tisdell’s (2003), qualitative study examined the spiritual experiences of 31

multicultural, multiracial, and multiethnic educators involved in higher education, to examine how they relate their spiritual lives to inform their work. Participants of this study identified as educators that teach for social change, working in challenging systems of oppression, based on race, culture, gender, and sexual orientation in higher education settings or community-based settings. Through nuanced descriptions of religion and spirituality, Tisdell (2003, 2006) validated spirituality as integral to meaning-making and understanding the world, and offered several classroom techniques that foster the important aspects of spirituality that include authenticity, respect, and being present. While her study includes black women, it is not specific to black women.

Dillard's (2000) qualitative study used interviews to examine the life-stories of three Black female researchers to explore how they made meaning of their experiences in educational leadership and research. Recognizing that old and existing epistemologies require deconstruction, as these minimize or neglect the cultural experiences of Black/African American women, and varying identities also influenced by oppression, race, class and gender offered an "endarkened epistemology" that seeks to unmask traditional languages and cultural constructions that continue to uphold intellectual colonization of Black/African Americans (Dillard, 2000, p. 662). An "endarkened epistemology" intentionally speaks to experiences of Black/African American women, centering attention on our resistant nature and identities influenced by oppressions. Dillard (2000) proposed that an "endarkened epistemology" also stimulates ways by which Black/African American women in educational leadership and research are perceived and understood in academia, and encourages education as a vehicle of social change.

This body of literature strongly suggests how integrating spirituality in teaching settings and deconstructing existing epistemologies, especially for Black/African American women,

holds promise as a conduit toward emancipatory education. Emancipatory education and emancipatory pedagogy, innovative approaches to teaching and learning and theoretically represented in the works of Paulo Freire (1970/2000), occupies a critical position in higher education and adult education, as emancipatory education challenges power relations, managed by socio-cultural factors, such as race, class, and gender that also mark one's cultural identity (Arnett, 2007; Dillard, 2000; Tisdell, 2003, 2006). These scholarly suggestions and actions reside at the core of adult education, adding to our understanding of the dimensions of culture and appreciation of diversity, all critical for teaching for positive social change.

In spite of the literature that does exist, there is a gap in the literature on how rites of passage affect the cultural identity development of black female emerging adults in the U.S. This dissertation study contributes to that end. Therefore, this study used a qualitative approach to explore the impact of African-centered rites of passage and their perceived influence on cultural identity development and learning among Black/African American adult females in the U.S.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study examined how Black/African American emerging adult women, involved in rites of passage, perceived their experiences of the three phases of rites of passage; separation, liminality, and incorporation. This study investigated learning and meaning-making at the intersection of cultural identity development and rites of passage. As such, the research questions that guided the study are: (1) What are females' experiences with these culturally-specific rites of passage?; and (2) What roles do these rites of passage assume in forging positive cultural identity development and learning?

This chapter begins with a brief description of qualitative research. Next, a discussion regarding my own relationship to the research project as the researcher and the main instrument of data collection anchors the relevance of my experiences to this study. Finally, additional components of this chapter also discuss descriptions of this study, the participant selection process, data collection methods, data analysis, and measures taken to ensure the reliability of the data.

Qualitative Research Paradigm

Qualitative research methods generate rich, detailed data from a small participant population, and are often used within the field of adult education to examine various aspects of adult teaching and learning, including perceptions of how individuals construct knowledge and make meaning of their experiences (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research is a form of inquiry examining information conveyed through language and behavior in natural settings and is used to capture meaningful data not expressed in quantitative data about beliefs, values, feelings, and motivations that underlie behaviors (Creswell, 2014). Participants in

qualitative research studies are usually chosen according to purposeful criteria, and relevant documents and artifacts are chosen that can provide more insight related to the issue under examination. (Creswell, 2014).

There are many theoretical frameworks that are used in qualitative research. But most broadly come from a constructivist paradigm that particularly focuses on how participants construct or make meaning. In the late 1980's, qualitative research transformed to expand its range of investigation to include the use of various theoretical lenses, such as critical theory and feminist perspectives (Creswell, 2014) that also focus on how participants construct meaning but are more specific to an examination of power relations around gender, race, or social class . In qualitative research, the theoretical lenses broadly define behaviors and attitudes, outline the types of questions posed, and inform how data are collected and analyzed (Creswell, 2014, p. 64). Theoretical lenses, such as critical race theory and critical race feminism, as detailed in chapter two, direct concerns to inspiring humans to rise above power constraints linked to race, class, and gender (Closson, 2010). These theoretical lenses exist among the theories available to qualitative research (Creswell, 2014), and back this research on important issues such as marginalization, race, and gender. This qualitative study directs attention to inspiring humans to rise above power constraints linked to race, class, and gender (Closson, 2010), and places Black/African American women at the center rather than the margin of this discussion (Wing, 2003; Rodriguez, 2006). As mentioned, critical race theory (CRT) and critical race feminism (CRF), applied to qualitative research, serve as viable theoretical lenses to support the analysis of the experiences of these young women who participated in this study. This study focused on ways in which Black adult women perceive their rites of passage experiences as counters to

power constructs related to concepts of race, class, gender, oppression, and marginalization, to influence their cultural identity and development.

This study of Black/African American adult women involved in rites of passage, and identity development and learning, necessitated a qualitative educational research design, because it focused on how participants make meaning of their experiences in the rites of passage experience which functions as a form of education. As suggested by Merriam (2009), qualitative educational research focuses on examining how participants make meaning of experiences, how these experiences impact their development and learning, and to improve educational practice. Further, qualitative research design is particularly well suited to obtaining an in-depth understanding of practical educational processes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Assumptions of qualitative research, detailed in the following section also address its major tenets and their significance to this study.

Assumptions of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is complex, and surrounded by an interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Creswell, 2014). Further, the terms qualitative research and qualitative inquiry are used interchangeably, and research methodologies of qualitative research are assorted, though to one extent or another the data collection methods used are interviews, observations, and analyses of documents or artifacts. (Creswell, 2014; Kim, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Creswell (2014) stated that qualitative research and researchers: (1) lean toward collecting data in a natural setting defined as a place where study participants experience the issue under study; (2) gather multiple sources of data, such as interviews, observations, and documents; (3) build patterns and themes through data analysis; (4) keep the focus on meaning that the participants hold about the issue under study throughout the research

process; (5) use a loosely designed inquiry plan to uncover emerging themes essential to qualitative research; and (6) collect multiple forms of data themselves and they reflect on how their experiences and role in the study may influence interpretations of the data (pp. 185 -186). In addition, qualitative research is focused on examining the particular in depth. Hence, sample sizes tend to be quite small compared to quantitative research, and participants are chosen according to purposeful criteria.

Given that qualitative research seeks to examine how participants make meaning; it is not meant to but rather to gather deep data from multiple sources so that practitioners and readers can determine its applicability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Further, qualitative research is a form of inquiry examining information conveyed through language and behavior in natural settings and is used to capture meaningful data about beliefs, values, feelings, and motivations that underlie behaviors (Creswell, 2014).

Varied Types of Qualitative Research

There are many different types of qualitative research approaches. Some of these include: narrative research; ethnography; phenomenology; grounded theory; narrative inquiry; case studies; and basic interpretive research. While there are other types of qualitative studies, these are the most common (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2016). Ethnography is one qualitative approach that focuses on culture, a primary aspect of this study. Creswell (2014) stated that ethnography is appropriate when research needs include “describing how a cultural group works and exploring beliefs, language, behaviors, and issues faced by the group, such as power, resistance, and dominance” (p. 94). Wolcott (2008) aligned ethnography with culture concurring that culture, which “refers to the various ways different groups go about their lives and to the belief systems associated with that behavior,” is the central defining characteristic of

an ethnography (p. 22). However, a hallmark of ethnography is long-term observation and requires a long-term commitment by a researcher. The exact time frame for ethnographic studies can vary from several weeks to a year or more and was not advised or conducive to this study, specifically because long-term observation was not completed. Therefore, while this research study was informed by ethnography in the sense that it focused on a particular culture, it did not make use of long-term observation, to examine perceptions of cultural identity and meaning-making among Black/African American women involved in rites of passage. Rather it focused on the perceptions of the participants about their experiences and meaning making process of their rites of passage experience. Hence this study is more of an interpretive qualitative study, to some extent informed by ethnography because of the focus on stories of an experience that foregrounds culture.

An Interpretive Study and Critical Research

Keeping in mind the previous references to the different types of qualitative research, this study stands at the juncture of an interpretive study (Merriam, 2002) and a critical research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam (2002), an interpretive qualitative research is “interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon; this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive” (p.6). Also, this genre of research centers on understanding how people interpret their experiences, what meaning they attribute to their experiences, and how they construct their worldview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Given that this study pursued understanding of how a marginalized group experienced and made meaning of the cultural practices of rites of passage, also considered marginalized, it is an interpretive study also informed by a critical lens through the theoretical frameworks that underpin the study.

This qualitative study relied on two critical theoretical frameworks, Rites of Passage and Critical Race Feminism (CRF), specifically Black feminism. As such, this study's research and data analysis processes, were examined through a critical lens. Critical qualitative research aims to uncover the "social, cultural, and psychological assumptions that structure and limit our ways of thinking and being in the world" (Merriam, 2002, p. 8). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained:

critical research has become a broad term that covers a number of orientations to research, all of which seek to not just understand what is going on, but also to critique the way things are in the hopes of bringing about a more just society. Questions are asked about who has power, how it's negotiated, what structures in society reinforce the current distribution of power, and so on. Critical perspectives generally assume that people unconsciously accept things the way they are and in doing so reinforce the status quo ... Critical research seeks to make these dynamics visible so that people can challenge power relations (p. 60-61).

Critical analysis, as offered by Merriam (2002), "seeks to free ourselves from these constraints, to become empowered to change our social context and ourselves" (p. 9). Therefore, this study, informed by critical frameworks and the researcher, as an instrument of data collection, pursued understanding of how participants perceived their rites of passage experiences as counters against powerful and destructive social issues related to race and gender.

The qualitative researcher manages a critical role in qualitative research; therefore, the following discussion addresses my background as the researcher and the process used to identify personal values and biases that influence interpretations of research data and a study's outcomes. Qualitative researchers often have continued intensive involvement with study participants.

Scholars agree that this requirement introduces a range of strategic, ethical, and personal issues into the qualitative research process (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, qualitative researchers are required to identify their biases, values, and backgrounds, such as gender, history, and culture, that shape their interpretations formed during the study. This researcher identifies as a Black/African American adult female, and as an African-centered rites of passage participant and facilitator.

Background of Researcher

My decision to study adult Black/African American females involved in rites of passage, as supervised by Orisa Priests, stems from varying elements of personal involvement with the Orisa tradition. As mentioned in chapter one, my personal involvement and learning about the Orisa tradition began in 1993. In 1996, my academic pursuits, professional experience and personal involvement merged, centered around a focus on African-centered rites of passage practices in America. Since 1993, my personal involvement with the Orisa tradition includes the successful completion of several rituals and their ongoing practice, all understood as prerequisites to Priesthood, while garnering experience as a rites of passage participant and facilitator.

My ethnic/racial identity and rites of passage experiences presented positive influences on this study's line of questioning and comprehension and understanding of answers. While some may perceive my knowledge as biased, the subjectivity of researchers has both pluses and minuses in a research project (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). On the plus side, my involvement in the Orisa tradition provides background knowledge into the meaning of artifacts and cultural objects study participants shared; it also aided in the comprehension of any symbolic references to rites of passage experiences. On the minus side, I needed to take steps to guard against my

own biases including my belief that the rites are extremely important to participants' development.

Given the nature of qualitative data, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the person doing the analysis to separate him or herself completely from the data. Several strategies for increasing credibility and dependability of findings (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell 2016) were implemented for this study served to safeguard against researcher bias, and to facilitate objectivity with qualitative data analysis. These strategies included: (1) the engagement of multiple people and tools to code the data (including consultation with my doctoral advisor and committee), to unveil and confirm consistencies between my interpretation and that of others; (2) conducting member checks by providing participants the opportunity to review study results to ensure that analysis accurately reflected their beliefs; and (3) the use of triangulation or verification of data with other data sources, such as observations and field notes, as well as documents and artifacts. As noted, to increase credibility and dependability, and to reduce researcher bias, I worked closely with my Dissertation Chair and a colleague to review the progress of my work at various stages during the study. An outsider, or someone who is not as familiar with the study, helps to review a report objectively and identify signs of bias that may have otherwise been overlooked. Prior to the collection of data, a colleague reviewed the methods section of the research study to look for questions or approaches that may have led to biased data.

In addition, member checking was conducted during the interview process, and at the conclusion of the study. Member checking serves to build a positive working relationship with study participants. During the interviews, I restated or summarized information gathered and then questioned the study participant to determine accuracy. This process ensured that the story

shared was accurately told through the voice of the participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Post-study member checks allowed participants to critically analyze the findings and provide comment. The participants had the opportunity to either affirm that the summaries accurately reflected their views, feelings, and experiences, or dispute the accuracy of the summaries. If the participants affirm the accuracy and completeness, the study has credibility, and these member checks aim to decrease the incidence of incorrect data and the incorrect interpretation of data. Moreover, the overall goal of the member check process is to provide findings that are authentic and reliable (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2016).

Participant Selection

Qualitative research generally makes use of a purposeful selection of participants for the study (Creswell, 2014). While the qualitative researcher focuses on the lived experiences of those in a purposeful sample, primary interest also focuses on the study participants' knowledge and perceptions about the phenomena under study (Patton, 2016)—in this case their experiences of Rites of Passage and their perceptions of its effects on cultural identity development. Purposefully selected study participants possess significant knowledge of the subject matter being examined (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2016). Hence, purposeful sampling provides the researcher unqualified opportunities to collect research data that answers the research questions, which in-turn, potentially contributes to learning by others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, a detailed discussion of my approach to purposeful sampling follows.

Interview Participant Criteria

The following criteria guided inclusion for the study participant. First, study participants must have completed rites of passage in America, known to be supervised by a Yoruba Priestess. Second, study participants were required to identify as African, Black/African-American, or

Yoruba. Third, because this study examines learning and development among emerging adults, study participants were required to be between the ages of 18 and 25. Considering that rites of passage framework informs this study, and that rites of passage mark varying stages of human development, study participants were not limited to which rites of passage experiences they relied on for our discussion and interview. Also, because the participant criteria set specifications on how their rites of passage were supervised, and also on age and race, no study participant was excluded due to geographical location.

Participant selection relied on several different outreach strategies. First, personal phone calls to select Yoruba Priestesses introduced this study, and requested their assistance with identifying potential study participants. An electronic letter followed each phone call, reiterating the focus of this research and the selection criteria for study participants (see Priestess Letter – Appendix C). Several Priestesses informed that they did not personally provide rites of passage training, and referred me to an Egbe Society based in a southern state.

This led to the next outreach strategy that relied on social media, the platform used to connect to two Priestess associated with the Egbe. One Priestess informed that she was not aware of potential study participants, but the other instructed me to draft a post summarizing the study, and requesting for study participants. She agreed to share the post on her social media and “tag” potential study participants. Her message accompanying the post emphasized the importance of their participation in this research project. Subsequently, social media “tagging” produced names of 19 individuals that were sent a “friend request”, the next step required in order to establish communication with these potential study participants. Through social media, 15 individuals shared geographical locations and mobile phone numbers, allowing the researcher to follow up via phone calls and text messages to discuss the study and arrange for interviews.

Participant referrals from a Priestess affiliated with an Egbe, based in a familiar location for my Orisa observances and celebrations, proved most productive. Surely, this method of selection could lead to a bias in the study, because my association and practice of the Orisa tradition could deem me as an “insider” in the realm of African cultural practices. However, this positionality assisted my credibility with the participants.

The described outreach strategies produced 19 referrals for this study. However, after several attempts to contact these young women, via social media and by phone, 10 agreed to participate in the study, resulting in eight in-person interviews, conducted in coffee shops, parks, restaurants, a private home, and two interviews by phone. Collectively, these interviews began in March 2019 and concluded in September 2019, allowing time in between for transcription, coding, and analysis. Table 3.1, provided on the following page, displays select information about this study’s participants. In protecting participants’ identity, Table 3.1 uses a pseudonym for their first name. At the time of the interviews, participants reported age ranges from 17 to 25, and indicated age ranges from 11 to 19 years as the ages at which they completed puberty rites of passage. Eight participants informed me of their Priestess status and the remaining two reported their guiding Orisa to which they pay homage. Also, participants reported their racial and ethnic identities as African, Black, Black / African American or Yoruba.

Table 3.1 Interview Participants

Name	Racial/Ethnic Identity	Occupation	Rites Age	Interview Age
Okan	African American	High School Student	12	17
Meji	African	Graduate Student	13	25
Meta	Yoruba	Undergraduate Student	11	20
Merin	Black	Undergraduate Student	14	22
Marun	Black	Undergraduate Student	12	24
Mefa	Yoruba	Sales Consultant	12	25
Meje	Yoruba	Undergraduate Student	15	20
Mejo	Black	Cosmetologist	13	25
Mesan	Yoruba	Undergraduate Student	11	19
Mewàá	African	Graduate Student	20	23

Conceptually, data saturation points to the desired end point of data collection, while operationally, the decision to stop interviewing was determined by several factors. According to Mason (2010), factors deemed relevant to this study, influencing data saturation and interview protocols included: (1) the more unstructured and variable the content, the more interviews are required, and this study relied on semi-structured interviews; (2) diversity among the interview group increases the number of required interviews, and this study used a homogenous group of emerging adult women, ages 18 to 25, who had experienced rites of passage; and (3) participant selection protocols met all requirements of purposeful sampling. More important, Guest et al. (2006) found that 12 interviews of a homogenous group are all that is needed to reach saturation. While this study's recruitment strategies yielded 19 unvarying potential study participants, 10 participants completed interviews. Keeping in mind that the goal of this study is to examine the

perceptions of rites of passage experiences among adult Black/African American adult females, the following selection criteria served as a guide to select these participants for this study:

1. Individuals identified as Black/African American.
2. Individuals reported ages between 18 and 25.
3. Individuals reported completion of an African-centered rites of passage.
4. Individuals reported their rites of passage were supervised by a Priestess of the Orisa tradition.

Primary factors influencing the development of this study's criteria stemmed from gaps in the literature on: (1) rites of passage experiences for "emerging" adult Black/African American females, those ages 18 to 25 years of age, and (2) perceptions of Orisa informed rites of passages' influences on cultural identity and development. Considering my professional relationships maintained with members of the Ifa/Orisa Priesthood, priestesses known to offer rites of passage programs were contacted and asked for contact information of those individuals meeting the aforementioned criteria.

Data Collection Methods

Typically interviews, observations, and analysis of documents and artifacts serve as data collection methods in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2016). This study satisfied and followed the requirements and protocols for research defined by Pennsylvania State University and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to the initiation of data collection. As mentioned previously, this study researched cultural identity development among a marginalized group, and made use of interviews as the primary means of data collection. Specific questions, framed by rites of passage and Black feminism, informed by critical race feminist frameworks, investigated these participants' rites of passage experiences. This data, solicited from

Black/African American women, examined their perceptions of how their involvement in African-centered rites of passage influenced their cultural identity development and learning.

In addition to collecting data through interviews, observations and artifacts shared during the interview process also provided valuable data. Exhibit 1 presents field notes written after the researcher interviewed three participants in a private home. Artifacts shared by several participants included an Egbe Rites of Passage handbook, Ilekes, and photographs of body scarification markings, a brass bell, and hand-dyed fabric. These shared artifacts enhanced the richness of this study's data. Explicitly, these artifacts also aided the researcher with understanding how these participants made meaning of a specific rites experience attached to these artifacts, as discussed during their interview. Moreover, these artifacts and accompanying dialogue add dimension to the data analysis process, helping to better investigate how these participants made meaning of their rites of passage experiences, and their perceptions on how these experiences influenced their cultural identity and development.

Interviews

This study used semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. Interviews, often described as the most challenging and rewarding form of data collection, require a personal sensitivity and adaptability to the research process, where face-to-face conversations capture real-life experiences and perceptions of the participants (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2016; Rogers, 2007).

In making use of interviews as the primary data collection method, this study required the development and use of an interview guide (Appendix A). The semi-structured format allowed for the use of the same general questions, but asked in a way that the conversations unfolded naturally (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The semi-structured interviews for this

study consisted of questions that focused on gathering descriptions and perceptions related to rites of passage experiences and the meaning participants made from these experiences. Well suited for qualitative research, the semi-structured interview guide approach allows for a natural flow of a story, and intends to ensure the same general area of information are collected from each interviewee, while the open-ended interview helps guard against the loss of important information (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2016).

Each interview was audio-recorded. The interviews were conducted in spaces chosen by the participant, allowing for the participants' enhanced feelings of safety and comfort, and fostering an environment conducive for them to open up and share their stories at a natural and comfortable pace (Creswell, 2014). This accommodation required travel to three different states to conduct eight face-to-face interviews, and two interviews were completed over the phone. These interviews explored the experiences of each phase of rites of passage (separation, liminality, and incorporation) and the roles these experiences played in forging positive cultural identity and development. The following are the interview questions for this study:

1. What is your general experience of rites of passage, including what rites you have completed, and how old were you when you completed your rites of passage?
2. Why did you complete these rites of passage?
3. Describe your interactions with other initiates you consider significant to your rites' completion?
4. What is your understanding of the purposes of each rite phase (separation, liminality, and incorporation)?

5. Considering that separation is marked or symbolized in some way, describe how this rite phase manifested for you, and what meaning did it have for you in relation to your identity?
6. How long was your liminal phase?
7. In what activities did you participate during liminality, and which were the most significant and why? Did your facilitator refer to a curriculum?
8. What did liminality mean to you in relation to your identity?
9. How did you experience incorporation? What activities of incorporation were most memorable and why?
10. What did the incorporation phase mean to you in relation to your identity?
11. Can you describe any specific spiritual experiences you perceive as significant outcomes directly linked to your rites of passage?
12. How did your rites of passage influence your interactions with the Orisa tradition?
13. Is there any additional detail about your rites experience you care to share?

Ideally second interviews provided participants and the researcher opportunities for follow up to questions, considering Patton's (2016) assertion that the participants' initial responses generated in the moment may differ after time has elapsed. However, considering the geographical locations of participants for this study, resourcing of the study proved infeasible and set limitations to the ability to conduct second interviews (Patton, 2016). Instead, study participants were requested to bring an artifact, which held significant meaning to their rites experiences to their interview. Those who conducted their interview over the phone, described in detail, their artifact of choice. One of the phone participants later provided photographs of her artifacts she discussed during the interview.

Interview Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research happens with the first interview or observation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell, 2014). As discussed earlier in this chapter, this study's interviews assumed a semi-structured format and took place in person and over the phone. Notes were taken during each interview, and each interview was audio recorded, and later transcribed. The interviews provided abundant content-rich data that addressed the opinions and perceptions of the participants (Creswell, 2014).

In analyzing the interview data, this study used inductive content analysis, a qualitative method of content analysis used to identify themes by studying documents, recordings and other printed and verbal material (Creswell, 2016; Patton, 2016). This method of data analysis required "segmenting and taking apart the data," which helped to "make sense of the data" (Creswell, 2014, p.195). The steps employed for analyzing the interview data involved Creswell's (2009) six-step method and are depicted in Figure 3.1.

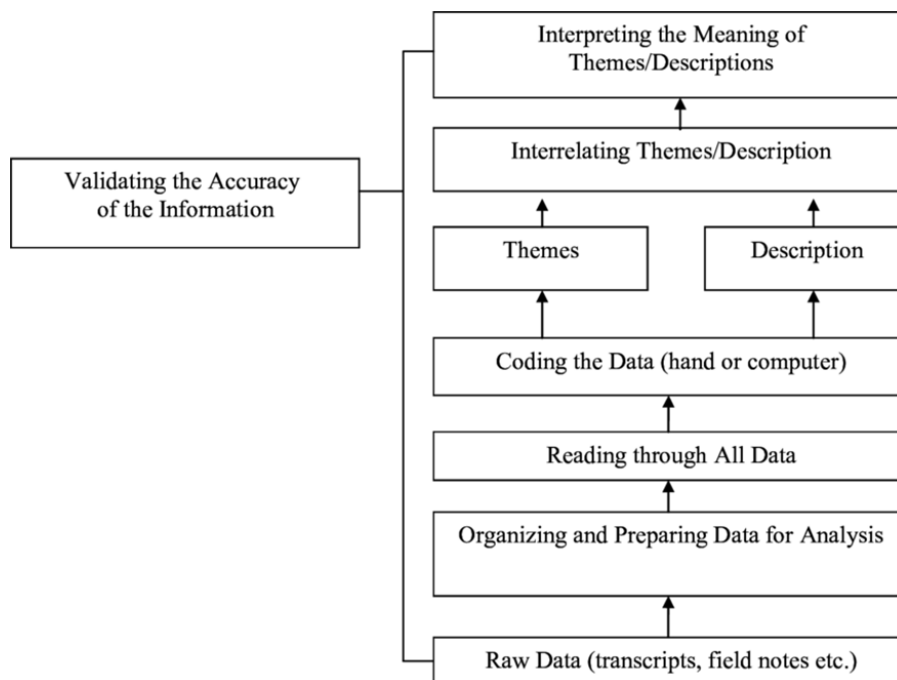


Figure 3.1 Creswell & Creswell (2009, p. 185)

The first three steps initiated for the analysis of the interview data, included a review of the interview data, collected notes and transcriptions, to unveil general themes. From here, the next step involved the process of coding noting codes in the margins of the transcribed interviews. Creswell (2014), stresses the importance that the researcher review each line of the transcribed text and assign codes. The use of NVivo, a qualitative analysis software program, facilitated taking apart the data further and doing a deeper analysis. This understanding and reference to inductive analysis is consistent with Strauss and Corbin's (1998) description: "The researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data" (p. 12), and supported the development of a manageable number of themes derived from the segmented interview data.

For the purposes of this study, data was coded to include common and emergent themes, as well as themes that addressed the larger theoretical contexts of rites of passage and Black feminism, as framed by critical race feminism. The next and fourth step in this analysis process generated descriptions, or detailed information and accounts discussed by the participants (Creswell, 2014). Through this process, the most important few themes (those that will be selected for discussion in the research findings), were highlighted. Next, a table created to display research findings, highlights the key themes. Finally, these interpretations of the analyzed data supported derived conclusions and meanings of this study.

Documents, Artifacts, and Observations

Documents, artifacts, and observations were ancillary forms of data in this study. Documents and artifacts assume a natural place in a qualitative research setting, and also serve as "ready-made" sources of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 162). Documents as data sources assume visual, written, and digital formats, but are always relevant to the study (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016; Kim, 2015). Artifacts, or objects, are things that societies make for their own use, and they provide material evidence of the past by documenting the past (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2016). Artifacts, such as statues, plaques, and organizational symbols, observed at a research setting, also serve as communication tools (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and can provide historical, demographic and, at times, personal information about a culture, group, or society (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2016).

Photographs serve as examples of public and personal documents (Chaffee, Luehmann, & Henderson, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and the photographs, deemed relevant to participants, exhibited as part of the interview and field observations. According to Chaffee et al. (2016), photographs as visual documents store rich and valuable research data as they tell of cultural values. This scholarly position on photographs aligns with this study's focus on culture. Other visual documents shared by the study participants included a program handbook, of which the cover and table of contents were permitted to be photographed.

Similar to the data analysis for the interview data, the document and artifact analysis portion of the study also assumed a thematic approach, following Creswell's (2014) six-step method for data analysis. Documents and artifacts enhance a study because they provide data not obtainable through an interview.

Several documents and artifacts analyzed for this study documented historical accounts of African-centered rites of passage and the Orisa tradition. These artifacts included an Egbe *Rites of Passage Handbook*, Ilekes, photographs of body scarification markings, a brass bell, and hand-dyed fabric. These shared artifacts enhanced the richness of this study's data. Explicitly, they also aided the researcher with understanding how these participants made meaning of a specific rites experience attached to these artifacts, as discussed during their interview.

Essentially, these artifacts and accompanying dialogue add dimension to the data analysis process, helping to better investigate how these participants made meaning of their rites of passage experiences, and their perceptions on how these experiences influenced their cultural identity and development.

Observational field notes were also an ancillary form of data in this study. I attended an Osun celebration in the southeast where I observed the celebration and also conducted interviews. My field notes for this event appear in Appendix B.

Critical Data Analysis

As established, a theoretical lens remains critical to the analysis of data. In fact, a rites of passage framework espouses three rites phases, each with its own distinct learning objectives, while critical race feminism (CRF), specifically Black feminism (Dillard, 2002) narrows the focus on the voices and experiential knowledge of Black/African American women who represent historically marginalized social groups (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). This lens proved critical to this examination of rites of passage experiences and their perceived impact on cultural identity development and learning, among the emerging Black/African American adult females that participated in this study.

Central to this study are marginalized practices of rites of passage, marginalized cultural group of the Yoruba tradition as practiced in America, and marginalized voices of women who identify as Black/African American. Therefore, Rites of Passage and CRF, specifically Black feminism, as a theoretical lens assumed a viable position to support the examination of the interview data, documents and artifacts collected for this study. Predetermined themes such as rites phases, race, gender, and power relations were evaluated and coded appropriately.

Dependability Strategies

Dependability steps aimed at ensuring the accuracy of a study, occurred throughout the research process, and addressed the trustworthiness of the study design and outcome (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2016). As discussed above in the Background of the Researcher section, use of triangulation and member checking most frequently support dependability or validation strategies in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2016). Triangulation is the examination of evidence from different data sources of information to build a substantial justification for themes derived from converging data sources; member checking determines accuracy by reviewing descriptions of themes derived from the data and the final report with study participants to confirm accuracy (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2016).

Trustworthiness

Several scholars (Creswell, 2014; Kim 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2016) expressed that it is imperative that the qualitative researcher addresses the criteria of credibility, subjectivity, and confirmability, as a requirement to fostering trustworthiness in qualitative research. Accordingly, credibility refers to the fact that the findings of the study are supported by the procedures of the study, and data is supported in the form of direct quotes, or passages from field notes, or documents that indicate the findings are believable. Credibility is addressed through descriptions of the analysis of the data, as well as evidence to support the data (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While dependability refers to the rigor of the methodology overall, confirmability is based on a position that the truthfulness of the findings' integrity rests in the data, which hinges upon the extent to which the study process can be confirmed by others, and the researcher's ability to link the data, processes of analysis, and findings in a manner that enables the reader to confirm the results (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2016).

Applicability

Considering the small sample size used in qualitative studies and the non-use of statistical analysis, qualitative studies, in the typical sense, cannot be generalized or applied to other phenomena (Creswell, 2014; Kim, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2016). However, this is not the intent of this form of inquiry, and the value of qualitative inquiry rests on the themes that develop and emerge as part of the investigative inquiry (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative researchers typically refer to “reader generalizability” which focuses more on the extent that the reader might see that the findings are applicable to a particular situation rather than generalizable in the statistical sense. The applicability of a study's findings is best achieved when the researcher provides sufficient information about the investigative process to include details on the research settings, research processes, participants, and about her or himself, or the researcher as instrument; these give way to the reader being able to decide how the findings may transfer (Creswell, 2014).

As stated, the primary reason for this study was to gain an understanding of the perceived experiences of Black/African American females involved in rites of passage that function within the Orisa tradition in America. Adult education upholds that Black/African American females are marginalized and oppressed, as are non-Western educational traditions, such as rites of passage and the Orisa tradition. Critical to this study is the understanding that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in society, and that meaning-making is critical to understanding qualitative research (Creswell, 2014; Kim, 2015; Merriam, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, in order to understand how this purposeful group made meaning of their rites of passage experiences and how these influenced their identity and learning, this study relied on

qualitative research approaches. Specifically, narratives or counter stories informed of each individual's perspectives of experiences, of which this research will analyze and assign meaning.

Summary

Qualitative inquiry assumes the critical and valid position that there exist multiple ways of knowing and understanding human experience, and recognizes the tentative and variable nature of knowledge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2016). Also, what defines critical inquirers is their desire to understand rather than predict the human experience. Interviews, as tools for qualitative research, provide the most direct and purposeful source of data (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2016). Specifically, semi-structured interviews, combining a standardized set of questions with opportunities to probe and explore particular areas of interest, garner some uniformity to the interviews, while allowing the participant to explore his or her own story within the interview (Patton, 2002). For this study, the informal structure of the interview supported a balance of power between the researcher and the participants. A collaborative relationship in the interview process gleans more rich data than those researchers who structure their interviews as question and answer sessions (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2016).

As researcher, my focus and approach permitted participants to guide the interview process, within a loose framework, while providing means for the participants to "tell their stories their own way" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 111). Moreover, analyzed data derived from this qualitative study aimed to reflect how the participants' rites of passage experiences influenced the expected shifts in their cultural identity and development, and incorporate my observations and interpretations of the participants' responses to the interview questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how emerging Black/African American women, involved in rites of passage, experienced their rites phases of separation, liminality, and incorporation, and the role these experiences assumed in forging positive cultural identity and development. The research questions guiding the study were:

- (1) What are females' experiences with these culturally specific rites of passage; and
- (2) What roles do these rites of passage assume in forging positive cultural identity development and learning?

This chapter discusses the findings of the study based on both the qualitative interviews with emerging adult women reporting completion of a rite of passage in America, as supervised by a Yoruba Priestess, and the shared artifacts they discussed. While the interviews served as the primary means of data collection, participants shared select artifacts, providing another means of data collection and additional data sets.

Informed by two theoretical contexts previously detailed in Chapter Two, rites of passage and critical race feminism frameworks, analysis of this study's data relied on the qualitative inductive content analysis process (Creswell, 2016; Patton, 2016). This data analysis process, used to examine 10 interview transcripts and five artifacts, revealed themes in the data, as discussed in this chapter. Additionally, to better focus readers on the findings of the study, summaries of the participants engaged in this study, precede these aforementioned sections.

Study Participants

As outlined in Chapter Three, Yoruba Priestesses assisted with identifying 19 potential study participants. Ten Black/African American emerging adult women, ranging between ages

18 to 25, completed interviews, and four participants also shared rites artifacts. At the time of their interviews, all participants reported being employed and/or enrolled in undergraduate or graduate school.

While all participants identified the Orisa to which they pay homage, eight participants shared they had also completed Priesthood initiation rites. However, all participants chose to rely on their puberty rites during the interview. Specifically, three participants provided these comments announcing the secret nature of Priesthood initiation rites as justification supporting framing the interview around puberty rites of passage experiences:

My initiation rite is very secretive. There would be a lot of things that are involved with the Priesthood initiation process that are secrets to the Priesthood and I cannot share with you. So, we can discuss my puberty rites. (Meta)

Similarly, another initiate described her Priesthood initiation and its associated rituals as secretive:

I actually completed my Priesthood rites a few years after my puberty rites. That process is much more secretive than my puberty rites. So that we can have a real good interview, we should talk about my puberty rites. (Mesan)

While another participant also chose to discuss her puberty rites during our interview, she alluded to her being very young when she completed Priesthood initiations, and offered the following comments:

My grandmother told me that initiation was a birth rite and I was initiated at a very young age. So there is probably a lot I would not remember, but of what I do, I cannot discuss.

We should discuss my puberty rites, as I just completed that a few years ago. (Okan)

The following findings provided in this chapter, represent the analysis of the assorted, complex and detailed data gleaned from the study. Along with field observations, and review of artifacts, these 10 emerging adult females provided an assortment of complex and detailed responses related to their puberty rites of passage experiences.

Findings

Table 4.2 below shows a summary of the findings from the data in the form of a data display. This display of the data shows these five distinctions that developed among the identified selective codes. First is the Orienting Context, which highlights the significance of female relationships. The next three themes depict the phases of the rite itself: experiencing separation, experiencing liminality, and experiencing welcoming back. The fifth and last then highlights their positive changed status. Each of these five themes have two to four subthemes, and direct quotes from the interviewees support the representation of the themes that emerged. Further, a discussion provided in the theme's findings of this chapter, will be further analyzed in Chapter Five.

Table 4.2 Data Display

- I. Orienting Context: Significant female relationships
 - A. Family tradition
 - B. Female role models
- II. Experiencing separation: Preparing for Learning
 - A. Seclusion
 - B. Ritual Bathing
 - C. Prolific uses of the term “white” and “white girl”
 - D. Scarification ritual
- III. Experiencing liminality: Cultural Learning
 - A. Group and peer learning
 - B. Learning environments
 - C. The task list
- IV. Experiences during welcoming back: Celebrating Learning
 - A. Traditional dance
 - B. The Bembe
 - C. The Gelede
- V. Positive Changed status
 - A. Start of menses
 - B. Racial identity
 - C. Recognized membership status

Orienting Context: The Significance of Female Relationships

The orienting context for why these women decided to do the rite to begin with relates to the notion of the significance of female relationships in their cultural and family context. This was manifested both in family tradition and in the significance of role models.

Family Tradition. Rites of passage as a family tradition emerged as a motivated theme. Family tradition, as a term used in the dissertation, describes collective attitudes, ideas and environment, passed along by one's parents and ancestors. While all participants provided their primary reason for completing rites of passage, nine of them attributed their involvement to a significant relationship with another female family member. Specifically, nine participants affirmed rites of passage as a family tradition, thereby linking other female family members to this tradition.

Eight participants stated they completed the rites of passage because it is a "family tradition," where some identified themselves as the third generation of women in their family to complete Egbe rites. These participants, quoted below, proudly attributed their involvement in rites of passage to their family's tradition, gaining them membership into the Egbe, or the Women's Society:

All the women in my family have joined the Egbe. The Egbe, or the Women's Society, is a Family tradition. I represent the third generation of women to join the Society. My grandmother was the last appointed Iyalode for the Women's Society. Even before, since I was a little kid, I knew. I remember seeing my aunts and one cousin going through the Society. (Marun)

Another participant commented on her family's connection to her puberty rites, and offered the following:

Rites of passage is a tradition among the women in my family— my grandma, my mom, aunts and cousins are members of the Women’s Society. All the women in my family complete Egbe rites as a tradition. It’s what we do. (Okan)

A different participant commented that her mother, too, completed Egbe rites, but also connected the start of menses of the predictor of when you are eligible to start your Egbe rites, expressing:

Traditionally, once you become of age, or once you have started your period, you can then petition to complete Egbe rites and join the Women’s Society. It is a tradition in our household, and I am sure once I have a daughter, she will also go through the Egbe training. My mother also went through the Egbe. (Mefa)

One participant not involved with Egbe rites of passage, named her mother as the primary motivator for her involvement in rites of passage training. Her description here points to lifelong involvement in Yoruba culture, and how at a very young age, her mother introduced her to the concept of rites of passage:

I was raised in the Yoruba tradition and received my ilekes at age six. Since I was very, very young, my mom guided me on how to pray, how to honor our Ancestor and the Orisa. When I was nine years old, I received my Warrior Orisas, Esu, Ogun, Ochosi and Osun. And, after rites of passage, I think I was 13, I received Orumula. My mom strongly encouraged my rites of passage. From since I was, say nine or ten, maybe younger, I was always told that soon after starting my period, I would complete rites of passage training with my Iyalosha. I kind of looked forward to it, even though at that time, I did not know what to expect. I knew my mom had my best interest at heart and I had grown to trust and respect my Iyalosha. (Mejo)

Female role models. In addition, two participants disclosed that their involvement in rites of passage linked closely to significant female role models within their community. They described role models as individuals set before them for guidance to assist them with further knowledge of Yoruba culture in the Diaspora. Specifically, one participant identified a college professor she has followed through undergraduate and now graduate studies as her role model. She described this professor as “well- accomplished” with an expansive focus and extensive publications on African culture and the African Diaspora. This participant offered the following commentary explaining how the professor’s encouragement resulted in her participation in Egbe Rites of Passage training:

When I went to the Village, it was intended just to be like an internship with my school. I've always been really interested in religion and around that time during my undergrad, I was coming into understanding that I really wanted to focus on black traditions and black people worldwide. It is an African tradition and so I went to the Village just as an intern. At that time, I was just participating. So basically, that's all I was doing, I was going, and it was just like, "oh okay", participate in this, participated in that... And I was actually having a divination session with the Iyalode. She's passed, actually, within the last couple of years and that was actually my first reading, and during that reading, she said, ‘Oh you wanna join the Egbe?’ I said, ‘Sure’. I had no idea what it was, so I basically just did it, and just to participate in something. Okay, but it sounded interesting. So that's basically why at that time. (Mẹwàá)

Another participant discussed a meeting she attended with Egbe members prior to beginning the Egbe rites of passage. She commented on feeling supported by them, stating

Okay, there was a time when all of the Egbe women came to my house to meet with me. As a sign of respect, I sat on the mat. All of the women brought me feminine gifts and different things like that. Each Iya gave me advice and shared their past experiences with crossing over into womanhood. They explained how puberty is a time when the body is so different and some of the things you should know about being a woman and all of that. It was support. The support that now as a more matured woman, I know every young woman needs. And that definitely was significant for me. (Mefa)

While the above discussion gets at how participants become involved with the rites to begin with, the next three themes are organized around the participants' experiences of the rites themselves during the three phases of separation, liminality, and welcoming back.

Experiencing Separation: Preparing for Learning

As previously noted, the separation phase exists as a rite's first phase, where periods of seclusion are common. During separation, initiates are geographically moved away from their familiar surroundings for varying periods of time, and undergo rituals designed to mark a changed social status, often involving removing familiar physical identity markers from the initiates, like hair and clothing (Turner, 1974; Gennep, 1960).

Participants elaborated about their separation experiences, where discussion about seclusion rituals emerged as motivated themes. The following conversation describes two different seclusion arrangements, as nine participants completed the Egbe Rites of Passage, at their site located in southeastern USA, and one participant completed rites of passage in a private home.

Seclusion. Eight participants completing Egbe Rites of Passage confirmed two separate weekends of seclusion. One weekend of seclusion occurred the first year of their rites of passage,

and the following year when they return to complete the training, a second weekend of seclusion takes place. Two participants likened this two-weekend process to pledging that occurs when one joins a sorority. They explained:

Okay, so your first year you are pledging to join the Women's Society or Egbe. So, you're there to work for Yemoja. You are not necessarily in the society until the year after you go over. So that first year you would call your pledging, which means you're just pledging to join the Society. Then the next year, we go over and you will be officially in the women society. (Meta)

In a similar vein, another participant verified that her Egbe rites required two separate seclusion periods, and explained:

You begin your rites with a weekend of seclusion, and return one year later. During the year in-between, you continue working the list of things you must complete before going over. The following year also starts with a weekend of seclusion, but ends with you going over and being a member of the Egbe. (Marun)

The one participant completing her rites training in a private home, experienced seclusion alone. She discussed her requirement to use a brass bell during her seclusion, as significant then and now. The brass bell, displayed in Figure 4.1, was used to signal when she needed to leave her seclusion room. She offered that brass, a preferred metal of the Orisa Osun, and one personification of Osun, is noted in the picture positioned behind the bell. She shared these comments about the purpose of the bell during her seclusion:

I remember most, a bell that was placed outside of my room. I thought it was interesting. I had to ring the bell when I needed to leave my room for any reason, but for the most part I was only permitted to go to the bathroom. I now own this bell, and it stays on my

Osun altar at home. I use it in prayer and meditation—anytime I want to call on Osun.

(Mejo)



Figure 4.1 Osun's Brass bell

Ritual bathing. Ritual bathing, discussed by several of the participants, is exhibited as a common practice during separation rituals. The participants shared their understanding of the importance of ritual bathing. They understood the omerio baths, anointed with blessings of elder priests for their continued success, marked the start of something new. In sharing their experiences and perceptions of ritual bathing, most commented about their first bath during seclusion.

One participant completing her rites in a private home, detailed her “first bath” experience. Her depiction informs that this ritual made her feel as if she was leaving her “old self” behind. She explained:

The first thing that happened when I arrived for my rites, was the clothes that I wore over to the house were literally cut and torn off my body. Then I was given a bath. It was a herbal bath with omeiro and it smelled so good, and it was so refreshing and I don't think I've been bathed before since I was a very small child. So that was interesting to have someone else bathe me . . . But it was like . . . a trust activity too . . . I remember her saying "Okay I'm gonna be taking care of you for the next three days. The bath was cold, so it wasn't pleasant in that regard, it was the smell of the bath and the herbs and whatever was in there. It just smelled so good. It was refreshing. It did feel like something new was starting. It felt like I was leaving my old things behind and on a new path. (Mejo)

Another participant indicated that the ritual baths gave her a perceived sense of community and made the rites of passage seem very official. Her comments noted here tell of her experience with ritual bathing:

Oh, we had our spiritual baths . . . Yeah, it happened on both weekends and we did it in the shower. We kind of all did this as a group and we were supervised. It made everything feel official. I felt like . . . I'm officially joining the Egbe. It was interesting, it was I would say it was the first time that I kind of felt a part of the community. (Mẹwàá)

One participant experienced ritual bathing as a bonding activity for her and the women in her group, offering:

Yeah, our ritual baths were cool times for sisterhood. We completed our baths together, or should I say all at the same time. We were bathed in omeiro by other priests. There is always songs and prayers for our success not just for the rites but ongoing. (Meji)

Prolific uses of the term “white” to refer to ritual. All participants made prolific uses of the term “white.” This refers to what goes on in the ritual and not to the white or Caucasian race, where white in this sense refers to a ritual of change and purity Evidence of this ritual displayed as wearing white clothing, white body powder and paint, and staying in white seclusion rooms, which follow spiritual bathing and prayer. All Egbe Rites of Passage participants confirmed that one of the separation rituals required them to become *obinrin efunfun*, which translates to “white girls” in English. In discussing this experience, participants more often relied on the English term “white girls” rather than the Yoruba term *obinrin efunfun*. This discussion emerged as a motivated theme, and select depictions of this ritual described this experience:

The first weekend of my first year I just complained a lot. You are called a “white girl” and marked with white body paint at all times when out in public. Any type of festivals during that year, they call on the “white girls” for everything. So anything that an Iya

needs your help . . . cooking, watching children, keeping the Temple grounds clean— things like that. (Merin)

One participant offered these details explaining how the use of white body paint markings differentiate between the initiates beginning their rites and those initiates returning the second year to complete their rites:

We call it your year as a “white girl” because for the festival we were painted in white.

The girls painted with white dots were crossing over the following year, and those painted all over in white were going over that year. (Meji)

Two participants expressed the requirement for all “white girls” to be topless at some rituals and ceremonies, as their most significant rites experience. One described feeling uncomfortable when she first learned of that requirement. However, she explained that being with her best friend for that first ritual experience made it much easier. She reflected back to the point in time during her rites of passage when she was first requested to bare her chest, and explained:

So when a girl starts her menses she is able to join the Egbe. She is presented to Egbe as a “white girl” and at all times during the festival she has to be dressed in all white and her body covered in white powder. At any ceremony her top has to be dropped. I would have to say during the sacrifice— seeing all the women with their chest out . . . that was first time hearing “OK obinrin efunfuns (Yoruba translation for white girls) drop your tops”. I was like what do you mean? And by that time, I had a chest that wasn’t meant for me at that age, but that was very scary for me. But after a while . . . I was like oh well . . . breasts are breasts, and my best friend was with me too. I would have to say that ritual was shocking for me. (Mesan)

Another participant detailed her understanding and acceptance of the importance of the requirement to be topless as part of the separation rituals. She explained:

It was the dress code, and so only having on a lappa, not having on any sort of top which is like the first time obviously that I've done anything like that. Okay, the way in which it was done, and the reasoning behind it and my doing it as a group with other black women was amazing, really. So, because the Egbe rites of passage is done in conjunction with the Yemoja festival and because Yemoja is almost always shown in statues and depictions and things like that, as topless with very large breasts. This is related to motherhood, which is related to breastfeeding, and so it's kind of a sign of respect for women to also do that. I guess, to show your breasts is to show respect to Yemoja and to womanhood. And, from what I understand, is that this practice is common at these sorts of ceremonies were among our traditional societies, in West Africa. And so, I guess maybe it's kind of like continuing with that, so that I guess it appears the same to the gods who were watching it. Yes, it appears exactly the same to them, so it looks exactly the same as when our Ancestors were doing these same practices. (Mẹwàá)

While all the participants referred to this ritual, one participant described this ritual experience as the most significant rites experience. In particular, she specified the importance of using white during these rituals:

I remember most the last day of the rites where we all were required to be in white from head to toe and were presented to the Village and our families as new member of the Egbe. White symbolizes purity, modesty, and honors the Ancestors. That was a profound moment for me as I remember most feeling honored to walk among the women of the

Egbe. Together we paraded through the Village as new women of the Egbe continuing our journey into womanhood. (Meje).

There was only one participant who did not complete Egbe Rites of Passage; however she also described magnified uses of white during her seclusion period. She talked fondly when reflecting on this time in her rites, explaining the following:

I completed my rites of passage in an all-white room. The walls, bedding, curtains—everything was white. I bathed daily in omerio and dressed in all new white clothing for the entire time at my Iyalosha's house. (Mejo)

Scarification. All participants discussed experiencing varying types of body scarifications, as part of their separation rituals. Since all participants discussed their experiences with this ritual, scarification emerged as a theme. Some of the Egbe Rites of Passage participants confessed to being afraid of the pain, when it was time for the ritual. However, all participants were knowledgeable of scarification as a traditional West African practice associated with some rites rituals. In fact, some explained they had previously completed scarification rituals as required by their Priesthood rituals, prior to their puberty rites.

All of these participants expressed overall pride with having the marks received from their puberty rites of passage. They explained that the marks represent their rites completion and their advanced social status in their community and an affiliation or membership with a specific cultural group in. They also explained that their marks, the *Osa Meji Odu*, provided them blessings and protection because of the medicine that was added to their bodies along with the scarring.

The nine participants completing Egbe Rites of Passage, referenced scarifications to show the *Odu Osa Meji*. According to Lewis (2018), *Osa Meji*, one of the 16 primary Odu, connects

to Oya, the Orisa of wind and transformation, who guards the portals between Earth and the ancestral realm, and the mother energies of the Iya Mi (p. 140). Moreover, *Odu Osa Meji* symbolizes female power universally, and encourages women to use their voice and agency (Lewis, 2018, p. 140). Figure 4.2 shows the *Osa Meji Odu* and serves as a reference to what these scarifications resemble.



Figure 4.2 Odu Osa Meji (Karade, 1994)

Five of the participants provided detailed accounts of their experiences and perceptions of this ritual. For example Meja explained:

So we had to get these marks on our arms the year we went over. Osa Meji, that was the Odu for that year, and that was the mark we received. Here they are . . . This is Osa and Meji. I will take a picture with my phone and send it to you. I mean physically I remember the sensation, but it was not traumatic and I did not associate it with anything negative. We took pride in it. We all wanted to have our marks as it was a part of the society— it was important to have them. We encouraged each other when it was time to do it; we looked forward to it. (Meji)

Merin also explained the importance of having the Odu markings, and offered the following:

When you get your marks, you are marked with the Osa Meji Odu. You have medicine put in you to ward off negative energies. It is a cutting ritual. It is painful, but it is also bonding ritual. Other women that have completed this ritual support those going through the process. There is lots of encouragement, hugging and support. (Merin)

In the context of the interview, Mesan proudly rolled up her sleeve to show me her marks and explained:

Here are my Egbe marks which I am very proud of. These marks symbolize my culture and my bond to my culture. I am very proud to have them. Yeah, I almost cried when I had to get these done, but I was so glad when it was over. These marks mean I have an Egbe that cares about me. We are sisters. (Mesan)

Figure 4.3, provided on the following page, shows a photo of the markings that resulted from a scarification ritual completed as part of the Egbe Rites of Passage. Mewàá who provided this photo, completed her interview by phone, discussed the scarification ritual, and later followed up and emailed a copy of a photograph of her Egbe marks.



Figure 4.3 Scarification Markings

She explained that she understood the ritual as being very African-like, in that the accompanying medicine and prayers complete the ritual. She stated that that she was eager to complete the ritual. She said:

Yes, on my left arm, I have the marks representing the Odu Osa Meji and are given to those crossing over. I can share pics of those. Well, for me I wanted to get it done I guess to connect with the other women who had done it previously because it seemed like that's how you're supposed to be doing it. And I kind of wanted to do, I wanted to complete the rite to the degree that I could. I studied African culture and African Diasporic traditions and culture and scarification is and has been done over the continent. Like a tattoo, my

marks remind me that this is almost a solely African practice. This is a very black practice on . . . That's what I loved about it. There is also medicine that goes into your body with the marks. Medicine for blessings and good fortune. So that's another reason why I wanted it. (Mẹwàá)

The one initiate not completing Egbe Rites of Passage, also discussed her scarification ritual. She explained her understanding of the scarring ritual as elevated connections to her Ancestors that had walked a similar path, and explained:

One of activities we did on the morning of my weekend in seclusion was pierce my right earlobe. I had both my ears pierced when I was very young and quite frankly, I don't remember that. But I do remember the piercing my Iyalosha did. My godsister and another Priestess was there when she did it. So, there were prayers to the Orisa and the Ancestors before and during the piercing. She threaded a white cotton string through the piercing, and I wore that for a few months before being allowed to put in an earring. I can't say that it hurt that much. I understood at the time that she was marking my participation and completion of the program. I also understood that many of my Ancestors had done similar rituals marking the end of their puberty. Afterwards we all prayed together for me to be successful as a young adult. I remember that. (Mejo)

Experiencing Liminality: Cultural Learning

The second phase of the rites is the Liminality phase, the phase of deep cultural learning.. The findings of this phase can best be discussed in light of their group and peer learning, the learning environments themselves, and the task list that they need to complete.

Group and peer learning. To ascertain a general understanding about certain aspects of the rites' learning environments, participants were asked if they completed rites alone or with a

group. Comments from nine participants confirmed they completed their rites as a group. The following commentary points to overall positive learning environments:

It was two of us, and we were the same age. Well she is about eight months younger than me. There were other women completing the rites the same year we began, but it was just the two of us starting the rites that year. (Merin)

Others also confirmed they completed their training as a group. For example Meji stated “We partially were a part of the group going over that year as we made up the group going over the following year”. while Meta noted. “It was a group of us though. It was five all together”. Okan’s group was somewhat larger, noting that:

It was a lot of us. I remember there being at least 13-14 of us in my group. Some of them I knew, but most of them I met for the first time when we started training. I guess my favorite part of it was us like just being all together. (Okan).

While one participant confirmed she completed her rites with a group, she commented that she really did not know any of the other ladies at the start of the rites, and felt somewhat alone. She said:

Well, the whole rites of passage was done with a group. There were 10 ladies in our group. I remember five of us were starting and five women were completing. I didn't know any of them before I came to the village, so even though I was with a group, I was technically alone, I guess. (Mẹwàá).

In addition, two participants focused on their sentiments around the importance of participating in the rites of passage with their best and closest friends. They stated:

My best friend and I were going into the Women's Society, together. That was extremely important to me. But, we started with a group. There were three other ladies who were graduating or going over the year we started our rites". (Mesan)

I did this along with my very good friend. So the two of us were together. We grew up together. So, we went through our Egbe pledge year together and we went over together. But it was a group of us though. It was five all together. But we were the only two pledging that year and we were the only two going over the next year. The other three women were actually going over that first year for us. But the next year when we went over, there were two more women pledging. (Meta)

In contrast, one participant not completing Egbe rites, explained she completed her rites alone. In this description she shared some of her thoughts about learning in solitude, stating:

I do remember there being lots and lots of books in my seclusion room. I will always remember just kind of meditating and getting in a nice calm space there. I started reading and later would discuss readings with my Iyalosha. There were some books I had to read on female Ancestors and the Orisa, but I was also allowed to read anything in the room. It made me feel really special that everyone was concerned about what I was doing and learning. I also remember that I couldn't have outside contact with anyone. (Mejo)

Additionally, several participants, reporting completing rites of passage with their peers, shared positive feedback about learning with peers. These comments support their perceived sense of camaraderie and support within their group:

I guess . . . my favorite part of it was us like being just being all together. I really enjoyed being with a group and I completed the rites with that group of women. It was helpful to

have the support of the group for just overall support. They were all just really nice, and we bonded". (Okan).

Another participant commented favorably regarding learning with her group, offering:

I just remember the camaraderie of women. Because you're in little house with women from all different ages and walks of life. From different places, from London, one from Nigeria, and she spoke very little English. But being in the room with just women we were able to create that sisterhood. That was one thing that really helped me grow as a person. (Meta)

Group learning. To expand further on how participants perceived their learning environments, several participants discussed advantages to learning in a group setting. While the nine participants, completing Egbe Rites of Passage, confirmed they made up a group of initiates, three of them discussed ways they perceived group dynamics as making a positive impact on their learning experiences. Specifically, these comments express their appreciation of being with a group and the perceived support this arrangement offered:

Some women that came the year they are going over had nothing prepared. They were told "Do you understand that Sunday is the day that you're going over?" But the Egbe helped everybody and at the end of the day, everything gets done. (Mesan)

One participant discussed how they supported each other with getting the required rites tasks completed, stating:

You're supposed to make certain items like they call for the marketplace. And a lot of us were up all night doing it because a lot of the women don't know how to sew, but we all just helped each other. (Mẹwàá)

Likewise, one participant focused her comments on the work required to make a grass skirt by hand, which she felt supported in by other women in her group, stating:

They were all just really nice, and we bonded— we made grass skirts together, and these were used in our dance at our celebration. Everybody had to have all things on the list done by the right time. (Okan)

The participant who did not complete Egbe Rites of Passage, confirmed she was the only initiate in her group. She explained that her rites training started prior to her seclusion period, and included another prospective initiate. She offered this understanding of how it came to be that she completed training alone:

I started the process with a friend of mine but ended up completing the rites, like seclusion and going over, alone. She did miss a few of our monthly meetings, that were to prepare us for our rites ceremonies, I guess this was why my Iyalosha decided not to take her through. My Iyalosha held monthly classes for group study about Yoruba culture. We learned different prayers and songs in Yoruba, for the Orisas, and how to take care of them. There was also a lot of time and emphasis spent on talking about honoring the Ancestors. At that time, we already had a shrine at home for our Ancestors that my Iyalosha had helped to organize some time before the rites. (Mejo)

The learning environments. Participants responded to questions designed to inform about their learning environments and learning cultures, associated with their rites training. Specifically, participants were asked to elaborate on significant interactions with priestess overseeing their training, and if they relied on a written curriculum. While all participants stated that a priestess was in charge, comments from one participant, who now serves as a Captain for

the Egbe, expanded on her now expanded knowledge of the rites of passage training model and practices related to governance and overall operations. She explained:

So . . . the order of Egbe is . . . you have the Iyalode who is the head priestess in charge. You have an Ose and Otu—two different people who serve as the Right and Left hand to the Iyalode. You have your Secretary, Treasurer, Head Captain, and your Captains. The Iyalode is in charge. The Ose and Otu who work directly with the Iyalode make sure all things get done . . . sacrifices, cleaning, maintenance. The Head Captain is in charge of making sure the Obinrin Efunfun or “white girls”— making sure they are doing the things they need to be doing. Captains interact directly with the “white girls”. My auntie was among the Captains. The Captains were cool . . . they got to bring us out for the “coming out” ceremony. They taught us the Moremi dance and they got to spend the nights with us. (Meta)

Others also commented on how they interacted with the priestess and other figures of authority supervising their rites. These select comments indicate their understandings of governance structure: “There was always that helicopter elder that was there to give us instructions”. (Meji)

At the time me and my best friend were going into the Egbe, the Priestess in charge and the Iyalode was my best friend’s grandmother, who has recently passed. She always gave us advice. She encouraged us to just do it, to get the required work done and that by doing just that, would make things easier for you. She also told us to help the new girls out so they would know what they had to do. This helped us get our tasks done without the Captains having to tell us what to do. (Mesan)

One participant expressed feeling as if their Captain required a lot of work from their group, and stated:

At the time I felt our Captain was being really hard on us. I was like oh man, why don't she live us alone? If there is any work to be done during the Yemoja Festival the initiates get called. And I was like cleaning up cooking you help with and get in the temple area, together for the festival. But now, that Captain is the one person I know I can call on. She is always there for me and follows through with her commitments. Right now I am doing a fundraiser for a playground at the Village and she was the first person I called on and she was more than willing to help. She said "what do you need?" "I got you"(Merin).

The one participant completing her in a private home elaborated on her interactions with the Priestess, or her Iyalosha, supervising her training. She offered the following description of how she understood the structure in place for her rites training:

My Iyalosha and the other priestess helping her, instructed my lessons and lectures. But, during seclusion, I was not allowed contact with anyone except my Iyalosha and the other priestess that helped her. And I was allowed minimum time with my god sister and her children, living with my Iyalosha. My god sister helped with a lot of the cooking and checked in on me a couple times throughout the day. (Mejo)

To gather a deeper understanding of how rites facilitators shared lessons and training content, participants confirmed if the priestess in charge referred to a curriculum. All participants acknowledged the absence of a curriculum. The select comments below point to the use of verbal instructions: "I did not notice a curriculum per se, our instructions were more oral" (Merin).

A lot of things we did were hands-on. Maybe they used a curriculum in the early days of our Village, but now our Village is coming close to its 50th year. I think most know what is done during the rites is oral knowledge passed on over the years. (Meta)

Our instructions were verbal. Verbally told us over and over and over again.

Okay, so I've never saw any kind of book or anything on paper. She would always tell us the night before. So then in the next morning . . . Well, me and my best friend both be like, "Okay you do this, and I'm gonna go do this." (Mesan)

The task list. Designated as a motivated theme, discussion among the participants completing Egbe Rites of Passage centered around the list of tasks they were expected to complete before being promoted as an official Egbe member. All nine participants completing these rites, confirmed knowledge of the task list, included in their Egbe Handbook. One participant shared her Egbe Handbook as an artifact. She explained that the handbook serves as an excellent resource and she refers to it frequently. She also stated understanding the handbook as intellectual property of the Egbe, but did agree to the researcher photographing the table of contents, as displayed in Figure 4.4.

These tasks, published as *Requirements of Egbe Initiates*, included, but were not limited to, knowing facts related to Yoruba culture to include histories about the Egbe. Learning expectations also included knowing the legends about Yemoja, the Iyami, and Queen Moremi. Additionally, Egbe initiates learn how to recite oriki, or Orisa prayers and required pledges in Yoruba. They also informed of the expectations for them to make and sell a marketable item, learn and demonstrate basic cooking skills, sew a traditional African outfit and display basic childcare skills.

Table of Contents

Welcome Letter from the Office of Iyalode.....	1
Festival Schedule.....	2
About Yemoja /Yemanja.....	3
Multiple Souls.....	7
12 Major Test in Life.....	8
Iyami (the mothers and the feminine mystique)	11
The Legend of Moremi.....	17
Purpose of the Egbe Moremi Women's Society.....	19
History of Egbe Moremi.....	20
Yoruba National Anthem to Mothers.....	23
Our Children Watch and Record.....	23
History of Oyotunji.....	24
Oyotunji Pledge.....	28
Requirements for Egbe Initiates.....	29
Egbe Application.....	31
Recommended Reading List.....	32




Figure 4.4 Table of Contents from Egbe Handbook

As the researcher, I observed a listing of learning objectives in a copy of an Egbe Handbook, shared as an artifact by one participant. She explained the following regarding the task list:

We all come to the training with different levels of skills and abilities. But for the most part we begin working on the tasks during their first weekend of seclusion. Your sponsoring Iyalosha confirms if you completed any of the tasks prior to your first weekend, and all tasks must be done before you can complete the rites. (Meje)

Several participants focusing their comments on “the task list”, often depicted it as somewhat insurmountable:

During the year in between and before completing the rites I had to get my market organized. I had to chop down a tree. You have to cook, chop down a tree, swim, change a tire, drive, sew, make a market so you have means to making money. I made Afrocentric bandanas with models. My family supported me with managing my market, and I sold those for a while. I had to prepare—so they give you that first year to prepare those things and as a group we all had different skill sets—but not all women know these things. I remember being outside and my grandfather knew I had to chop down a tree and he gave me an axe and he showed me how to correctly . . . by angles and then chop and prepare the wood for a bonfire. I remember shooting my first gun—that was scary. Traditionally, these tasks prepare you to be able to take care of your family, to be a wife. But I was 11 at the time and of course marriage was not the concept. But those skills do help you be self-sufficient, and to also help your family and community. (Meta)

Likewise, another participant described the work expected of the initiates in her group. She stated:

Okay, so, there's all these chores and all of that stuff and helping other people cleaning up certain things. You're supposed to make certain items for the marketplace. You have to make a grass skirt you have to make an entire outfit, so you have to make a buba, lappa, and gele. Then on top of that, you have to do the fertility dance. And a lot of us were up all night doing it because a lot of the women don't know how to sew but we all just helping each other. (R-CA)

In the same vein, another participant talked about the work expected of them, and noted that:

We had a lot of things that had to be completed—we had to go into the woods and cut a tree. Yeah, we had to sew clothes and make a craft. I made a traditional outfit. We had to learn the Pledge, in Yoruba. Yeah, part of our community work included changing the water on the Temples. We also had to serve the food at the Festivals—just whatever needed to be done. (Mefa)

One participant commented about the support she received from her grandmother during the year with completing her rites of passage tasks. She stated:

There is a lot of things on the task list that must be completed before entering the Egbe. My grandmother sponsored me with joining the Egbe and she helped me with completing my tasks. She made sure I had certain skills, like cooking, sewing, marketing, the Pledge, childcare, outdoor living and survival, etc. (Meje)

One Egbe initiate informed that Egbe rites of passage also required initiates to pass a written test. She proudly informed:

You have to recite the Pledge, in Yoruba. That takes some time to learn, but you have a year to learn it. More important, there is a test you have to take and pass to complete the rites. The test for the most part is about the things we learn about our female Ancestors, Queen Moremi, the IyaMi, and Yemoja. Yeah, I got an A.” (Merin)

Most tasks referenced above continued to completion during the year in between their first and second seclusion weekends. However, several participants confirmed that the task requiring them to construct grass skirts was completed during the second weekend of their Egbe rites, prior to participating in their “welcoming back” ceremonies. Several participants centered their conversation around the requirement to complete construction of their grass skirts during the last weekend of their rites, stating:

And then also the grass skirt kind of has to be made in the village, because we had to pick the leaves to make it ourselves. You have to go down that little road back near the water. So that has to be made the night before or the day before and we're all kind of doing it the same time in the Women's House. (Mewàá)

Another participant stated that the task to make her grass skirt, by hand, added stress to the second weekend in seclusion, stating:

You have to make a grass skirt and you have to harvest your own grass. That was easy but having to strip them one by one, sewing it, making sure it fits and having to remember the dance, and having a market. It is stressful because you're still a “white girl” and you have all the other tasks to do like taking care of Yemoja temple and grounds and other festival tasks. (Mesan)

Another participant focused her comments on her market item, explaining that initiates were required to produce an item for sale at the market. She offered the following:

My market item was fabric that I had dyed, because I was really into dying, so fabric at the time and doing different types of techniques with it, so I had a bunch of different colored fabric. This was also the fabric I used to make my traditional outfit. I completed the dying and constructed the outfit during my year in-between. (Mewàá)

Figure 4.5 is a photograph of fabric she hand-dyed and used to sew her required traditional African outfit. She also used some of the fabric she dyed as her market item.



Figure 4.5 Hand dyed fabric

The one initiate not completing Egbe rites, chose to focus her comments on her learning activities, occurring during her three-days in seclusion. She offered these five points to explain her understanding of how her learning objectives manifested, perceiving them as personalized:

I got my cycle, while in seclusion and it felt like it was for the first time . . . No, no, but it just happened on the second day and I started, and at first I was like, "Oh man, I'm gonna be an all-white and I have my cycle but then as I'm learning about my body, and learning about learning, about the African traditions and everything, I kind of put it together like God in the spirit world and the ancestors made sure that I was going through some type of renewal regeneration, rebirth cleans. At that time, I kind of felt like I was purging my old out and I thought that was incredible. I was kind of stumped that it happened like that, and it wasn't about being in all-white and getting my menses anymore, it was about being a woman and knowing that this is what happens to women. They get their cycles. Then I had cramps for them to help me make the food for the camps I had, it was like "Oh yeah, don't forget. You're gonna have to deal with your cycle. Let's talk about food, let's talk about hormones is talk about . . . So I don't know if it was a spiritual part of the rite, but it was definitely something I had no control over and was given the interpretation by someone told me while I was in that room that day. Like, "No you're going through this because you needed to be really new when you came out. But another thing that I really understood was feminine, health practices. I guess we learned different types of foods to eat when you're menstruating to ease cramps. We learned about taking care of the female body, learned about processes and things that the body goes through and those are things that don't kind of think you know already, but it's nice to hear from someone else. And the food that we made was all foods that I never made before. (Mejo)

Experiencing “Welcoming Back”: Celebrating Learning

“Welcoming back” rituals and ceremonies, presented as highly celebrated occasions, marked completion of the rites for these initiates and the communities they represented. While

all participants expressed the understanding that these community-sponsored “welcoming back” ceremonies marked this success, discussions about their “welcoming back” experiences varied. All participants completing Egbe rites of passage, reported attending a Bembe as part of their “welcoming back” ceremony. Overall, participants commented approvingly about their bembe experiences, and dialogue among these nine participants about the requirement to present a traditional dance at the Bembe, as part of the “welcoming back” ritual, was revealed as a motivated theme.

Traditional dance. “Expected and consistent with traditional African celebrations, all participants discussed the inclusion of dance, along with food, music, and traditional dress, at their “welcoming back” ceremony. Traditional dance emerged as a motivated theme, as all participants discussed their dance experience as required for their “welcoming back” ceremony. These remarks capture their perceptions and experiences with “the dance” they presented:

At the end of the Festival during the Bembe, that's when we come out. That is a very special time for everybody. As a group we do our crossover dance and then we have to do a dance solo. Our movements salute Yemoja and remind of the ocean where Yemoja governs. (Meji).

While another participant also provided positive comments about her Bembe and dance experiences, more important, she conveyed that now as an Egbe member, she really enjoys training new initiates with learning “the dance”. She offered:

Oh, yeah you have to be completed all your tasks before participating in the Bembe, including learning “the dance” and your solo. During the Bembe for Yemoja, we also came out to present our dance to all the folks at the Festival. I loved that part . . . even

now as an Ebge member, I really like that part of the rites and I really enjoy helping other girls learn the dance so they too can go over. (Merin)

Another participant described performing the dance as liberating. She also expressed how previous experiences as a spectator, at other Yemoja and Egbe Bembes, was of great benefit with her learning “the dance”. She explained:

The dance is kind of like a big sigh of relief. Learning the dance for me was last minute. I learned the dance like 10 mins before I had to present it, but I had seen some of my other families do the dance before and watched the celebration before. (Okan).

In contrast, one participant described the requirement to dance publicly as the most stressful component of her rites. However, she talked about how the support and encouragement from other women there as spectators was extremely helpful. Her comments here point to the support she experienced from other women attending the Bembe:

But I would say probably nervousness because I don't like dancing in front of people alone. So me, thinking about that, made me nervous. Really most memorable about the second weekend for me was the dance, and that I had to do solo that I was really, really nervous about . . . And I was even more nervous because with my previous year, there were five women crossing over and five women beginning the rite. So there was kind of a group, but not in the group that had to do a solo. But crossing over, there was only me and two other women. So it was like I was even more on display. But it was the dance, it was a lot, but it was awesome because the women made it seem like they were the only ones there. As we were dancing solo the women who were just there in the crowd who had crossed over, they're just chanting and cheering you on. It was awesome . . . really, really awesome. So while I was really nervous about it, it was really one of the best parts

of the whole ceremony. But I was also excited because I began to take it seriously at that point. I was excited about it. (Mewàá)

The Bembe. Bembes are festive and celebratory in nature. Bembes honor Olodumare, the Ancestors, and the Orisa, and mark the closing of any Orisa-related event. Several Egbe Rites of Passage participants shared favorable comments about their attendance and participation in Bembes that occurred during their rites of passage. Several participants acknowledged their understanding that Bembes occur as regular components of the Yemoja festival, stating: “There is a Bembe for the celebration. Egbe Rites of Passage and Yemoja festival is done together” (Okan). “At the end of the Festival there is a Bembe”. (Mefa).

Equally, one participant discussed her experience at the Bembe honoring Yemoja the year she completed rites of passage. She talked about being more comfortable with the ritual requiring her to be in all white again. More important she shared her Bembe experiences, as a time that centered around the importance of family, the Ancestors, and extended community being present. She stated the following:

So when the time came for our coming out, I put on my "Moremi skirt" and my efun. I was a “white girl” again, I started to feel a little more comfortable. But I was 11, so I wasn't really fond of showing my breast and everything. But when it was over, and they called my name I felt even better and not as overwhelmed. My family was there, uncles, my mom, my grandparents. It was cool. That was one of my fondest memories. My little brother and all of my uncles and my extending uncles, cousins were there and everybody gave me my congratulations. (Meta)

The sole participant completing rites outside of the Egbe, described her “welcoming back” ceremony. While she completed her rites alone, these descriptors point to an overall sense of satisfaction and appreciation of being the center of attention:

When I was escorted out of the room there were not a lot of people there, just the really significant people—my mom, my brother, my god sister and the priests that helped in the ceremony. There was a drummer, too, and a few people that I did not know before then. There was so much food there. They began singing for me to come out of my seclusion room. Later at the end of talks and comments from the priests and my mom, I presented my solo dance and that was awesome. I began learning the dance during one of our monthly meetings and while I was in seclusion, my god sister would come in to practice it with me. When I danced, I was so relieved and proud of myself at the same time. I know some people do go through their rites in a group, but I'm glad I got to do mine by myself 'cause everything was for me. And again, the food was great. I really remember that. I remember the, I think they called yeast rolls, that my god sister made for me basically, and they were awesome . I just felt like a princess. (Mejo)

The Gelede. Several Egbe Rites of Passage participants provided comments regarding the Gelede that made an appearance during the Bembe. They explained their understanding of the importance of this particular masquerade, as it is very common during the Yemoja festival. These comments provide their perceptions, understanding, experiences with the Gelede:

At each festival, there is always an Egungun that comes out. The Egungun represent our Ancestors. But for Yemoja, Gelede comes out. This mask is very important to females and it helps us to understand how to move forward in our lives. (Meji)

Equally important, another participant described a very strong affinity to the Gelede, and

offered that the Gelede mask was the one rites artifact she wished she could have provided for the interview. While she explained that certain constraints determine when and where the mask is in public, her comments also emphasized why the Gelede, present during Bembes, held in honor of Yemoja and Egbe members and rites of passage initiates, was of great significance:

Well I probably could not have gotten the mask, but if I could have, I would have brought a picture of the Gelede mask. The Gelede restores balance and represents the Devine Woman. They come out at the closing of the ceremony for the Egbe Rites of Passage. (Merin)

Another participant stated that her attraction to Gelede connects to the fact that Gelede represents female power. Here, she described the presence of the Gelede as her most positive and memorable rites experience:

My favorite part of the rites was the Bembe where the Gelede is presented. For me, this experience was my most memorable spiritual experience. Being present for the Gelede. I am attached to the Gelede presentation as it symbolized female power. The Gelede is the only mask that is managed entirely by the women of our Village, which now as an Egbe member I help with. While women do not typically masquerade, our Egbe is responsible for every aspect of the Gelede's presence at the Yemoja Festival. We draft their scripts that focus on women's issue globally and within our community. We are also responsible for Gelede's garments. (Marun)

Collectively, these culturally specific experiences described rites of passage requirements as stipulated by the communities these women represent. They described explicit rituals and their intended learning, across the three rites of passage phases. All participants celebrated successful completion of rites of passage, marking positive changes in their statuses from adolescence to

emerging adulthood, also understood as positive changes in their cultural identity and development.

Positive Changed Status

This study also explored the role rites of passage experiences undertaken in forging positive cultural identity development. To investigate this theory, this study accepted multidimensional qualities of cultural identity development, understood as change overtime.

Previously discussed in this chapter, participants detailed experiences describing required learning and participation in culturally-specific activities. These activities included, but were not limited to, (1) use of Yoruba language, (2) constructing and wearing traditional African dress, (3) the Gelede (4) learning about the Iya Mi and Queen Moremi, and (5) other learning that involved African traditions and spirituality. Collectively, these learning experiences about Yoruba culture and the Orisa tradition, showed as positive influences on cultural identity and development.

Obvious attachments to concepts of female camaraderie, womanhood, and female power, emerged in discussions on learning about Queen Moremi, the Gelede and other female Ancestors. One participant explained that her rites experience, focusing on learning about Queen Moremi, had a positive and lasting impact on how she understands womanhood as marked by her Egbe rites of passage and its connections to family, community, and society:

I just remember the camaraderie of women. Because you're in little house with women from all different ages and walks of life. From different places, from London, one from Nigeria. She did speak barely any English but being in the room with just women we able to create that sisterhood that was one thing that really help me grow as a person. Now I have a society. I felt that when I heard the Queen Moremi story. It was on the Saturday, night of the first weekend. I remember the story; it was being told by an elder. There we

were in this room, me and my best friend and three other sisters and the elder. It felt like we were in like this our own little bubble. I did not think about the outside world. We were really focused on trying to gain something out of this and walking away with something. Everybody was there for one reason, it was to join the Society, join the sisterhood and learn the rites of passage as a Yoruba woman. Queen Moremi set the ultimate example of the hard work and sacrifice women make for family and community. Reflecting on the year and beyond, that night was most memorable for me. (Meta).

Several participants discussed their experiences and ongoing involvement with the Gelede during their “welcoming back” ceremony and after completing Egbe training. These comments point to their acceptance of positive changed identities from adolescence to womanhood. More important, these comments infer an attachment to the Gelede where womanhood was constructed around concepts of divinity and female power:

The Gelede represents and reminds me of the Divine Woman. A lot of people get it twisted. They are not drag queens, they function to restore balance to individuals and our communities. They come out and act like the exaggerated woman, but they talk about whatever gossip that has been going on during the year. And what it does is, it's supposed to eliminate the gossip because now it's all out in the open. So now no one else needs to repeat it again, that's that . . . And they also come and chastise those that have not been treating the women fairly. The Gelede represents and reminds me of the Divine Woman. (Merin)

Many participants referred to their attachment to the Gelede. Another participant explained her attachment stating:

I am attached to the Gelede presentation as it symbolized female power. This

is the only mask that is managed entirely by the women, and now as an Egbe member, I assist with managing the Gelede. While we do not masquerade, our Egbe is responsible for every aspect of the Gelede's presence at the Yemoja Festival. (Marun)

To expand this examination of the roles rites of passage assume in fostering positive cultural identity development, participants responded to questions about their racial identity, and explained the impact of their rites training on their assignment of race. Their responses, along with commentary about the start of menses, and the significance of belonging to a cultural group, showed connections to positive cultural identity development, and emerged as motivated themes in the data. Presented first, the start of menses showed as a marker of positive cultural identity development related to establishing womanhood:

Start of menses. Within the framework of rites of passage, the separation phase confirms a loss of identity for initiates, however, nine study participants conferred that the start of menses impacted their cultural identity. Specifically, the start of menses confirmed the loss of their childhood identity and marked the beginning of their journey into womanhood. While only one study participant completed rites of passage training well after puberty, at age 20, discussion among these nine participants connected the start of menses and formal rites of passage training. Their comments emphasized the start of menses existed as the required criterion to participate in formal rites of passage training designed to foster successful transition into the womanhood. These select comments echoed positive anticipation of the start of menses and rites of passage training, emerged as a motivated theme:

So, when a girl starts her menses, she is able to join the Egbe. I remember my menses, the night I ended my first period my best friend started hers. Of course her mom called my mom and my aunt. We were told that we would be able to join the Egbe together. When

you begin your period you meet with the women of the Egbe and get advice from them about how to carry yourself from this point on. My grandmother told me that it was time to put down the dolls, toys and coloring books. I was like what—no more coloring? I really like to color. (Mesan)

Similarly, another participant discussed the timing of her menses in relation to rites of passage, and stated:

My mother always told me that once I started my period, I would complete rites of passage training with my Iyalosha. My mother explained how the start of my period would indicate that I was entering a new phase in my life, and that rites of passage training was extremely important and would be very helpful to me to development as a young woman (Mejo)

Another participant described her “moon party” as the celebration given in her honor that recognized the start of her menses. While she acknowledged that the start of menses did not grant womanhood, it did recognize the beginning of a new life phase. She explained:

I started my cycle—well when I started my cycle when I was 11 and at the time there weren't any other girls my age to go through the rites, so I waited until some of my friends were ready to go over. I had my Moon Party, but I did my rites after I got a little older. A “moon party” is a celebration when a young girl begins her period. So when you start your cycle you have a party and it's like, you . . . We don't wanna say you are an adult, because you definitely not a woman. But when you start your cycle it a celebration of the beginning of womanhood. So older women gather all the younger women, all of them who have started their cycle and you eat—talk . . . it's like a party or . . . it is a

celebration for you. Everyone goes around and gives you advice about this having your cycle. About this new journey you are about to encounter. (Merin)

Racial identity. To assess the role that rites of passage assumed in forging positive changes in cultural identity development and learning, participants discussed how their racial identity connected to rites of passage experiences. Three participants identified as Black or African American, and seven participants racially and ethnically identified as Yoruba or African. Moreover, comments shared by four participants clearly revealed connections to rites experiences and chosen racial identity. While these comments reflect fluctuating descriptors of racial and ethnic identity, more important, they support that rites of passage experiences assumed in establishing positive cultural identity remains clear:

I am a Yoruba African American. I prefer to identify as Yoruba, but I am African American through and through. But I practice Yoruba traditions. These are the traditions I have learned throughout my life to include my rites of passage. Rites of passage helps you to better appreciate Yoruba culture. (Meta)

One participant, in responding to the question about racial identity, offered the following comment on her worldview:

My worldview was very African from the beginning. I grew up in Yoruba culture and was initiated as a priestess as a young age. There is pride with being a priestess and with being an Egbe member. I have experienced racism, but it never really messed with my worldview. (Meji)

Likewise, these participants reflected on rites of passage training, and confirmed its strong affinity to Yoruba culture, the power of culture, and the self-confidence it provides:

Well, for me, of course, on the box is going to put Black / African American up in. I am a Yoruba American. My rites of passage is about my culture as a whole. My culture is definitely linked to my assessment on race particularly considering how we came to the Americas as enslaved African. This is how I know what I know and believe. This is where my confidence comes from . . . my culture, and I know exactly who I am. I can't stress enough how important it is that as a Yoruba American I know my culture and am able to celebrate it. Because it was a time when we were not allowed to acknowledge our culture—colonialization tried to cut us off from our culture. Culture is POWER (Mefa)

Another participant stated her preference to be referred to ethnically rather than racially, and offered the following:

I racially identify as Black I guess, but I preferred the term "African" ethnically or nationally as African American, but I prefer to identify as African. I would say the rites process clarified being African, just the whole process was so traditional. I coined myself African-American, but I would say that learning African traditions, reading about different things and just understanding that, I would say, went to that practice and rite, which made me feel strongly that we are African, but we're just in a different location. So yeah, before the rite, I don't know if I identified so strongly with the term African but afterwards, I would say yes, an influence one to be able to say it without saying . . . Oh, I'm African. Like drumming around fire in the dark. Yes, with other women, chanting and singing. Things like that reminded of African spirituality and traditions. (Mewàá)

Recognized membership status. Public recognition of womanhood status and earned cultural group membership, are presented as primary impacts on cultural identity development. Specifically, several Egbe Rites of Passage participants perceived their publicly recognized

membership into the Egbe as a positive change in their family and community statuses. Noted here, select conversations point to positive changes cultural identity fostered by changed social roles and the perceived benefits of belonging to a larger cultural community:

I reminded myself “you're growing up” and going over is a sign that you're growing up. I think that's when everything started to click. The reality set in for me during and after the “going over” ceremony. It really clicked to me when it was time to go over and we had to parade in the Village. I think that is when I realized that my maturity level changed.

(Meta)

Comparably, another participant offered these comments about being publicly recognized as an Egbe member:

It is a sense of elation . . . that was most profound for me. That was very, very special part for me, probably the most significant—because you see the products of all your hard work. I go down every year for the Yemoja Festival now and every year the Egbe designates a captain to make sure the “white girls” are doing what they need to do and to make sure they are OK. Currently I am working with the other Egbe members to update some components and requirements of our Egbe rites—like I feel the women would benefit greatly if they were encouraged to not only develop a marketable item, but also know how to develop a business proposal is extremely important. (Merin)

One participant, in addition to confirming her Egbe membership, discussed feeling supported by the Egbe and other benefits the membership carries. She explained:

At the end of the Bembe we are officially introduced to the community as an Egbe member. Now I know that I have an Egbe that cares about me. We are sisters. Okay, I can go to anybody in the Egbe with the problem no matter how big. If we have problems with

each other at the end of the day, there is gonna be that one lady in the women society that's gonna be like, "You know what, let's put our egos aside and let's just talk, talk to me. (Mesan)

Similarly, another participant shared her most memorable experience was during the “welcoming back” ceremony when she was presented as an Egbe member. She offered the following comments:

My most memorable rites experience points to the times when we were in all white that I discussed earlier. Or the weekend that we all “go over”, so to speak. It was during that time old and new Egbe members were presented together and it was apparent that we all had bonded under the cause of entering the Egbe. We— the members had successfully completed the process to pass and enter the Egbe. That was life-changing.

Several participants discussed other positive impacts from completing rites of passage. These observations indicate a perceived acceptance of rites of passage as a completed training that aids their continued development:

My rites also helped me to have an affinity for children. As an adult now, in general, I enjoy teaching children, mentoring children. I find kids that are lost, but kids also seek me out. And I know it's the energy that I carry. But the reason why that's so important is because of the properties of a child, children are just . . . They're a gift and people need to be more aware of that and put kids on a bit of an altar. (Mejo)

One participant reflected back on her rites training, commenting of her development since age 14, when she completed rites of passage. She explained:

It was a very humbling experience. I learned that sometimes you just have to know when to speak up and when not to and that you don't have to complain about what you have to

do . . . just do it. But back then I was 14 so I complained about everything. It's not one interaction. Just the whole process was very hard for me and a lot of the things that I went through those two years, like I said, I didn't really understand, or apply the knowledge until later. (Merin)

Another participant focused on the importance of being accepted as a woman in her community, and stated:

I think in general, it's just to celebrate going over as a woman. So it's kind of just like, now you're considered a woman by the community and it's an awesome thing that you and the community should be celebrating. (Mẹwàá)

These findings support that rites of passage assume a worthwhile role in establishing positive cultural identity development and learning. Also, to further contextualize cultural identity among these participants, all participants shared varying levels of involvement in Yoruba culture, prior to their rites training. Precisely, all participants reported completing rituals that identified their Orisa guides. Also, eight participants confirmed completion of Orisa priesthood initiation rites, considered among the most elaborate Orisa rituals. Now as emerging adults, who successfully completed rites of passage, these women connected their continued development to rites of passage training. All participants expressed pride in their culture and presented a perceived air of confidence. They shared life successes with professional careers, and undergraduate and graduate academic pursuits. As noted, most participants reported supporting and participating in their community's cultural events, to include support of annual rites of passage training.

Conclusions

This chapter contains the results of the demonstrated consistent analysis process conducted for this study. This analysis connects back to the research questions grounded in rites of passage and Black feminist theoretical concepts. Ten participants were interviewed for this qualitative study. Interview questions were structured to gain understanding of their perceptions of how rites of passage experiences, and related learning during this process, influenced cultural identity development and learning. All participants identified as Black/African American, or Yoruba, between the ages of 18 to 25.

Three levels of analysis supported the examination of this study's data: open coding, selective coding, and theme coding. Twenty-five codes emerged from open codes. Constant comparison analysis and using several of NVivo 12's software coding features discovered 20 selective codes. Auto coding followed on the five distinctions identified among the selective codes, confirming eight motivated codes or themes. These resulting eight themes summarize contributing factors influencing cultural identity and development, among emerging Black/African American and Yoruba females, involved in rites of passage here in the United States: (1) rites as a family tradition, (2) prolific uses of white, (3) scarification, (4) task list of learning activities, (5) traditional dance (6) start of menses, (7) racial identity, and (8) recognized membership status.

The first theme, rites of passage as a family tradition, offers commentary explaining why initiates chose to complete this culturally specific training. Two other prominent themes, prolific uses of white and scarification, highlight those experiences deemed as significant that occur during the separation phase of rites of passage. While a list of learning activities also emerged, initiates discussed the African-centered learning activities they perceived as most important to

their rites training. Finally, perceptions of womanhood and female power included discussions on female Ancestors and the Orisas, and the understood power of group membership and inclusion fostered by completing rites of passage. Chapter Five includes the summary for the critical analysis and discussion of these eight themes.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how emerging Black/African American women, involved in rites of passage, experienced the rites phases of separation, liminality, and welcoming back. This study also investigated what roles these rites of passage experiences assumed in forging positive cultural identity development and learning. As stated previously, qualitative research methods, often relied on in the field of adult education, support investigations of various aspects of adult learning, such as perceptions of how individuals construct knowledge and make meaning of their experiences (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Centered on details of cultural experiences, this study examined the experiences and perceptions of these women as they reflected on the rites designed to mark their successful transition into womanhood. The purpose of the research is to understand how they perceived these rites of passage experiences, and the roles they understood these experiences assumed in shaping their ongoing development and cultural identity. The following questions guided this inquiry:

1. What are females' experiences with these culturally specific rites of passage?
2. What roles do these rites of passage assume in forging positive cultural identity development and learning?

Varying themes of findings emerged from the qualitative research, which informed these research questions. This chapter examines the findings in relationship to the theoretical frameworks guiding this study: rites of passage and Black feminism informed by Critical Race Feminism (CRF). The chapter begins with a brief summary of this study's findings. The second

section provides an overview of the theoretical frameworks to prepare the reader for the next section which centers on answering the first research question—examining experiences across the three rites of passage phases, in view of the theoretical framework of rites of passage and Black Feminism, informed by CRF.

Discussion addressing this study's second research question follows, and considers participants' responses to questions about race and other cultural identifiers. This discussion considers CRF, specifically Black Feminism, and the literature on Black Female Cultural Identity Development and Learning in the United States, which was discussed in Chapter Two. Lastly, this chapter presents an analysis of how this research informs theory and practice in the field of Adult Education, and suggestions for further research, allowing for the limitations of this study. In ending, this chapter offers a conclusion and a personal reflection on this research process.

Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study explain how emerging Black/African American females experienced rites of passage and what roles their rites experiences assumed in forging positive cultural identity development and learning. The participants of this study, classified as emerging adults, ranged between ages 17 to 25 at the time of their interview, and reported completing rites of passage between ages 11 to 19. In particular, nine participants completed Egbe sponsored rites of passage, and one participant completed her rites in a private home. An Egbe, in the Ifa/Orisa tradition, represents a society in which membership requires the completion of a rites of passage program.

As stipulated in this study's participant selection criteria, all rites activities operated under the supervision of a Yoruba priestess. All participants confirmed their rites training began

with periods of seclusion, where Egbe initiates described two separate seclusion weekends, while the participant completing rites in a private home described a three-day seclusion period.

This study investigated experiences of women involved in rites of passage that uphold the Ifa/Orisa tradition, with study participants reporting engagement in the three above-mentioned rites of passage phases. Recapped next are descriptions of assorted experiences, labeled as significant, that occurred across each rites phase (separation, liminality, and welcoming back), which scholars agree exist as being natural processes for every person (Adinku, 2016; Babatunde, 1998; Brookings, 1996; Crentsil, 2015; Hill 1992; Moors, et al., 2013; Piert, 2007; Pratt-Clark, 2013; Steegstra, 2005).

The findings, as discussed in the last chapter, first highlight the fact that part of the orienting context of the study is that these young women had grown up with significant female relationships in their family traditions and as a result had significant female role models who supported their initial involvement in the rites. The next three findings center on their learning from the three phases of the rites: separation, liminality, and welcoming back, whereas the last set of findings focuses on their overall learning.

During the first rites phase, the separation phase, where participants prepare for learning (which comes in the liminal phase), participants discussed taking part in ritual bathing using omeiro. For most, the ritual baths enhanced bonds with their supervising priestess and other initiates in their group. However, one initiate stated that her first bath made the rites process seem real, and confirmed that she was officially starting something new. Also, during separation, all participants experienced the requirement to dress in all-white clothes, and Egbe initiates reported that white body powder and / or white body paint were also required. The one participant completing rites in a private home described that in addition to the white clothing

requirement, she was confined to an all-white room, and given very limited access and movement about the house. All but one participant experienced scarification rituals, also shared as a significant rites experience. The only initiate not participating in this ritual stated she was afraid of the pain, but remains confident she will get her marks in the near future.

During liminality, or their learning phase, participants described learning focused primarily on Yoruba culture, that centered on the Yoruba language, their sponsoring Egbe, legends about the Orisa, the Iyami, and Queen Moremi, and female Ancestors. They described other learning activities that stressed proficiency with basic life-skills, such as: personal hygiene, making and marketing an item, cooking, outdoor survival, sewing traditional African outfits, and basic childcare. They presented these tasks as learning supporting their continued journey into womanhood, while enhancing skill levels that would also benefit their families and communities. Also, the nine participants completing Egbe rites put emphasis on the requirement to construct a grass skirt, by hand, primarily, because they were also responsible for harvesting the grass needed for its construction, as well as assemble it by hand. This specific task, described as significant, mainly because the grass skirt served as primary attire for the traditional dance, learned during their training, and later presented as part of the welcoming back ceremonies.

As rites of passage designate starting and ending points (Gennep, 1960), all participants of this study concurred they were aware that the welcoming back phase and its associated rituals marked the end of training, and a celebration of their learning. Welcoming back phases and rituals played out as a highly celebrated occasion for all participants, and as a common practice, are attended by family and community members. They expressed this as an exciting time overall, but some of the Egbe initiates described being anxious about the requirement to present a traditional dance, they had learned during training, to their community. The welcoming back

phase welcomes and reincorporates those completing training, back into their communities, but in elevated social roles. This phase also emphasizes important roles that families and communities assume in rites of passage practices.

In exploring the role rites of passage experiences undertaken in forging positive cultural identity development, this study considered varying qualities of cultural identity development, understood as change overtime. This study found completing rites of passage established positive changes in cultural identity development and learning among all participants, as they acknowledged completing rites of passage marked positive changes in their development. Precisely, nine participants, completing rites of passage as adolescents, recognized the advancement from adolescence to emerging adulthood as positive changes in their cultural identity and development. To add, participants detailed rites experiences that required learning and participation in culturally-specific activities. These activities included, but were not limited to, (1) use of Yoruba language, (2) constructing and wearing traditional African dress, (3) the Gelede (4) learning about the Iya Mi and Queen Moremi, and (5) other learning that involved African traditions, and spirituality. Collectively, these learning experiences about Yoruba culture and the Orisa tradition, showed as positive influences on cultural identity and development. This section provided accounts for the general findings of this study. Before examining the findings of the study in relationship to the two research questions, I first provide an overview of the theoretical frameworks that informed the study.

Intersecting Theoretical Frameworks

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, two intersecting frameworks inform the study. The first, the rites of passage framework itself speaks largely to the first research question, while the second, Black feminism informed by critical race feminism speaks largely to the second research question about cultural identity development. An overview of each is provided here.

Rites of Passage

Announced in early scholarship, three distinct phases; Separation, liminality, and welcoming back distinguish rites of passage (Gennep, 1960, Turner, 1974). Scholars argue that these rites phases exist as natural processes for every person (Adinku, 2016; Babatunde, 1998; Brookings, 1996; Crentsil, 2015; Hill 1992; Moors, et al., 2013; Piert, 2007; Pratt-Clark, 2013; Steegstra, 2005). Moreover, a rites of passage framework advances the phases of separation, liminality, and incorporation, each with its distinct educational activities, and rituals (Hill, 1992; Moors et al., 2013; Pratt-Clarke, 2013). Dating back to the Mystery System of Kemet (James, 1954, 1986), rites of passage endure as cultural traditions, passed along from one generation to another, serving as markers of transition and personal development across the lifespan (Babatunde, 1998; Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2010; Robinson, 2013; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Hill, 2002; Peteet, 1994; Reagan, 2005; Williams, 2013).

Moving forward to the late 1970's, Black/African-Americans adopted the African-centered model of rites of passage, in countering a recognized lack of cultural rites of passage in American society (Brookings, 1996; Hill 1992; Monges, 1999; Moors, et al., 2013; Piert, 2007; Pratt-Clark, 2013; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). Important scholarly agreement exists on the importance of the connections assumed by family and community in one's development (Adinku, 2016; Babatunde, 1998; Crentsil, 2015; Mibiti, 1974; Nwoke, 2012). Unequivocally,

rites of passage, or life cycle rituals, are explicit moments in which cultures create, organize, transmit, and bestow meaning (Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1974).

This study is grounded specifically in rites of passage, managed by those involved in the Ifa/Orisa tradition, practiced by some Black/African Americans in the U.S. Although the Ifa/Orisa tradition assumes the classification of an Indigenous African spiritual tradition, understood as marginalized and oppressed here in the U.S. (Hucks, 2014; Regan, 2005), a critical announcement supporting African-centered rites of passage, claims a viable role of spirituality in human development. Clearly, Richards (1990) suggested that people of all ethnicities in the United States rely on spirituality. Further, she maintained that “Africans survived the middle passage, the slave experience, and other trials in America because of the depth and strength of African spirituality and humanism” (p. 207). Examined in this study, African-centered rites of passage, informed by the Ifa/Orisa tradition, exhibited its focus on self-development, and espoused an African-centered view, emphasizing African spirituality and history. Scholars recognize that rites of passage training espousing African spirituality and history, show potential for empowering African-American girls and women (Berry & Rese, 2013; Pratt-Clark, 2013; Monges, 1999; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). Of utmost importance to this study on the influence of rites of passage experiences on cultural identity and development, lie the descriptions study participants provided that connected their rites experiences to their family and community. According to hooks (2015), cultural traditions and values, upheld by a family and community network, instill a positive sense of identity.

The rites of passage framework appropriately corresponds to this study as it allowed an examination of the experiences, as described by the participants in this study, to discuss their experiences across each rites phase. Further, participants also identified which experiences they

perceived as most significant. This study relies heavily on Reagan's (2005) position that rites of passage exist as accepted forms of experiential learning (Reagan, 2005), transmitting African cultural values to cultural identity development (Hall, 1992, 1997). Subsequent sections of this chapter discuss the findings unveiled in Chapter Four. These findings, presented as they connect to the research questions, are foregrounded in the theoretical frameworks: rites of passage and Black feminism, informed by CRF.

Black Feminism, informed by Critical Race Feminism (CRF)

Linked to Black Feminist scholarly positions, notions from CRF (Closson, 2010; Rodriguez, 2016; Wing, 1997), and perceptions of Andersen and Collins (2015), hooks (1984), and Dillard (2002) supported the analysis of this study's findings. First, as espoused by CRF, this study placed women of color in the center, rather than the margins of this debate about their rites of passage experiences (Wing, 1997). Therefore, CRF, linked to Black Feminism as a framework (Rodriguez, 2016), assumed a key function in advancing the conversations and discussion of this study on cultural identity development and learning among females that identify as Black in the United States.

Black feminist theoretical concepts and critical cultural theories occupied important positions in this study involving Black/African American adult females (Dillard, 2000, 2012; Hill-Collins, 1996). As this study examines the influence of culturally-specific experiences, Black feminist scholar Dillard's (2012) notion of Endarkened Feminist Epistemology is relevant here. Dillard (2012), proposed that Endarkened Feminist Epistemology differs culturally from White feminism, primarily because it overlaps culturally constructed notions of race, class, gender, and other identities (p. 59). Further, Dillard's (2012) focus on the importance of women of African ascent to remember those things we learned to forget (p. ix), closely aligned with this

study. She argues that colonization fueled the entanglement of diasporic genealogies and that these strongly influence the identities of women of African “ascent” throughout the world (p. x). This postulation brings attention to the focus of this study, which examined Black females’ experiences, good, bad, and indifferent, and how these experiences shaped their identity development and learning.

Additionally, Hill-Collins (1987) emphasized the significance of motherhood-daughter relationships in Black culture, and upheld important concepts of “motherhood”, from an African perspective, informing an Afrocentric view on Black motherhood (p.4). According to Hill-Collins (1987), the following viewpoints on an Afrocentric perspective on Black motherhood, assume relevancy to this study on Black female learning and development: (1) Motherhood in African religions, philosophies, and social institutions represents continuity; (2) African cultures view motherhood roles as interwoven and supported by community; and (3) African-centered views on motherhood suggest that the experience of motherhood impacts Black females with a base of self-actualization, status in the Black community, and cause for social activism. Also, according to Hill-Collins (1987, 1999), slavery disrupted this described West African family structure, exposing slaves to Western views on race and gender, thereby identifying all Africans as inferior beings. Slavery introduced challenges for Blacks as how to best continue traditional Afrocentric values under a powerful and oppressive regime of racism (Clarke, 2004; Hill-Collins, 1987; 1999; Hucks, 2014), resulting in an African-centered view of Black motherhood to include “blood-mothers, other-mothers, and women-centered networks” (p. 4). More important, the African-centered view of motherhood, whether “blood-mother, other-mother, or community other-mother, can be invoked by Black women as a symbol of power” (p.6). According to Hill-Collins (1987), girls identify with their mothers, and feminine behaviors

results from girls' connections with adult female role models, emphasizing how an African-centered view of motherhood is actualized through Black mothers' activities as role models. More important, these concepts of Black motherhood underpin learning and development experiences transferred in rites of passage and their associated rituals (Koukoui, Hassan, & Guzder, 2017; Monges, 1999; Piert, 2007; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). Precisely, Black mothers in Black communities, perceived widely as powerful figures, contribute positively to the rites process and the communities they represent (Koukoui, Hassan, & Guzder, 2017; Monges, 1999; Piert, 2007).

Research Question 1:

What Are Females' Experiences with These Culturally Specific Rites of Passage?

The first question asks: What are females' experiences with these culturally specific rites of passage, during rites phases of separation, liminality, and incorporation? Responses to this question described an assortment of required rites of passage rituals, these women participated in and completed, as outlined in Chapter Four. This discussion of these shared experiences are framed with knowledge of both the literature relating rites of passage and Black feminism, as informed by CRF.

While rites of passage designate starting and ending points (Gennep, 1960), this study explored perceptions of experiences and their influence on learning across the three aforementioned rites phases. All the participants provided robust descriptions of their experiences with each rites phase. They also reported completing rites of passage, required to acquire womanhood status in their community. These discussions labeled some phase experiences as being most significant and provided next is an analysis of their commentaries as informed by rites of passage and Black feminism frameworks.

The Separation Phase: Preparing for Learning

As previously mentioned, rites rituals during the separation phase include moving the initiates geographically away from their physical home, and stripping them of clothing, hair, or other physical markings of their previous selves (Babatunde, 1998; Grimes, 2000; Pratt-Clarke, 2013; Turner, 1974; Gennep, 1960). This is intended to help the participants to prepare for learning that will happen largely in the liminal phase. All participants confirmed separation rituals requiring them to geographically relocate from their homes. During these time intervals, they were required to dress in all white clothing. Also, the nine Egbe initiates added white body powder and paint, marking them as initiates, while the one participant completing rites in a private home, told that she was confined to an all-white room.

While some interpret that the use of the term “white girl,” when used in this context, has racial connotations, that was not the stated intent. Conversely, its use refers to the Yoruba chromatic system, as the Yoruba have a very rich philosophy of color (not in the racialized sense) _ and the use of paint, predating the colonial era (Folola & Akinyemi, 2016; Oluwole, Ahmad, & Ossen, 2013; Washington, 2005). The color white, when worn, shows respect to the Ancestors (Karade, 1994) and also associates with “peaceful feelings, purity, and kindness” (Folola & Akinyemi, 2016, p. 71), Oluwole, Ahmad, & Ossen, 2013). Further, Yoruba colors, classified according to human dispositions, induce cognitive and sensory responses, create moods, and provide visual (Folola & Akinyemi, 2016; Oluwole, Ahmad, & Ossen, 2013; Washington, 2005). These understandings of the Yoruba chromatic system, support the expectations of More important, those wearing white attire, as with the Egbe initiates, are individuals expected to demonstrate good behaviors (Folola & Akinyemi, 2016; Oluwole, Ahmad, & Ossen, 2013; Washington, 2005Oluwole, Ahmad, & Ossen, 2013). Clearly, within

the Ifa/Orisa traditions, white is worn by those striving to develop and maintain good character (Karade, 1994; Folola & Akinyemi, 2016; Karade, 1994; Oluwole, Ahmad, & Ossen, 2013; Washington, 2005). Oluwole, Ahmad, & Ossen, 2013). This color assignment complements those in training for new and elevated roles in their communities, as they are expected to exhibit good behavior while an “obinrin efun fun.” Negative connotations related to being an obinrin efun fun, or “white girl”, expressed included that the women feeling felt as if they were manual laborers during the festival, offered simultaneously with their rites training. Also, as an “obinrin efun fun”, they were easily identified among the other festival attendees, and often called on by other Egbe members to help with various chores.

The one participant, completing rites of passage in a private home, also described prolific uses of white during her separation phase. However, her most memorable experience was described as the requirement to ring a small brass bell to ask permission to leave the seclusion room, which was all white. She also shared that outside of some of her learning activities occurring in other parts of the house, she was only permitted to leave her white room when needing to go to the restroom.

All study participants confirmed participation in ritual bathing during their separation phases. Those elaborating on their understanding of the importance of ritual bathing discussed bathing in “omerio”, which had been anointed with blessings of elder priests for their continued success. Two participants described ritual bathing experiences as significant, where one participant stated she experienced feeling as if her old self was torn away, as were her clothes for her first ritual bath performed by her Iyalosha. Another stated her ritual bath experience made the rites of passage seem official. Ritual bathing exhibits as an important separation ritual as it

incorporates libations and prayers to the Supreme Being, other deities, and the Ancestors (Adinku, 2016; Crentsil, 2015).

All participants described a separation ritual that adopted the common and culturally sanctioned West African practice of body or tribal scarifications (Babatunde & Oyeronke, 2011; Molla, 2012). Ritual scarification is the culturally sanctioned process of cutting the skin, resulting in patterned scars, post healing, and members of the Yoruba in Nigeria obtain facial scars called “kolo”, expressing a variety of feelings, such as mourning and grief, as well as religious beliefs (Garve, et al., 2017; Molla, 2012). Literally, scarification opens the skin; metaphorically it opens the road to life’s journey (Molla, 2012, p.28). This inference appoints specific aspects of the Ifa tradition, as scarification is overseen by Ogun, a key figure in the trinity of the Ifa Pantheon (Abiodun, 2016; Fabre, 1985; Hucks, 2014).

Some of the Egbe Rites of Passage participants confessed to being afraid of the pain, and anxious when it was time for the ritual. However, they described feeling supported by the priests and other initiates through the ritual. All participants expressed an understanding that this ritual provided them with medicine added to their scars, and prayers and petitions to Oludumare, the Orisa, and the Ancestors, for a long and prosperous life. All participants expressed overall pride with having the marks received from their puberty rites of passage. They explained that the marks represent their rites completion and their advanced social status in their community and an affiliation or membership with a specific cultural group. These separation rituals, aligned with other West African rites of passage traditions (Adinku, 2016; Babatunde, 1998; Crentsil, 2015), served to mark initiation status for these study participants.

During their interviews, some participants proudly showed their marks, and described them as significant rites artifacts. One participant explained she was eager to get her rites marks,

primarily because she was knowledgeable of scarification rituals as a traditional West African practice, stating her ultimate goal was “to complete her rites as close to the tradition as possible”. Some expressed that these rituals gave an official accommodation to their rites experience, while others described positive changes in their cultural identity, as this ritual bonded them to the Egbe, or Orisa community, and Yoruba culture

Significant Experiences in Liminality: The Cultural Learning Phase

The term “liminal” infers a state of waiting, as such, the liminality phase is the time period during rite of passage when initiates receive education and training to prepare them for reincorporation into society, in an elevated social role (Brookins, 1996; Grimes, 2000; Hill, 1992; Gennep, 1960; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). This is the intense learning period, particularly related to the culture of the rites themselves. While periods of liminality vary from several days to up to one year, (Brookins, 1996; Foster, 2017; Hill, 1992; Warfield-Coppock, 1992), participants of this study reported liminal phases lasting nine months to one year. They conferred liminality as the time during their rites when various tasks, required to complete rites training, were finalized. This phase is critical to development as time is designated for intensive training and learning for the initiates (Brookins, 1996; Foster, 2017; Grimes, 2000; Hill, 1992; Gennep, 1960; Warfield-Coppock, 1992).

While the participants in the study primarily talked about learning in groups, instances of individual learning were discussed. In all cases, they described learning environments that emulated the importance of “mother-daughter” learning, as they were supervised by Iyas (or mothers). The priestess or Iyas supervising these rites of passage were described as women in authority and recognized as sitting members of an Egbe. One participant referred to her rites supervisor as her Yeye, or Godmother. These arrangements all describe an acceptance of the

supervising Priestess as mother figures for these initiates, and closely associate with Piert's (2007) study of rites of passage, that pointed to the impact of mother-daughter learning and in Nwoke's (2012) study of Ogoni rites of passage in Nigeria. Mother-daughter learning emerged as a prominent theme in Piert's (2007) study, which connects to Harris's (2016) discussion. Harris (2016) also discussed learning among Black mothers and their daughters, stating that raising a Black daughter sensitizes Black mothers to issues related to Black womanhood. Racism assumed a primary focus in Harris's (2016) study, and is addressed later in this chapter's discussion on race as it relates to cultural identity development.

Similarly, participants in Piert's (2007) study indicated the female initiate's mother served as the primary taskmaster, calling out the important role that Mother-daughter learning plays in development, particularly for Black females. Nwoke (2012) studied the Ogoni's rites of passage. She explained that among the Ogonis, a matrilineal society, a strong affinity exists toward mothers, and was labeled as a cultural value. She observed that during confinement and liminality, this "cultural value", exhibited as primary. This was certainly the case in this study.

Participants involved in this study elaborated on the tasks they were expected to complete as part of their education, and this intense period of learning. These tasks included, but were not limited to, knowing facts related to Yoruba culture, to include histories about the Egbe, and knowing legends about the Orisas, the Iyami, and Queen Moremi. According to Hall (1992) and Reagan (2005), knowledge acquisition about a culture includes learning about that culture's traditions, heritage, language, religion, spirituality, and ancestry (Hall, 1992; Reagan, 2005). Egbe initiates also learned to recite oriki, Ancestral prayers, and required pledges in Yoruba. Nwoke (2012) called out the importance of language to ethnic identity development, and Robinson (1999) defined ethnic identity as a cultural identifier. The concept of cultural

identifiers is expanded on later in this chapter in the section discussing the findings as they relate to cultural identity development.

As an African-centered rites of passage model (Harvey & Hill, 2004; Pratt-Clark, 2013; Monges, 1999; Moors et al., 2013; Piert, 2007), participants of this study described additional learning experiences that focused on self-development, and African spirituality, and as with other models, this approach exhibited potential for empowering African-American girls and women (Pratt-Clark, 2013; Monges, 1999; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). These participants also informed of the expectations to: practice proper feminine hygiene habits, make and sell a marketable item, learn and demonstrate basic cooking skills, sew a traditional African outfit and display basic childcare skills.

Noteworthy, Hilliard, et al., (2016) announced that rites of passage serve as culturally empowering spaces. Moreover, culturally empowering spaces, as modeled in the rites of passage experiences examined in this study, emphasized learning experiences focused on African history and cultural principles. These approaches show improvements with critical consciousness among Black youth and adults (Belgrave et al., 2000), and these Afrocentric scholars suggested that culturally empowering spaces and empowering learning contexts, including African-centered pedagogy, remain critical to Black learners' success (Chapman-Hilliard, et al., 2016).

The Welcoming Back Phase: Celebrating Learning

“Welcoming back” experiences, as shared by this study’s participants, explain encounters they deemed as significant during this phase. The phase is defined as the time designated to celebrating successful completion or rites training and promotion to an elevated social status. These celebrations generally include elaborate ceremonies involving family and community (Alford, 2003; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Pratt-Clark, 2013; Monges, 1999; Moors et al.,

2016; Piert, 2007), and according to hooks (2015), cultural traditions and values, upheld by a family and community network, instill a positive sense of identity. Discussed here, are shared experiences, deemed significant during this rites phase by all study participants.

Bembes. All participants completing Egbe rites of passage, reported attending a Bembe as part of their “welcoming back” ceremony, and described their welcoming back rituals as extravagant, as they occurred alongside much larger festivals honoring Yemoja. The one participant, not associated with Egbe, completing rites of passage in a private home, took part in a Bembe dedicated to Osun, and described her welcoming back rituals as elaborate and significant. Understood, Bembes enhanced the authenticity to these rites practices, as in the Ifa/Orisa tradition, Bembes honor Olodumare, the Orisas, and the Ancestors (Adefarakan, 2008, 2012; Aiyejina & Gibbons, 1999; Karade, 1994). Further, these welcoming back ceremonies aligned to traditional rites practices, as Bembes held in honor of Yemoja and Osun, celebrate and magnify concepts of womanhood and motherhood (Adefarakan, 2008, 2012; Aiyejina & Gibbons, 1999; Karade, 1994). These acknowledgements pronounce an overarching focus and intent of both rites training programs, of supporting initiates with successful transitions into womanhood (Adefarakan, 2008, 2012; Aiyejina & Gibbons, 1999; Karade, 1994).

Traditional dance. Consistent with traditional African celebrations, all participants discussed the inclusion of dance, along with food, music, and traditional dress, at their “welcoming back” ceremony. Traditional dance emerged as a motivated theme. The Ebge initiates described varying experiences with the requirement to perform the dance that some had learned during liminality, while some had previously witnessed other women in their families present the same dance during their rites training. Egbe initiates boasted about the opportunity to present their welcoming back dance, in the grass skirts they constructed, as a training

requirement, and some described the experience as liberating. While the Egbe participants expressed a general understanding that bearing one's chest during rituals and certain ceremonies shows respect for certain Orisas, like Yemoja and Osun, who govern womanhood and motherhood (Adefarakan, 2008, 2012; Aiyejina & Gibbons, 1999; Karade, 1994), some experienced anxieties with this requirement. Here again, some described the benefit of feeling supported and encouraged by the presence of other Egbe and family members in attendance. One participant described her public presentation as "the best parts of the whole welcoming ceremony".

The Gelede. As a common modern-day practice, at annual festivals or following the death of an important member of the society, men present Gelede in honor of women, performing an ensemble of song, dance, masks, and costumes (Kruger, 2010). Egbe initiates experienced the Gelede during their welcoming back Bembe, described this ritual as honoring Yemoja, womanhood, and female Ancestors (defarakan, 2008, 2012; Aiyejina & Gibbons, 1999; Karade, 1994). In fact, one participant described the Gelede mask as a significant rites artifact, and explained that certain constraints determine when and where the mask may be visible in public. Equally important, Egbe initiates explained that the appearance of the Gelede honored Yemoja, Egbe members, and Egbe rites of passage initiates. Precisely, Egbe initiates understood Gelede as an expressed symbol of the divine and powerful woman, and scholars identify Gelede as, above all, honoring women or a mystical power harnessed by female and male elders (Babatunde, 1988; Drewal & Drewal, 1988; Kruger, 2010; Willis, 2014; 2017). More important, Gelede appeases spiritually powerful women, elders, the gods and ancestors, and represents a vastly visible artistic expression of Yoruba belief that women, particularly elderly women,

possess extraordinary powers comparable to, or greater than, those of the gods (Kruger, 2010; Willis, 2014; 2017).

Welcoming back experiences, described as culminating rituals for all study participants, highlighted their completion of training. More important, these rituals magnified womanhood, and pointed to positive changes in their cultural identity and development, as evidenced by reintroductions to their communities as changed individuals granted elevated social roles. Given, experiences are understood as a critical component to adult development and learning (Dewey, 1938; Knowles, 1980; Lindeman, 1961; Merriam & Bierema, 2013), and rites of passage rituals exist as accepted forms of experiential learning, through culturally-relevant experiences (Reagan, 2005), and convey African cultural values to cultural identity development (Hall, 1992, 1997). Therefore, the next sections of this chapter present discussions that explore concepts of shifting identities (Hall, 1992), and the impacts of significant rites experiences, assumed in positive cultural identity development among these emerging Black/African American females.

Research Question 2: What roles do these rites of passage assume in forging positive cultural identity development and learning?

In responding to this question, it is important to keep in mind the orienting context of the whole study, and the fact that these young women were from families that emphasized the significance of female and familial relationships. Hence, in what follows, this is discussed in light of the literature. Next, the significant roles and rituals relating to positive cultural identity are considered. Finally, is a specific consideration of racial identity, racism, and cultural identity

Orienting Context and Women's Cultural Identity

The traditional African viewpoint upholds rites of passage communities as sacred organizations, protected and governed by the deities and Ancestors (Adinku, 2016; Babatunde, 1998; Crentsil, 2015; Mibiti, 1974). This African view extended to the African-centered rites of passage examined here, as participants expressed the importance of connections assumed by family and community to their personal development. As noted in the last chapter, in this study participants' identified significant relationships with other female family and community members as primary supports before, during, and after their rites training.

Rites of passage as a family tradition emerged as a theme in the findings of this study. Family tradition, or family culture, describes collective attitudes and ideas passed along by one's parents and Ancestors. This was evidenced in the accounts of nine of the ten study participants, who announced they decided to complete rites of passage because it exists as a family tradition, some describing themselves as a third-generation rites of passage participant. This arrangement aligns with the literature on the impact of mother-daughter learning. Piert's (2007) qualitative study investigated the impact of mother-daughter learning, African-centered learning, and counters to racism, among students involved in rites of passage as part of their high school curriculum.

Mother-daughter learning emerged as a prominent theme in the study, and indicated that mother-daughter learning also plays an important role in identity development. These findings connect to scholarly assertions on the critical importance of Black motherhood in the Black community, and Black mother-daughter learning on cultural identity development and learning (Clarke, 2004; Harris, 2016; Hill-Collins, 1987, 1999; Hucks, 2014). Further, Harris (2016) posited that raising a Black daughter sensitizes Black mothers to issues related to Black

womanhood, where issues of “being Black” and the potential negative impact of the social representations of Black women in the larger society, are better addressed Black mother-to-daughter (p. 37). Piert’s (2007) study indicated the female initiate’s mother serves as the primary task-master, and also recognized the important role that mother-daughter learning plays in identity development, particularly for Black females. The nine women participating in this study who stated they identified with rites of passage at a young age, and it remains a family tradition, specifically noted that it was passed along to them by their mothers.

Conversely, one participant in this study told of a long-standing and respected relationship with her college professor, that began in undergraduate school. This participant described her as “well-accomplished” in African culture and the African Diaspora, and as her primary role model. She told that this professor strongly encouraged her to complete rites of passage. This arrangement agrees with the aforementioned descriptions of Black motherhood in Black communities. Also, this participant explained that she did not just pursue rites of passage for academic purposes alone, but her professor also helped her to realize that rites of passage would offer her an opportunity to experience African culture, first-hand.

Specific Roles and Rites Relating to Positive Cultural Identity

The second research question asks: What roles do these rites of passage assume in forging positive cultural identity development and learning? Responses to this question described an assortment of required rites of passage rituals, these women participated in and completed, as outlined in Chapter Four. This discussion of these shared experiences are framed with knowledge of both the literature relating rites of passage and Black feminism, as informed by CRF.

Wholeheartedly, scholars emphasize that rites of passage support the progression from one developmental phase to another (Gennep, 1960; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Mbiti, 1991; Moors et

al., 2013; Pratt-Clarke, 2013; Turner, 1974; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). Prominent in this study, the pursuit of recognized statuses of womanhood connects to critical scholarly debate which emphasizes the impacts of sociocultural elements of race and gender, and their influence on cultural identity development and learning among Black females (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999; Cross, 1995; Tisdell, 2003). Clearly, findings in this study connected ongoing cultural identity development and cultural experiences, associated with African-centered rites of passage rituals, as practiced here in the U.S., emphasized shifts in their cultural identities. These shifts in identities primarily manifested alongside the rites experiences, foreshadowed by the pursuit of womanhood.

Hall (1992) advanced the concept of “shifts in identities” and announced that “cultural identity belongs to the past and the future, and while cultural identities have a history, they are also constantly transformed and fluid” (p. 274). More than 20 years later, Huck (2014), drew on Hall’s notion of the fluidity of cultural identity, restating “cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture, where one can make some final and absolute return” (Hall as cited in Huck, 2014, p. 9). Also, critically aligned to this study’s findings that address cultural experiences and cultural identity, Huck (2014), advanced that cultural identity development, informed by African cultures and religions, is a means by which marginalized, but culturally related, people are brought together to facilitate their cultural identity development. This concept of “shifts in identities resonated throughout this study’s findings that called out obvious changes in identities.

Subsequent dialogues, outlined by the frameworks of this study, and select literature on and related to Black female cultural identity, further advance these findings, as chronicled during each rites phase. Discussed next, are findings that clearly enunciated significant rites of passage

experiences' roles in forging positive cultural identity development and learning. First, however, important discussion centers on the role that the start of menses assumed in forging positive cultural identities. Although physiological, this developmental process presented as the leading catalyst for positive changes in identities. Clearly, the start of menses sanctified eligibility to pursue rites of passage training processes, a requirement for advanced and formalized statuses of womanhood for these emerging adult females.

Start of menses. While participants exhibited changes in their cultural identity across all rites phases, the first and perhaps most obvious shift in cultural identity was associated with the start of menses, which confirmed the loss of childhood identity. Clearly, the start of menses marked the beginning of their journeys into womanhood. All participants understood the start of menses as the fixed prerequisite to begin rites of passage training, as sponsored by their communities and supported by their families. As detailed previously, the ultimate goals for pursuing rites of passage centered on following family traditions, passed down by other women, and for nine of the ten study participants, gaining membership in the Egbe sponsoring their rites training.

Within the framework of rites of passage, the separation phase confirms a loss of identity for initiates (Alford, 2003; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Moors et al., 2013; Pratt-Clarke, 2013; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). However, the findings of this study conferred that the start of menses imparted a positive impact on the cultural identity development of this study's participants. Specifically, the start of menses confirmed the loss of their childhood identity and marked the beginning of their journey into womanhood. The start of menses, as a clear cultural identifier, exhibited the first shift in cultural identity related to the required criterion to participate in formal rites of passage training designed to foster successful transition into the womanhood. This was

evidenced in the select comments of the participants, echoing the positive anticipation of the start of menses and rites of passage, which confirmed the loss of their childhood identity and marked the beginning of their journey into womanhood. Offered next, discussion of the findings that address the roles rites experiences assumed in building positive cultural identity development and learning. Overall, rites of passage literature, and literature on Black female cultural identity development supports these findings.

Separation rituals. The findings indicated that prior to entering the liminal phase, separation rituals, detailed in the previous chapter, marked the end of puberty for the participants in this study. Clearly expressed, separation rituals contributed to the authenticity of the rites' ceremonies. Further, findings of the study indicated that separation rituals elevated concepts of spirituality and succeeded with garnering support and blessings from the Gods, the Ancestors, and the Orisas, for the new life phase these initiates had embarked upon. Hill (1992) defined spirituality as ways in which the Ancestors in Africa, and later in America, conceptualized to explain the universe and their relationship to it and subsequently govern their relationship to each other, and Tisdell's (2003, 2006) study validated spirituality as integral to meaning-making and understanding the world. As evidenced in the rites of passage rituals examined in this study, spirituality and interconnectedness evidenced as primary tenets (Alford, 2003; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Monges, 1999; Moors et al., 2013; Olade, 2011; Piert, 2007; Pratt-Clarke, 2013). These findings reflect similar studies of African-centered rites of passage, where significant focus was directed at self-development, involved African spirituality and history, showed potential for inspiring positive cultural identity for African American girls and women (Pratt-Clark, 2013; Monges, 1999; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). Finally, scholars debate how cultural identity development relates to learning that fosters a sense of belonging to a culture or group (Cross,

1971; Hall, 1992; Lustig, 2013; Tisdell, 2003). Specifically, scholars agree that cultural identity development relates to learning that fosters a sense of belonging to a culture or group (Cross, 1971; Hall, 1992; Lustig, 2013; Tisdell, 2003), and spirituality is highlighted among tenets of cultural learning (Hall, 1992; Reagan, 2005). including learning about traditions, heritage, language, religion, spirituality, and ancestry (Hall, 1992; Reagan, 2005).

Critically important to this study's significant findings, is the understanding that scarification rituals intentionally leave visible marks of one's successful life phase transitions (Garve, et al., 2017). Use of white clothing, white body powder and paint, a significant finding in this study, describes rituals aimed at marking the beginning of training for entry into a new life phase, where the color white reinforced requirements for good character, and honored the Ancestors.

Other findings of this study indicated that scarification rituals, performed towards the ends of rites training, marked entry into womanhood and societal membership. Specifically, scarification is described as a rite of passage and action that literally and metaphorically "opens" the person up socially and cosmically enabling self-identity through the Yoruba social code (Molla, 2012, p. 28). This inference appoints specific aspects of the Ifa/Orisa tradition evidenced among the findings of this study, where participants proudly described their scars as cultural or tribal markings and associated them with positive cultural identifiers linked to gender. Besides, Hall (1992) and Reagan (2005) agreed that cultural identity is the identity of a group or culture, and while these scarification rituals marked their identity into womanhood, more or equally important, these rituals marked their formalized cultural group membership. Pain, discussed as an afterthought by this study's participants, corresponds with traditional rites of passage models, where some scholars view scarifications as tests for the initiates. Mbiti (1974) suggested pain

creates borders between the old and the new. Moreover, Mbiti (1991) reinforced that puberty rites of passage recognizes development from childhood to adulthood, and most important, those completion of rites of passage gain elevated social roles within their families and communities .

Liminality and cultural learning. In relation to learning activities previously discussed, the participants in the study confirmed participation in varying culturally specific activities during rites training. During the liminal or learning phases, learning about Yoruba culture and experiencing rituals associated with the Ifa/Orisa tradition were prominent. Of significance, the requirement to learn and use the Yoruba language in Orisa prayers, presented as a positive influence on their cultural identity, specifically contributed to their ethnic classification Yoruba. According to Hall (1992) and Reagan (2005), the acquisition of cultural knowledge supports cultural identity development. Also, this process of acquiring cultural knowledge emphasizes language skills, religion, and spirituality (Hall, 1992; Reagan, 2005).

In addition, Huck (2014), posited cultural identity development, informed by African cultures and religions, is a means by which marginalized, but culturally related, people are brought together to facilitate their cultural identity development. This adaptation strongly connects to the findings of this study, primarily because both Black/African American females and Indigenous practices of cultural rites of passage (Reagan, 2005), labeled as marginalized, show primary means of supporting cultural identity development for those involved in rites of passage informed by the Ifa/Orisa tradition.

Additionally, this study's findings illuminated interweaving of spiritual and religious experiences for participants of the study. The considerable time devoted to prayers and offerings to female Orisas, and female Ancestors, produced a positive impact on their cultural identity development. Ancestral veneration, to include Egungun or ancestral masquerade, is considered

essential to Ifa religion (Bascom, 1992; Karade, 1994; Olaitan, 2016). Findings in this study, discussed experiences with Yoruba Egungun ancestral masquerade practices (Willis, 2017), and realized these experiences as influencers of positive cultural identities. These findings discussed the importance of interacting with the Gelede, a masquerade practice first known among the Ketu Yoruba that has rapidly expanded to other Yoruba groups and Diasporic communities (Babatunde, 1998; Willis, 2017). The findings connect positive cultural identifiers to the classification of womanhood. The Gelede, above all, magnifies womanhood and honors women (Babatunde, 1988; Drewal & Drewal, 1988; Kruger, 2010; Willis, 2014; 2017). This study's findings associate the Gelede's role in the community to appease spiritually powerful women, female elders and Ancestors, and gods (Kruger, 2010; Willis, 2014; 2017).

Moreover, scholars remind, that cultural rites of passage, classified as an indigenous African spiritual tradition, remain marginalized and oppressed here in the U.S. (Hucks, 2014; Reagan, 2005). Nevertheless, Richards (1990) made a critically important declaration supporting African-centered rites of passage, asserting the viable role of spirituality in human development. Explicitly, Richards (1990) suggested that people of all ethnicities in the United States rely on spirituality. Further, she maintained that "Africans survived the middle passage, the slave experience, and other trials in America because of the depth and strength of African spirituality and humanism" (p. 207). Examined in this study, an Ifa/Orisa tradition rites of passage, showed a focus on self-development, and espoused an African-centered view, emphasizing African spirituality and history. Scholars recognize that rites of passage training espousing African spirituality and history show potential for empowering African-American girls and women (Berry & Rese, 2013; Pratt-Clark, 2013; Monges, 1999; Warfield-Coppock, 1992).

Racial Identity and Cultural Identity

Other inquiries taken in this study, gathered insights on how participants understood the influences their rites experiences had on their cultural identity and learning. Specifically, they were asked: (1) What role did rites of passage assume in their racial identity? and (2) How did their rites experiences influence their cultural identity development? These findings considered the frameworks of this study and the literature on cultural identity development among Black/African females in the U.S..

Racial Identity. Race and racism, expected to be primary social issues among the participants of this study, did not emerge as that much of a discussion point in the interviews. Rather, discussions united closely the literature addressing the impacts of other cultural identifiers of ethnicity and gender. Scholars argue that cultural identifiers, include, but are not limited to, race, ethnicity, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and physical and intellectual abilities. Literature confirms that the collection of various cultural identifiers manages concepts of oneself (Lustig, 2013; Robinson, 1999). As determined in this study's findings, pursuits of cultural development were of primary interest. In fact, in responding to a specific question that asked how rites training influences the racial identity of the study participants, most prioritized their ethnic and Diasporic identities, as Yoruba over a racial classification. Therefore, ethnic identity was positioned as more important than racial identity, and participants expressed that rites of passage experiences assumed a primary role in their assignments of race. Also maintained here, the backgrounds and experiences, boosted the cultural identifier of ethnicity, thereby minimizing perceptions and interpretations of racial experiences, complimented individual sense of themselves, where Yoruba was the preferred ethnic cultural identifier (Lustig, 2013). While Black racial identity development (BRID) exists

as a component of cultural identity, (Cross, 1971; Phinney, 1996) the findings of this study suggest positive self-identity as nuanced by ethnic or cultural group membership. Clearly the findings indicated that rites of passage experiences fostered their positive cultural identities, expressed as African, Black, Black/African American or Yoruba.

Group Membership. Aligned with Hall's (1992) critical viewpoints on culture and cultural identity, findings of this study called out instances of cultural identity development, as fostered through involvement with culturally specific rites of passage. Evidenced in this study, shared culture resulted from shared history and ancestry that these study participants had in common with other people (Hall, 1992); this accommodation applies to findings in this study that magnified the importance of family, family histories, and cultural group memberships. Clearly espoused, the emerging adult females in this study, completed required learning activities. These requirements offered them cultural experience and measures aimed at achieving recognized statuses of womanhood, defined by Ifa/Orisa traditions, as observed in their families and communities. These findings link to learning experiences reviewed in previous sections of this chapter, and connects with select literature in the field of adult education that suggests a connection of cultural identity development to learning that promotes a sense of belonging to a particular culture or group (Berry & Reese, 2013; Cross, 1971; Hall, 1992; Lustig, 2013; Reagan, 2005; Tisdell, 2003). In fact, formalized group membership is presented as the ultimate outcome in the study. Upon completion of all rites tasks, publicly announced completion of rites training and Egbe membership status (for the nine participants seeking Egbe membership), was revealed as a positive change in their family and societal statuses, and thereby were celebrated as positive influences on each participant's cultural identity development.

Summary

The findings of this study uphold African-centered rites of passage, promote positive life phase development, and legitimize the transition from one phase of personal development to a higher level of human social and educational development. Plainly, the findings of this study confer with values that adopt an African worldview (Asante, 1987, 1991, 2010; Collins, 1998; Merriweather-Hunn, 2004; Mbiti, 1991; Shockley & Frederick, 2010). An African worldview centers on the values of African traditions predicated on traditional African philosophies that predate European and Arab invasions of Africa, European colonization of Africa, and the transatlantic slave trades (Asante, 1997, 1991; 2010; Collins, 1988).

Also, the findings of this study support other scholarly positions (Adams, 2012; 2014; Chapman-Hilliard, 2016; Shockley & Frederick, 2010) that refer to African-centered education in describing educational practices that concentrate on African history and African cultural principles, because these teaching practices yield positive impacts on learning and development among Black youth and young adults. Openly, these findings support rites of passage as a viable tool to appropriately direct African-centeredness (Chapman-Hilliard, 2016), which showed in this study with aiding personal development of these emerging adult females. Overall, these findings reveal the role rites of passage assumed in advancing African-centered education, that bolstered concepts of Black Motherhood, Black female power, and thereby served as positive influences on cultural identity development and learning.

Implications for Theory and Practice in Adult Education

The study and the discussion offered in this chapter offer several implications for theory and practice in Adult Education. This study is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of rites of passage and Black Feminism, informed by Critical Race Feminism. The theoretical frameworks of Black feminism informed by Critical Race Feminism often informs adult learning/development, research, and practice in adult education. Rites of passage have been less common. In any case, this section offers implications for theory and practice within adult education, particularly in relation to these theoretical frameworks.

Implications for Theory

A review of the findings presented in Chapter Four presents several applicable theoretical implications for in the field of education. First, the data supported concepts that rites of passage experiences involved ritual activities and teachings, and marked important phases for the participants in this study. These concepts, supported by the emergent themes, connected to rites of passage experiences described during separation, liminality, and welcoming back phases of their rites training periods. Clearly, rites of passage experiences described ceremonies that removed former identities for the participants of this study and prepared them for successful transitions into elevated social roles (Gennep, 1960). Collectively, these experiences connected as primary influencers of positive changes in cultural identities. This certainly has some implications for theory building in the field, particularly because rites of passage have not been used within the field to discuss the learning or development of Black Women.

Further, the data supported notions that rites of passage experiences provided cultural learning, specific to the culture they strongly identified with. These cultural experiences fostered positive feelings about their culture and aided in their cultural identity development. Openly, this

study accepts notions that rites of passage help participants feel positively about their culture and aim to be positive influencers on cultural identity development (Adinku, 2016; Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2014; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Piert, 2007; Pratt-Clarke, 2013). These notions align with the social issue of racism, and although racism did not emerge as a prominent theme in this study's data, this study clearly supports the notion that hegemonic racism, evidenced by the domination and oppression of African culture throughout the African Diaspora (Asante, 1987; Hall, 1997; Hill-Collins, 1999; Hucks, 2014), supported the development and practice of African-centered rites of passage in the United States (Harvey & Hill, 2004; Monges, 1999; Moors et al., 2013; Olade, 2011; Piert, 2007; Pratt-Clarke, 2013; Reagan, 2005). African-centered rites of passage assumes an African worldview, conveying varying facets of African culture to African descendants in the African Diaspora (Alford, 2003; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Monges, 1999; Moors et al., 2013; Olade, 2011; Piert, 2007; Pratt-Clarke, 2013; Reagan, 2005), and thereby provides means by which marginalized and fragmented culturally-related people share their African identity, African culture, and spiritual traditions (Hucks, 2014).

Also, the data supported concepts on the critical role that family and community assume in adult development and learning, particularly for Black women. Within the phenomenon of rites of passage, scholars also highlight the important connections assumed by family and community in one's development (Adinku, 2016; Babatunde, 1998; Crentsil, 2015; Mibiti, 1974). Precisely, Mibiti (1974), emphasized the importance of a child's birth in African societies, and tells that the birth process begins long before the child is born. This announcement bolsters the significant roles that family and community assume in the individual's social development, thereby accentuating the interdependence of individual development to family, community, and society. As highlighted in Chapter Four, all study participants emphasized the

important role that family tradition assumed in their rites of passage experiences. This is supported by the emergent themes of the participants being supported by significant relationships with other female family and community members, through a cultural lens. The concept of significant female relationships is also confirmed by themes associated with positive cultural identity, where many of the participants mentioned ritual experiences that elevated notions of significant relationships with female Orisas and female Ancestors.

Underlining the African-centered rites of passage framework, this study adopted theories on emerging adulthood, as cultural identity development and learning were examined among individuals also classified as emerging adults (Arnett, 2007). Emerging adulthood, described as a new demographic that is ever-changing, some scholars believe that those individuals in their early twenties have always struggled with "identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and feeling in-between" (p, 69). This definition also finds relevance alongside critical views insisting on the fluid and shifting nature of cultural identity (Hall, 1992; Huck, 2014). Additionally, findings of this study endorse the theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2007), and also consider the critical perspective espousing that personal definitions of adulthood are formed by social norms (Chervinko, Strom, Kinney & Bradley, 2005). More important, the findings of this study considered how social norms differ across ethnic groups and are shaped by standards set forth by a culture, in this case a small subgroup of women's Black communities within the US as part of the African Diaspora, and who are emerging adults. Cultural-specific social norms, as outlined by the Ifa/Orisa traditions set criterion for womanhood clearly had a positive influence on these young women. The significance of such rites of passage from this tradition or any tradition for women of color have not been considered to any great degree within the field of adult education. Dillard's (2012) discussion of Endarkened Feminist Epistemology comes the closest in that she

directly discusses the role of spirituality and spiritual ways of knowing as significant to many women of the African Diaspora, and its implications for teaching research. Nevertheless, even Dillard does not directly discuss the role of rites of passage per se for emerging adults. Hence including this dimension in critical race feminism in relation to adult education could offer implications not only for theory and research, but also for practice.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study connect with the literature on cultural identity development and learning that endorse racial and ethnic identities as prime factors influencing Black female development and learning, and have implications for teaching for cultural identity development, particularly with emerging adults. Scholars in the field of education and beyond insist that heightened sensitivity to racial and ethnic identities enhances teaching among adult educators and learning among marginalized populations (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999; Cross, 1995; Tisdell, 2003). Based on the findings of this study, critical perspectives of cultural identity development age, ethnicity, race, and gender, proved as primary and intersecting influencers of cultural identity development (Anderson & Collins, 2015; Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999; Cross, 1971; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003). The findings of this study advance African-centered rites of passage experiences as commanding allies that resisted hegemonic power that marginalize African traditions and culture. Collectively, these perspectives on identity are significant, as they forge increased understanding of critical perspectives of cultural identity development, to include the impact of intersectionality on identity development.

The African-centered rites of passage in which these young women participated, was a nonformal education program, in that it was not offered in the formal education system within the US. As African-centered rites of passage evolved, scholarly recognition for more uniformity

in their development and delivery (Moors, et al., 2013), still holds merit. The identified need for uniformity in African-centered rites of passage aims to ensure these educational programs maintain a key identified purpose of authenticating our cultural heritage and strengthening Black communities (Hill, 1992; Moors, et al., 2013).

This acknowledgement bears truth for me, as the developer and facilitator of Mate Masie® Rites of Passage. In its next evolution, Mate Masie® will expand its learning experiences about African spirituality specific to include the Ifa/Orisa tradition, while continuing its focus on self-development and self-esteem. Also, Mate Masie® will expand its outreach to serve emerging adult females, in support of their development and learning. Moreover, these program adaptations align with literature on African-centered rites of passage, where uniformity and significant focus on African spirituality and history remain critical to the efficacies of African-centered rites of passage (Hill, 1992; Monges, 1999; Moors, et al., 2010; Warfield-Coppock, 1992).

Incorporating aspects of rites of passage, not necessarily of the same degree could easily be incorporated into other nonformal education programs. For example, instructors and leaders of groups related to different aspects of cultural education, such as through music, poetry, or dance, or other cultural aspects could incorporate aspects of ritual related to the cultural group that is age appropriate and culturally appropriate.

In formal education settings, higher education programs and services, informed by rites of passage framework, hold potential to support an institution's outreach to marginalized and emerging adult students and their families and communities. Such programs, highlighting a rite's concept of starting with and ending, in mind (Mbiti, 1991), reinforces agreed-to academic goals and timelines for both the students and institutions of higher learning. Additionally, programs

framed by rites of passage, would encourage ongoing family involvement, as parents and guardians prove to be viable partners when it comes to the academic success of students (Caro, 2011). Furthermore, for students whose parents are involved in their lives tend to have a more positive college experience (Little and Price, 2013; Caro, 2011). More importantly, rites of passage education emphasizes the benefit of family support for those training and preparing for successful life phase transitions (Brookins, 1996; Warfield-Coppock & Harvey, 1989).

Also, Wlodkowski (2010) called for celebration in learning. This announcement aligns with the rites of passage framework's emphasis on the importance of celebrating successful completion and life phase transitions (Harvey & Hill, 2004; Hill, 1992; Moors, et al., 2013; Oladunjoye, 2012). While celebrating attainment of an academic degree or goal, is common, programs framed by rites of passage calls for participants and their communities to share in the celebration, while honoring cultural traditions.

On a related note, findings of this study also identify concepts of culturally empowering courses (CECs) postulated by Chapman-Hilliard et al., (2016), and Guiffrida (2003), whether they are in nonformal settings or formal settings. Prior discussions on culturally empowered learning established that the existence of culturally empowering spaces and empowering learning contexts, including African-centered pedagogy, are critical to Black learners' development and success (Chapman-Hilliard, et al., 2016; Guiffrida, 2003). Of critical importance to this study, Chapman-Hilliard, et al., (2016) suggested that African-centered rites of passage programs are one way of providing culturally empowering spaces that should contribute to cultural identity formation (Chapman-Hilliard, et al., 2016). CECs are defined as courses that focus primarily on experiences of people of African descent and include African and African Diaspora history courses and Black Studies courses (Chapman-Hilliard, et al, 2016), which would likely be

offered in formal education settings such as universities or community colleges. The Chapman-Hilliard, et al, study established that participation in African-centered coursework contributed to positive cultural identity development for students. Further, this study connects to Arnett's (2000, 2015) emerging adult development theory as a significant number of those participating in the study met age criteria of emerging adults (age 18 to 25). This age of development is marked by adolescents becoming more independent and willing to explore various life possibilities but is also found to be a time where individuals struggle with "identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and feeling in-between" (Arnett, 2015, p, 69). The acknowledgment of emerging adulthood as a separate and recognized life phase further supported the participation of rites of passage during this time of life, given that rites of passage focus on marking transitions from one life phase onto another.

Also, based on the finding of this study, it is also important to point out that rites of passage exist as forms of indigenous knowledge (Reagan, 2005). Precisely, Reagan (2005) aligned Indigenous education and rites of passage with culture, informing that culture contributes to the creation of knowledge. Importantly, some scholars invested in causes to disrupt the marginalization of indigenous knowledge, and advance that indigenous educational experiences require additional bolstering in academic curricula (Adams, 2012, 2014; Asante, 1987; Reagan, 2005). Reagan (2005), broadly considered an adult education scholar, called for expanded considerations to educational customs, primarily related to indigenous and non-Western education. Explicitly he suggests that, although indigenous and non-Western education practices relish centuries of use throughout the world, past traditions and histories of Western educational customs dismiss or delegitimize their epistemological value (p. 62). The findings of the study support his calls for expanded diversity of thinking, practices, and approaches to Western

educational practices within the field of education. More important, Reagan's (2005) positions on ethnocentrism, which is the tendency to view one's cultural group as superior to others, calls for prudence in our approaches to expanded educational thought and perspectives without bias. Reagan's (2005) work on education, adapted to findings in this study, are conceptually related to Black women's cultural identity development. While he includes rites of passage and initiation rituals among details of seven non-Western and marginalized approaches to education, he also reminded that rites of passage engage learning and knowledge acquisition through cultural restoration and transfer cultural values from one generation to the next (Reagan, 2005).

Finally, the findings of this study connect to scholarly efforts, within and beyond the field of adult education, that have provided abundant literature exploring how cultural identity development relates to learning that fosters a sense of belonging to a culture or group (Cross, 1971; Hall, 1992; Lustig, 2013; Tisdell, 2003). Emphasized strongly in the literature and in this study, we are reminded that cultural learning involves knowledge acquisition about culture, including learning about traditions, heritage, language, religion, spirituality, and ancestry (Hall, 1992; Reagan, 2005). Cultural identity, broadly defined, is the identity of a group or culture, and for an individual, self-identity is influenced by one's belonging to a group or culture (Hall, 1992; Lustig, 2013; Reagan, 2005).

Limitations, Strengths and Suggestions for Future Research

This study, as with all research, presented limitations. In addition to discussing these limitations, also offered are ways in which future research could bridge recognized gaps that this study was unable to satisfy. Such limitations offer suggestions for further research.

Limitations and Strengths

This study presented the findings of a study of 10 Black Women as emerging adults and their experiences in rites of passage. While the study was designed to be a strong qualitative research that made use of strategies of verification and dependability, given that there are only 10 participants in the study, it has some generalizability limitations. Qualitative research is meant to study the particular in depth by following the protocols of strong qualitative research, such as doing in depth interviews, and making use of other sources of data (such as observations or documents and artifacts where possible) to enhance the strengths of the findings; this study made use of some artifacts as shared in the last chapter. It is not meant to be generalizable. Nevertheless, qualitative researchers talk about generalizability more from the standpoint of how readers might apply the findings of the study to similar situations. A strength of the study is that it provides enough thick rich description that a reader should be able to determine what might be applicable to similar situations.

Another factor that could be viewed as a weakness of the study is that the study only examines the experiences of women at a relatively early stage of their adulthood. It was interesting to note that these young women talked very little about the experience of racism. This may be due to the fact that they were not asked directly about it enough, or because their experience of rites of passage and the program got them deeply involved with a group that would

act as some protection against the effects of racism. But this would need to be the subject of further research.

Suggestions for Further Research

Here in the U.S. Ifa/Orisa tradition, is also expressed in practices as varied as Santería, Candomblé, Trinidad Orisha, among others (Bascom, 1992; Karade, 1994; Hucks, 2014; Olupona & Abiodun, 2016). As the findings in this study show, the Ifa/Orisa tradition, though marginalized and oppressed, serves as means to bring fragmented and culturally-related peoples together (Dillard, 2002; Hall, 1997; Hucks, 2014). Although considerable literature exists on African-centered rites of passage, future research to unveil and explore other Diasporic identities among emerging adult females, who identify as Black, African, and or Black/African American, is needed in the field of education and beyond. These suggested areas for future research, calls for expanded examinations of Diasporic identities while unveiling power structures that otherwise discourage such conversations.

In light of the literature on African-centered rites of passage, which emphasize positive impacts of African-centered pedagogy, culturally relevant education, and rites of passage frameworks on fostering positive cultural identity development, learning, and thriving transitions studied adolescents (Pratt-Clarke, 2013; Monges, 1999), additional research specific to culturally responsive teaching in higher education is needed. Such research would seek out teaching and learning models that reflect culturally responsive teaching to examine their positive impacts on development and learning. Bearing in mind that culturally responsive teaching "uses the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay, 2010, p. 38), extends the focus of this research study framed on cultural experiences. This suggestion for

further research would refer to Gay's (2010) position of six dimensions that define culturally responsive teaching, as detailed in Chapter Two of this study. Finally, this area of expanded research would reinforce that according to Gay (2010), teachers need to understand how and why culture and difference are vital beliefs for culturally responsive teaching, as these are critical to humanity (p. 38).

Also, given the intense scrutiny and expanded studies on the complexities of development, particularly between adolescence and adulthood, that generated the "emerging adult theory" of adult development (Arnett, 2007), additional research in this area is warranted. Specifically, in the interest of cultural identity development, additional research to examine Diasporic identities is required, to bring into focus, other possible influencers of cultural identity among emerging Black/African American females. As this study pointed out that African-centered rites of passage provide an important function of bringing marginalized cultural groups together, across the Diaspora. Therefore, additional research should examine cultural identity development and learning, and rites of passage, within other marginalized Diasporic communities. This research would reinforce the already established recognition that the transition to adulthood, as generally accepted in developed countries, is long enough to constitute a separate period in the life phase (Arnett, 2007; Smith & Taylor, 2010). Also, this research would provide a platform for marginalized and oppressed identities to enter the conversation on cultural identity and development, as honored in their families and communities.

Finally, additional research, perhaps with this same cohort, over the next five to ten years, to examine existing concepts of womanhood, is needed. First, given the strong influences of family traditions and Black mother-daughter learning, additional research is needed to further explore these concepts and their direct impacts on cultural identity development and learning. In

particular, qualitative research is best suited to understand what meanings are attached to the concept of Black motherhood. Also, qualitative research is well-suited to this examination that would seek to thoroughly understand Black motherhood and the experiences associated with this concept concerning cultural identity development and learning. Also, additional research to unveil new markers of womanhood, in comparison to the earned statuses of womanhood, bestowed them by the families and communities that supported their rites of passage training, is needed. Here, considering the need to gather and correlate data, and the qualities of quantitative research, mixed-method research is suggested. First, such a study would explore influencers of continued cultural identity development and what meaning is associated with learning as espoused by their ongoing involvement with the Ifa/Orisa tradition. Second, such a study would seek out apparent shifts in identities, along their continued life journeys as women involved in the Ifa/Orisa tradition.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand the experiences of emerging Black/African American females, involved in African-centered rites of passage. Also, this study aimed to understand what these culturally specific rites of passage experiences, associated with the Ifa/Orisa traditions assumed in forging positive cultural identity development and learning. Findings of this study connected back to the research questions grounded in rites of passage and Black feminist theoretical concepts.

This study addressed obvious gaps in adult education literature, and other disciplines as well, where studies of African-centered rites of passage are limited to adolescents. However, while studies of African-centered rites of passage, examined for this study, showed a significant emphasis on African spirituality and religions, no literature existed on Ifa/Orisa influenced

African-centered rites of passage. The participants of this study found added value to their rites of passage learning experiences, expressing how these experiences supported their successful transitions from adolescence into womanhood.

The finding of this study overwhelmingly found family traditions as the prime influencers for rites of passage participation. Equally profound were pursuits of the markers of womanhood, as established by the Ifa/Orisa tradition, which governed their rites of passage training. Also, this study found that specific rites of passage experiences had a significant impact on cultural identity development and learning. Exclusively, African-centered learning activities and culturally specific rites of passage rituals embarked experiences that influenced views on Black womanhood and Black female power, both discerned as positive influencers on cultural identity development and learning among the participants of this study.

Personal Reflection

I began this journey with first-hand knowledge and experience with Ifa/Orisa tradition and African-centered rites of passage. Since 1993, my involvement with the Orisa tradition includes successful completion of several rituals, understood as prerequisites to priesthood, while simultaneously garnering experience as a rites of passage facilitator in my community.

While my decision to study Black/African American emerging adult females involved in rites of passage stems from varying elements of personal involvement with the Ifa/Orisa tradition, a primary goal of this journey focused on my desire to explore rites of passage from an academic perspective. I understood that this added knowledge would provide opportunities for expanded conversations about rites of passage, and with varying audiences.

In reflection, internalizing this academic experience, as a rite of passage, helped me make meaning of the many and varied experiences that continue to manifest along the road to my doctorate in Adult Education. First, separation was marked on the day I was officially accepted in this Adult Education program, and from there liminality ensued. While learning had occurred up until this point, liminality or the learning phase from that point forward, has been life-altering.

Academia, for me, presented as a culture or group, and early learning in this adult education program reinforced the importance of learning this culture's language, if I was to be accepted as a member. Also, learning that discussed lifelong learning, and positioned experience as a central tenet in adult education and adult learning, was encouraging. Clearly this learning was the key to my persistence in the program. Followed, was learning of critical issues surrounding development and learning where I was drawn to sociocultural issues, like racism, which I learned oppresses learning and development. However, I was even more encouraged to learn about proven strategies in the field of adult education that combat these. Specifically, I was encouraged to learn that rites of passage, and other forms of indigenous knowledge, showed positive results with fostering development and learning among Black/African American females. I was able to build on this knowledge to explore other critical frameworks that applied appropriately to this study.

Equally important, I learned the value of qualitative research, and am confident that qualitative research provided the most effective means for the participants of this study to share their rites of passage experiences. Also, I learned the critical role I assumed as the researcher in this qualitative study. Explicitly, I was reminded to identify my values and biases that could influence interpretations of this study's research data and the study's outcomes.

One of my most significant findings of this study centers on definitions of Black motherhood. This academic journey heightened sensitivities in this area, and as a mother and grandmother, I was reminded of my familial and universal responsibilities of Black motherhood. As I approach the end of this rite of passage, welcoming back must occur, where I envision my community as embracing this accomplishment and seeing me armored with new knowledge and skills, ready to assume social roles that target positive development and learning for our community and beyond.

This academic rite of passage afforded me interactions with professionals dedicated to positive teaching and role modeling, for which I am forever grateful. Words here do not describe the utmost amount of respect I have for you. The connections developed as a result of this academic endeavor are life altering and proven invaluable in seeing this dissertation come to fruition.

Appendix A: Interview Guide
Rites of Passage and Cultural Identity

1. On which rites of passage (i.e. puberty, marriage, initiation) will this conversation (interview) be based?
 - a. At what age did they complete this rite, and why?
 - b. Did they complete the rite alone or with a group?
 - c. Can you please tell me a story about a significant rites experience?
2. Please elaborate on significant interactions with your facilitator/ supervising priestess?
 - a. Did your facilitator refer to a curriculum?
3. Please tell me about your most significant or memorable rites experiences during the rite's phases of separation, liminality, and incorporation?
4. Study participants will be asked to bring a rites symbol or artifact to the interview and the following proposes questions that will be asked about the artifact:
 - a. Can you tell me a story about how you obtained this artifact/symbol?
 - b. What does it mean or symbolize, and how does this artifact/symbol connect to their cultural identity?
5. Today there are many terms used to describe a person's race. What term(s) do you use to describe your race?
 - a. Please share specific experiences from your rites of passage that influence your choice of the term(s) you use to describe your race?
6. Can you please tell me a story about any spiritual experiences you perceive as directly linked to your rites of passage and the Orisa tradition?
7. Is there any additional detail about your rites experience you care to share?

Appendix B - Field Notes

Date: April 12, 2019

Time: 1:00 PM – 7:00 PM

Location: Southeastern USA

During the participant referral and selection process for this study, one priestess confirmed that her three nieces, completing Egbe Rites of Passage, would complete interviews. She intentionally scheduled the interviews to coincide with a weekend of activities planned in celebration of her 40 years as being an initiated Priestess of Osun, which most of her family would attend. Given the significance of the weekend, and prior interactions with this priestess at other Orisa events, the researcher felt confident with traveling to southeastern USA for these scheduled interviews. The priestess organizing these interviews serves as head of *Ile Tiwalade*, and her home serves as the base for this Orisa organization

The interviews, scheduled on a Friday afternoon, began at 1p.m.. The organizing priestess informed the researcher in advance that her work schedule would not permit her to be present during the designated interview times. However, she assured the researcher that her Ile staff had been notified of my pending arrival and the scheduled interviews. The researcher arrived at the home, located outside of Atlanta, and upon arrival, was greeted on the front porch by three gentlemen. They reported being Ile staff assisting with various events planned for the priestess's celebration. At the front door, the researcher observed Esu. As noted earlier, Esu is an extremely important guardian Orisa, and his usual place in a home is by the door, if not outside. Esu's position affirmed Orisa presence at the home. Following the researcher's acknowledgement and greeting to Esu, the gentlemen extended an invitation to enter the home. Figure 4.6 displays the Orisa Esu.



Figure 4.6 Orisa Esu

Inside, the researcher greeted two study participants and another priestess who was preparing food. The study participants were informed that the third interviewee would arrive around 6 p.m.. Hung on the fireplace mantle was a banner, with the words “Ile Tiwalade”. The interview participants confirmed the following about this location: (1) the home or “Ile” serves as the base for this Osun Orisa organization, “Tiwalade”, (2) Orisa-related events, like classes, rituals and ceremonies occur at this home or Ile regularly, and (3) the home also serves as their aunt’s residence.

The study participants explained that due to the preparations for weekend events, the house would be busy with people coming and going. Therefore, they decided that use of an upstairs room would provide privacy for the interviews. The first participant and researcher then moved to an upstairs bedroom. The room appeared to be a child’s bedroom, as lots of children’s toys were visible. We sat across from one another, on a twin bed, and began the interview.

The first two participants completed interviews back-to-back, but there was at least an hour lag time in between the second and third interview. The researcher returned to the front porch and waited for the third participant to arrive, and while waiting, listened to first recorded interview.

The researcher observed the first two participants as casually dressed in jeans and t-shirts, but the third participant was dressed in all white and wore Ilekes. She informed that prior to arriving for the interview, she had assisted with rituals for two individuals preparing for Orisa initiation, and was the primary caregiver for one of two Obatala initiates, a young 8-year-old female, still in seclusion. However, her aunt planned for another priestess to take her place at the seclusion site while she completed her interview. Reflecting back on attendance at Orisa celebrations, the researcher understands that one's time becomes demanding. The researcher expressed her appreciation for their time and left shortly after completing the third interview.

The next morning, the researcher met other Osun worshipers at the riverfront for a river ritual in honor and praise for Osun. Among a long trail of Osun worshipers, the researcher also paid homage to Osun. After the river ritual was complete, the researcher returned to the airport to catch a return flight home. Figure 4.7 shows the procession of Osun worshipers heading to say prayers at a designated spot along the river. Figure 4.8 shows an elder Osun Priest kneeling to pray and offer honey to Osun at the river.



Figure 4.7 Osun Worshipers southern USA



Figure 4.8 Elder Priestess of Osun Praying at the River

Appendix C - Priestess Letter

Ayotunde Oladunjoye “dba” Sonya Mann-McFarlane
Founder, Imani Edu-Tainers African Dance Company

February 6, 2019

Alafia Iya,

I am writing to request your assistance in identifying potential participants for an important doctoral study that will be completed early this year. The goal of the study is to investigate learning and meaning-making at the intersection of cultural identity development and rites of passage. Specifically, this study will examine the experiences of Black/African American women, between the ages of 18 to 25, who completed a rite of passage supervised by a Yoruba priestess.

I’m hoping that you will be able to help with recommending potential study participants who might be willing to share their experiences with me, the researcher. I will be setting up interviews with study participants at a location of their choice. The interviews will take approximately an hour-and-a-half of the participants’ time. The participants will not incur any expenses or be identified by name in the study.

These interviews aim to explore perceptions of each participant’s experience of the three phases of rites of passage; separation, liminality, and incorporation. There is currently a lack of research related specifically to the rites of passage experience of Black/African American women. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge and help us to better understand the importance of these rites as they relate to cultural identity development.

Your assistance with selecting potential study participants is greatly appreciated, and I will follow up on this letter within one week. However, in the interim, please contact me with questions via phone/text (717-808-0203) or email smannmcfarlane@gmail.com. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ayotunde Oladunjoye / Sonya Mann-McFarlane

Doctoral Candidate

717-808-0203

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