AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE SECOND GENERATION GERMAN

AMERICANS LEAVING THEIR MARK

ON U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION

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by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the sociocultural contexts in which second generation German American students pave their way to educational attainment in the U.S. institutions of higher learning and identify themselves as a unique cultural group in American multicultural and diverse society. Ethnography as a design was in alignment with this study precisely because it focused on the practice of education embedded within distinct sociocultural contexts and by the participants whose identities have been shaped by these contexts. Autoethnography as a complementary method enabled me to describe and analyze my personal experiences as a second generation German American.

Several theoretical perspectives informed this study: sociocultural theory, segmented assimilation theory, intercultural theory, ethnic identity theories, among others. The sources of data for analysis included in-depth, semi-structured, qualitative interviews with 15 participants; extensive field and researcher’s self-reflective notes; and documents and artifacts offered by the participants. Data analysis has resulted in the identification of the following themes and subthemes that speak to the posed research questions: (a) Values and Beliefs, (b) Identity Recognition, (c) Intercultural Mobility, and (d) Educational Values. The subthemes included: temperament, work ethic, tradition, transitioning, assimilation, self-categorized identity, language influence, support, closeness, experiences with coming to America, and difficulties and barriers.

This study contributes to the scarcity of literature on cultural peculiarities and educational attainment of second generation German Americans in higher education. It
assists in understanding this unique group of students and can subsequently help higher education professionals to work to bridge gaps on the journey toward academic success. This study also contributes to the existing theories addressing the nature of cultural identity, its development, its interplay with larger social contexts, and ways in which it is being shaped by and is shaping the sociocultural and educational contexts of second generation German Americans.

The findings of this study signify that German American experiences are dynamic and fluid and do not rely on community involvement to promote a sense of cultural belonging and meaning. Future research on German American identity might specifically examine the physical and mental processes of identity development in German Americans, resilience factors in German Americans who have experienced difficulties in transitioning, or perceptions of dual identity experienced by individuals with a strong emphasis on both American and German aspects of their identities.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history.

— Oscar Handlin

Background of the Study

As I began writing this introduction, I had a tab open for a website to help my mother reapply for her permanent resident green card. I did not find anything unusual about the practice of helping my parents navigate the realities of being German American immigrants in the USA. The tables are turned in this and in many other situations in immigrant families. Children are the link to navigating the processes of adjusting to their new country and functioning as a bridge from one culture to the next. One would intuitively think that a parent would help a child with his or her homework, application to the college, or with the financial aid process. The reality is that many of the children of immigrants help their parents figure out many of the essentials such as applying for citizenship, or reapplying for a lost green card, taking citizenship classes, or learning the language of their new home country. The children of immigrants also need to learn about their postsecondary education process, a system that is foreign to them and to their parents. The extra layer of information that they need to learn on their own to begin the college process is an extra step that makes navigating the college process that much more difficult.
The inspiration to pursue a study on the second generation German American population within the context of higher education is one that is close to my heart. Being a first generation college student and a child of immigrant parents had its challenges, but I had persevered and found myself inspired and curious within the world of academia. I soon found that many amongst my family and social circles within my culture had also been successful in a world that was foreign to the ones who were responsible for guiding them—their parents. I wanted, needed to know more about how cultural groups view educational attainment and foster their pursuit of knowledge within higher education. I became fascinated with understanding how ethnic identity and culture were being sustained by immigrant students as they navigated the unfamiliar system of American higher education. I believe that immigrants have made a great impact on American higher education and continue to be successful. This study tells the stories of how these students journeyed through the U.S. higher education system, with their beliefs, culture, values, and familial integration which may have resulted in educational attainment.

The issues surrounding first generation college students have long been a contested ground for debate and discussion among the stakeholders of higher education.

Nearly 17 percent of entering freshmen were first-generation college students. At the time, higher education celebrated their inclusion, as well as our ability to provide need-blind admissions and financial aid. These students were our success stories; we all pointed to those who, with our help, had pulled themselves up and out. They became part of the story we told about our missions. (Greenwald, 2012, p. 1)

With one in three college students identifying as first generation (Greenwald, 2012), we need to hone in and pay close attention to this population because they are rapidly becoming a large part of our student population. My interest in the experiences of students from immigrant families was enhanced by the studies of first generation
students. In the literature, first generation students are defined as those for whom neither parent attended or graduated from college (Davis, 2010). While that definition does not fit students from German immigrant families, many of the issues identified in the literature do seem to relate. These include unfamiliarity with U.S. higher education culture, practices and processes, language barriers, and socialization. I grew interested in how this literature might inform my primary study.

My own experiences offer an illustration. All throughout my academic career, high school and college included, my primary role in a classroom was to observe, partially because of the obedience that is a part of my culture and partially because I felt insecure in a classroom setting. The more I recall my grade school experiences, the more I can relate to how Davis (2010) described high school graduates from immigrant families: “Graduates emphasized the importance of developing accurate expectations about course content and about necessary academic skills as well as readiness for the more general cognitive development usually associated with a college education” (p. 31). Specifically, during my grade school years, I developed a heightened sense of awareness that instructors had their own way of conducting the course and instructors had expectations of how they wanted assignments completed. By the time I was in high school, I achieved the ability to read my instructors well on how they preferred things were done. Not all instructors were clear and concise about their expectations, so doing well also meant that students needed to be able to read their instructors’ preferences. Instructors who leave such details unspoken “make it difficult for first-generation students, who often take a little longer to get the lay of the land” (Davis, 2010, p. 51).

Typically, first generation college students are found to be low-income and “minority”
students who often require extra support services from a college in order to reach attainment and high achievement. These students also represent a highly racially and ethnically diverse group of persons.

**Problem Statement**

Understanding the experiences of second generation German American students within the context of higher education and how they approach their academic commitments and educational attainment is paramount to this study. Although German Americans “remained the country’s largest single ethnic group, at least as late as the year 2000 when 17% of Americans—42.8 million people—identified themselves as German American and many million more had at least some German ancestry, most today have little sense of ethnic identity” (Ross, 2012, p. 21). The story of my family reflects the essence of what has been recorded in the existing literature about German Americans who “have so successfully overcome prejudices and so fully integrated into American society that most are not regarded as German Americans, but simply as Americans” (Ross, 2012, p. 35). As I examine the contours of my life, I often wonder where my sense of German American identity came from. I am a proud German American, a part of “the American ethnic mosaic” (Ross, 2012). However, at times, I have also felt a sense of estrangement from the group of people with whom I share a cultural heritage, which I believe is a direct correlation to the dark moments in the history of Germany, specifically WWII.

It was my freshman year of high school and I was sitting in my German class. From the open door, I could hear the late-arriving students rummaging through the halls. Our instructor, Frau Schmidt, had just begun her lesson when a young man I had recently
met at a football game peeked his head into the class, saw me sitting there, and asked me if I really had class with Frau Hitler. My face turned red; I was extremely embarrassed and overwhelmed. This is where it all began, the awareness that my being German may not have been looked at favorably, and it became the day that I hid my culture and my ethnicity, ashamed of who I was and what the people of my heritage did. I had never really thought about it before. Of course I knew about World War II. I knew what a Nazi was; I knew that Jews and Germans had a history. However, I did not know that I had a personal stake in this history and I had never before felt ashamed or targeted for being responsible for the actions of my people. Although, I still cannot say that those were my people. My people would not have done such terrible things. I would never have done such terrible things; and yet, I was not there, so I do not know how I would have reacted. I was not there, so how could I be associated with such people as the Nazis? Needless to say, this event shook me to my very core and gave me a completely different outlook on my cultural identity. How does one feel shame for something she or he did not do? Once proud of my heritage, from then on, I hid it and did not answer when asked what my heritage was.

As I matured and entered the realm of higher education, my curiosity about the cultural and educational attainments of German Americans grew immensely. I set it as my purpose to discover more about the group of people with whom I share a cultural heritage and who have so successfully integrated in and contributed to American society. Certain values and beliefs hold different levels of importance for various cultural groups. How much do we really know about specific immigrant groups in the U.S.?
My grandparents were intelligent people. My paternal grandfather and grandmother had property in Germany. My grandmother, being the daughter of the mayor of their town, had significantly more schooling than the norm for a woman born in her time. Yet, when she came to the U.S., she worked as a cleaning lady and my grandfather as a janitor. My maternal grandfather and grandmother became factory workers due to their lack of English and the necessity to provide for the family. In my grandfather’s house, there was a small plaque that read “Hier wird Deutsch Gesprochen,” or in English, “Here we speak German.” Now that both of my grandparents have passed, I have a new-found appreciation for that plaque; it was their pride, pride in their heritage, their language, and their country. They may have immigrated to the United States, but they did not lose their identity.

When one stands with one foot in her cultural group and the other foot in the mainstream of American society, how does she understand herself—as German, American, or German American? How does she understand her place within the realm of higher education? Children of immigrants can be first in their family to attend college. This often brings about many firsts for their immigrant family. Zhou (1997) called this group “the new second generation” (p. 64). The new second generation technically refers to the children of contemporary immigrants. The emerging literature on the new second generation, however, has discussed not only U.S.-born children—the true second generation—but also contemporary immigrant children who have arrived in the United States before they reach adulthood. (Zhou 1997)

An apparent lack of studies focusing specifically on the new second generation German American students has prompted this research.
Research Purposes and Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the sociocultural contexts in which second generation German American students pave their way to educational attainment in the U.S. institutions of higher learning and identify themselves as a unique cultural group in American multicultural and diverse society. According to Rosenblum, Zhou, and Gentemann (2009),

the educational impact of American diversity has been the subject of considerable research, such that there is an increasingly fine-grained understanding of diversity’s effect on a broad range of factors, such as student satisfaction, the tendency to stereotype, knowledge about self and other, general cognitive development, critical thinking, commitment to racial understanding, and skills that support democracy (see Astin1993; Chang 2001, 2002; Gurin 1999; Gurin et al. 2002; Hurtado 1999, 2001; Hurtado et al. 1998; Milem and Hakuta 2000; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Smith et al. 1997; Smith and Schonfeld 2000; Tanaka 2002, 2005; Whitt et al. 2001). (p. 338)

Studies such as this can shed light on the relevance of America’s diversity to ways in which students develop a sense of self and others. I aim to gain a better understanding of second generation of German American students’ experiences within the larger context of an American life and uncover the nuances of German American identity as an “unsettling paradox” expressed by Kazal (2004) as follows: “If ours is an age of multiculturalism—as many Americans like to think—then how is it that the nation’s largest ethnic group has gone missing from the national scene?” (p. 2). This study seeks to answer this question and thereby contribute to a deeper understanding of the overall effects of American diversity within the context of higher education.

The following research questions guide this study:
1. What are the traditions, beliefs, and values of second generation German Americans that distinguish them as a cultural group amidst American diversity?

2. What are the sociocultural contexts in which second generation German American students develop a sense of their ethnic identity?

3. How do these students approach instances of acculturation, assimilation, social integration, social distance, or stereotyping, should such occur in their educational and/or social settings?

4. What value do these students place on education and how do they succeed academically in higher education?

From a methodological standpoint, this study employs ethnography and autoethnography as qualitative research designs and traditions that seek a “holistic understanding of how individuals in different cultures and subcultures make sense of their lived reality” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 193).

**Significance of the Study**

Even though much research has been done on how and why children of immigrants can be successful in academia, there is still a lack of studies focusing on specific ethnic groups such as German Americans. Therefore, this study makes primary and substantive contributions to the scarcity of literature on cultural peculiarities and educational attainment of second generation German Americans in higher education.

This study assists in understanding this unique group of students and has the goal of subsequently helping higher education professionals to work toward bridging the gaps on the journey towards academic success. Some studies suggest that “affiliating with
one’s ethnic culture as one navigates life in the new country or in college, paradoxically, may enhance one’s ability to engage in higher education institutions and subsequently to attain positive educational outcomes” (Nuñez, 2004, p. 2).

Finally, this study contributes to the existing theories addressing the nature of cultural identity, its development, its interplay with larger social contexts, and ways in which it is being shaped by and, in turn, is shaping the sociocultural and educational contexts of second generation German Americans. Qualitative and, in particular, ethnographic studies allow for an in-depth exploration of individual lived experiences within the social contexts. In this regard, this study offers a unique account of German Americans sharing their cultural beliefs and values; their experiences of acculturation, assimilation, and social distance within the mainstream American society; and their pathways to educational attainment within the U.S. higher education system. My goal was that, as a result of this study, readers will develop a more enlightened view of who and what German Americans are and what they have managed to accomplish in America.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

*September 1984: My son Eric is fourteen when I move with my children across the country to the state of Washington. He brings a new friend home from school, who asks me about being German. “Does this mean you are a Nazi?” I can’t breathe.*

— Hegi, 1997

**Introduction**

“The educational impact of American diversity has been the subject of considerable research” (Rosenblum et al., 2009, p. 338). Yet, there is an apparent lack of studies on the impact of some immigrant groups of European ancestry on American education, and German Americans are no exception. An exploration of the German American immigrant experience, specifically second generation German Americans, can deepen the understanding of American “diversity’s effects on a broad range of factors such as student satisfaction, the tendency to stereotype, knowledge about self and other, general cognitive development, critical thinking commitment to racial understanding, and skills that support democracy” (Rosenblum et al., 2015, p. 338).

Early on in my college career, I found myself lumped into the category of first-generation student, like many of my peers who were the first in their families to attend college. But are we all the same? Have we not come from remarkable backgrounds and stories of survival and dynamic journeys across oceans to be here? Perhaps we are too concerned with neatly categorizing the immigrants of this country into a first generation classification. However, we are far from a neat categorization and it will only prove
beneficial to understand each group individually; each immigrant group and generation is best understood on their own terms.

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, the United States saw the influx of massive numbers of immigrants from European nations such as Ireland, Italy, Germany, Russia, Poland, Hungary, and Slovenia. It was during this same time that the settlement of immigrants in urban centers provided opportunities for sociologists to develop theories about group interaction, ethnic inequality, and assimilation. (Waters & Jimenez, 2005, p. 122).

Immigrants are responsible for the makeup of the U.S. population and they bring their unique values, skills, beliefs, and contributions to American society.

This study focused particularly on German Americans leaving their mark on American education. The review of the literature is structured around the following major themes: (a) an overview of German immigration to the U.S. and the contributions of German Americans to American society and education; (b) German Americans: culture and identity; (c) students from immigrant families; and (d) theoretical perspectives on ethnicity, subjectivity, and educational attainment.

“The Silent Minority:” An Overview of German Immigration to the U.S. and the Contributions of German Americans to American Society and Education

German Americans have been recently labeled as the “silent minority” to designate America’s largest yet rarely mentioned or studied ethnic group.

Forty-six million Americans claimed German ancestry, more than the number who traced their roots to Ireland (33 million) or England (25 million). In whole swathes of the northern United States, German Americans outnumber any other group. Some 41% of the people in Wisconsin are of Teutonic stock. Yet despite their numbers, they are barely visible. Everyone knows that Michael Dukakis is Greek-American, the Kennedy clan hail from Ireland, and Mario Cuomo was an Italian-American. Fewer notice that John Boehner, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Rand Paul, a senator from Kentucky with presidential ambitions, are of German origin. (“German-Americans,” 2015, para. 3, 4)
One might wonder why German Americans are rarely mentioned as a distinct ethnic group within a multicultural milieu of the United States and why this group does not draw the closer attention of researchers and scholars. The immigrant experience epitomizes America, and American education reflects the influences of theories and pedagogical practices brought to the U.S. by various immigrant groups. In this regard, the study of German Americans and their impact on U.S. education can be indispensable and will be examined throughout the chapter. An apparent lack of studies on the first and second generations of German Americans leaving their mark on American higher education made this ethnographic study even more imperative.

**German Immigration to the U.S.**

The manner by which immigrants came to the U.S. has differed through the centuries. However, one thing is certain; bolstered by perseverance and determination, each generation of immigrants has undertaken a lengthy journey to get to their destination. “Immigration to America calls to mind images of millions of Europeans crowding into eastern port cities, struggling to get ahead, to escape the slum and carve out a better life, either in the city itself or on the frontier” (Fogleman, 1996, p. 1) The immigrant experience of German Americans is replete with stories of survival and courage. Having skills that were transferrable to other areas could have made it easier for them to assimilate into the middle class and, therefore, assimilate into the U.S. more quickly than other groups. Opportunity also came with the Homestead Act of 1862 (Fogleman, 1996). Many Germans were industrious and had an aptitude for farming so they traveled west where they were promised 160 acres of land for free.

While it is self-evident that the immigrants sought opportunity, and that many sought some kind of freedom, the degree to which they left behind the Old World
or brought some of it with them is debated. When did they become Americans? What kind of Americans did they become? Or did America become them? (Fogleman, 1996, p. 1)

While the Germans continued to seek interests that suited what they knew best, they also sought to become a familiar fixture amongst the American people and blend in as best they could while keeping their heritage at their center (Fogleman, 1996).

The American Dream was open to German immigrants, the land where money supposedly fell from trees and opportunities seemed endless.

There seemed to be no limit to the growth of America. America was by now well known as das Land der unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten, or the land of unlimited possibilities. German immigration after the Civil War continued at an annual rate of 130,000. This was due to the wars of German unification, military conscription, as well as various related pressures on the civilian population, all of which contributed to the desire to immigrate. (Tolzmann, 2000, p. 222)

Throughout the history of German immigration, many German immigrants received sponsorship to immigrate to the U.S. from families that made the journey before them and moved in with other German families until they had enough money to provide for their families on their own (Sudendorf, 2012). Germans helped one another to immigrate to the U.S. and settled commonly in New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, and St. Louis.

Unlike nineteenth century immigrants from many other places, Germans frequently arrived with at least some capital, literacy, or artisanal skills—sometimes all of these. Even German peasants tended to have picked up more sophisticated farming techniques than their counterparts from other countries. (Ross, 2012, p. 23)

German Americans experienced biases in their new home country primarily because of WWI and WWII, often referred to as the anti-German hysteria. “Some individuals, however, did experience harassment due to their ethnic background, and the war’s revelations of Nazi atrocities contributed to the reluctance of many to advertise their German heritage, a reluctance that continues to this day” (Kazal, 2004, p. 261).
This left the children and grandchildren of immigrants to develop a different sense of their cultural identity as they grew up. Kazal (2004) explained that the German American experience appears “idiosyncratic.” Kazal went on to elucidate that the transmission of culture from one generation to the next was directly impacted by the political mayhem in Germany.

Many, like my own family, settled in what was then Romania but were asked to leave their homes and belongings and find a new place to settle. Women, children, and the elderly were all herded into horse-drawn wagons and traveled to find a place of acceptance after being unwillingly evacuated from their villages (Sudendorf, 2012). Many died or became ill during their travels and there was barely enough food to eat other than what they might have taken from various farms along the way (Sudendorf, 2012). World War II left Germany completely devastated, and many familial accounts of the time include stories of theft, destruction, and violations. “Russian soldiers penetrated and plundered the land and shipped everything back home. This was the custom of defeated lands from earliest Old Testament days” (Zavada, 2012, p. 42). This is the reality of what became of many German people during and after the war. “Young, attractive daughter Ilse was repeatedly raped by whole groups of Russian soldiers; again, this is the fate of women of defeated lands dating to age-less times” (Zavada, 2012, p. 46). Once occupying their homeland, they were now practically refugees. They were, however, survivors, and they knew how to keep their families together in times of chaos.

The advent of the Third Reich in 1933 led to the emigration of more than a million Germans to escape tyranny and persecution. Altogether, two hundred thousand came to the United States. The new arrivals deeply enriched American society from technology to the arts to politics.” (Tolzmann, 2000, p. 317)
However, it was not without conflict that German immigrants made the U.S. their home. “A retreat from public German identity carried out on so wide a scale could not help but have some impact on private expressions of German-ness” (Kazal, 2004, p. 192). In a time of American nationalism after WWII, German immigrants began to retreat from their origins and embrace an assimilated American identity:

Esther Schuchard Browne had a tie with German background through her German-born mother’s correspondence with relatives in Germany; nevertheless, “I thought of myself as an American, first of all.” Browne, like Eichman, claimed this identity among her contemporaries during her grade school years: “I used to think I was American, and then they said to me, ‘You’re not American—you’re, you’re German!’ I am not!” she would reply. Even George Beichl, whose interest in German culture eventually led him, in the 1970s, to the presidency of the German Society, recalled that he would call himself an American, while also referring to himself as being of German descent. (Kazal, 2004, p. 233)

Even with all the contributions of German education, technological advances, business and industry, German Americans suffered great humiliation and persecution during World War II.

German Americans continued to suffer ethnic intimidation and harassment during World War II, when more than 10,000 innocent German Americans were interned in concentration campus. Not surprisingly, German Americans “opted for a submerged ethnicity, limiting the celebration of their heritage to the closed spaces of family, church, and cultural organizations, many of which were screened by the FBI.” (Tolzmann, 2000, p. 120)

In order to understand the contributions that Germans have made to American culture, one must understand the enigmas that Germans present to themselves and the rest of the world.

Why does a society that prizes security and order and that seems to have a rule for everything not set a speed limit on its superhighways, despite the increasingly high number of automobiles that use these roads? How could a culture that produced such inspired musicians and artists as Bach, Beethoven, Goethe, and Schiller and such profound philosophers and scientists as Kant, Hegel, Heisenberg, and Einstein fall prey to the barbarities of the Nazis? (Nees, 2000, p. 1)
Although there have been many contributions to society and culture through music, industry, and culture, the German culture remains rather ambiguous. Whose German culture should we study?

Do we mean the culture of the relatively young German nation, whose borders have changed several times in the last hundred years, or do we mean the culture of all the German-speaking peoples? The latter would have to include the Austrians, the great majority of the Swiss, and isolated groups of Germans as far east as the Volga and as far south as the Seven Mountains region of Romania, not to mention the German-speaking people in Alsace-Lorraine and Luxembourg. (Nees, 2000, p. 7)

Yet, the real driving force behind it is its underlying ethic, which is a strong sense of social responsibility and a desire for consensus that, together with the market structure, work to create a pragmatic balance between economic growth and the common social good. From this perspective, the free-market style of capitalism found in the United States appears too driven by greed and selfish individualism. Germany’s underlying ethic of social responsibility is directly related to the German sense of duty, which is manifested in a company’s obligation to do more than simply produce goods and services. (Nees, 2000, p. 98)

With strong regulations of systems and values placed in different areas for German culture than would normally appear in American culture, it is sometimes difficult to understand the paradoxes this would create for someone who represents with the German American identity.

The American Association of Community Colleges (2012) described the American Dream as each new generation enjoying a better standard of living than their parents. Immigrant children become the ones entrusted with making something of themselves and fulfilling the promise of the generations that have come before.

The bridge between the immigrant and American world was precisely what parents worked to achieve through their children. For parents, pursuing the “American dream” meant working hard at their businesses and providing for their
families. For their children, that dream could be achieved through education.” (Hohn & Mohammed, 2012, para. 9)

**Immigrants: Making the U.S. Their Home**

Unlike some immigrant groups, particularly Italians and east Europeans, “most Germans came to the United States in family groups with the intention of making America their permanent home” (Ross, 2012, p. 23). The fact that these family members traveled together across the Atlantic with the intention of starting a new life contributed to their success as a cultural group. “Immigrants’ sense of self can be derived both from being members of their ethnic in-group and their country of residence” (Hannover et al., 2013, p. 175). When members of many ethnic groups immigrate to the U.S., they often find enclaves of cultural distinction where they could live surrounded by others from their culture. Equally important is an association between cultural assimilation and immigrants’ well-being. The balance of integrating into a new culture while not leaving your culture of origin behind involves the idea that assimilation is of great significance to the immigrant population (Angelini, Casi, & Corazzini, 2015).

German immigrants were “better attuned to the environment they were entering in America than any other immigrant group” (Carlson, 2003, p. 79). Perhaps it was that many immigrants made their new language a priority or their resourcefulness when it came to finding opportunities to work (Carlson, 2003). Their resourcefulness and discipline may have allowed the assimilation of German Americans in the U.S. higher education system to occur very smoothly to a point where they could be unrecognizable as immigrants. (“German-Americans,” 2015). Hannover et al. (2013) maintained that previous studies on acculturation strategies and on ethnic identity “converge in that immigrants or ethnic minority members with separation strategies or in-group focused
ethnic identities are worse off than their counterparts who retain both ethnic in-group and national culture in their strategies or identities.” (e.g., Altschul, Oyserman, & Bybee, 2008; Andriessen & Phalet, 2002; Berry et al., 2006; Oppedal, Røysamb, & Sam, 2004; Oyserman et al., 2003; Phinney et al., 2001; Trickett & Birman, 2005; Vedder, Van de Vijver, & Liebkind, 2006)” (p. 177).

To understand a culture of people, one needs to have a sense of their values, norms, beliefs (Kolinsky & van der Will, 1998). The ideas of culture and cultural themes can best be explained as the values that are most important to a particular group; for Germans it is the significance of education, order amongst things, clarity and compartmentalization amongst a reverence for privacy and independence (Nees, 2000). You may also find a different communication style for Germans than most Americans; while Americans are concerned with being democratic and well liked, Germans are more concerned with their accuracy and credibility (Nees, 2000).

**German Influences on American Higher Education**

The American educational system from kindergarten to university was deeply influenced by and patterned after German educational models:

In the 19th century, many more began to attend German universities, and upon their return they exerted a strong influence in terms of introducing German educational ideas, methods, and practices. German influences were also strong at Johns Hopkins University, which was founded in 1876. Almost all of the members of its faculty had obtained their doctoral degrees in Germany. Stanford University’s first president, Professor Jordan, who had studied in Germany, chose as a motto for his institution: “Die Luft der Freiheit weht,” or “Freedom is in the air,” a reference to academic freedom. (Tolzmann, 2001, p. 70)

The philosophy of the German universities, according to Röhrs (1995), was dictated by the pursuit of scholarship for its own sake. The most significant fruit of this new identity, the classical German concept of the university, defined
the mission of scholarship as the quest for truth within the framework of methodologically organized research. (p. 12)

German universities, for all intents and purposes, were models that the American university system could build upon. Röhrs (1995) discussed the influences of German universities, how strong they were, and how American universities such as Cornell, John Hopkins, and the University of Michigan mimicked the German university model. These influences were the research base of a University, the introduction of the seminar style to the classroom, and the emphasis on teaching and developing the professoriate. The tradition of German academic freedom comes from the deep rooted ideas of freedom in education; the freedom of teaching and learning comes from the German distinctions of Lehrfreiheit, which can be described as the freedom to teach how one sees fit and Lernfreiheit, which addresses the students’ freedom to choose and pick (Röhrs, 1995). The importance of education to Germans cannot go unnoticed. Occupational success and education go hand in hand. “Most employers will not even consider someone for a job who does not have the proper education and credentials. In addition, for Germans, having a formal education means great respect as well as high status” (Nees, 2000, p. 44). Nees (2000) claimed that educators in Germany are highly respected and paid handsomely for their positions, whereas in the United States, business is more of a highly-paid and well-respected sector. Menacker (1979) noted:

Public employment, which absorbed most of the 5% of the population completing higher education, carried a life-time guarantee of civil service security and status. University graduation was the ticket to entry into the social and economic structure of German elite society. (p. 409)

This explains why Germans, even those who immigrated to the U.S., had such a respect for higher education and educational attainment in general.
The cultural tie to education shows that education is deeply embedded within the German way of life, in Germany and also within the immigrants’ experience in the U.S. The reforms in German higher education in the 19th century “augmented the authority and prestige of the professoriate, while at the same time linking both the universities and the academic profession to the state” (Altbach, 2011, p. 231). The global well-roundedness of German education is an example of how Germans place importance on a holistic education.

Educated Germans have been raised to think and analyze historically; the American who learns the rudiments of this way of thinking and talking will earn respect and credibility from them. Not to do so is to run the risk of being written off as simply another uneducated American who is ignorant of the more important things in life. (Nees, 2000, p. 9)

Simply put, the Germans are a people who are concerned with obtaining an education and concerned with making educated contributions. Hagy and Staniec (2002) emphasized the importance of immigrants and their children to the American education system. Their study showed that “among high school graduates, immigrants are, in many cases, even more likely than natives to look to public institutions for access to higher education” (p. 390). It should be of great importance to higher education whether immigrants and their children succeed through higher education because they contribute to a large portion of the labor force in the U.S. (Center for American Progress Immigration Team, 2014).

**German Americans: Culture and Identity**

**Culture**

German Americans retain their unique culture through organizational involvement and cultural events, language schools, and social involvement (Kolinsky & van der Will, 1998). There are many definitions of culture based on the differences of the disciplines
providing the definitions, whether anthropology, sociology, or psychology. For purposes of this study, culture deals with “learned and shared human patterns or models for living, day-to-day living patterns. These patterns and models pervade all aspects of human social interaction. Culture is mankind’s primary adaptive mechanism” (Damen, 1987, p. 367). When applied to our diverse and multicultural American society, however, we find that the understanding of culture differs considerably and is influenced by diverse and often contending ideological perspectives. For the purpose of this study, identifying the definition of Kultur, the German term, is essential:

In German, Kultur came to signify intellectual, spiritual or artistic areas of creative activity that contributed to the self-enhancement of an individual, or group or the whole nation by remaining aloof from the common purposes of social, political, economic or technical life. In English, culture and civilization have been perceived as complementary aspects of social organization and development. (Kolinsky & van der Will, 1998, p. 2)

Clearly, the Anglo and German understandings of “culture” differ. How might Kultur affect the German immigrant experience? According to Schmuck, Kasser, and Ryan (1999), there are many similarities between German culture and the U.S. culture. Some of the cultural differences they cited are Germany’s less capitalistic, less individualistic, and less heterogeneous society than the U.S.

Schmuck et al. (1999) found that German students were generally less extrinsically oriented than the U.S. students. Their study has implications for the reasons for the success of German students and the motivation behind it. With the juxtaposition of German Kultur within the environment of American culture, German immigrants settled close to each other in proximity so there were fewer problems of assimilating to their new cultural environment. They still visited the German taverns and shopping districts and worked together in the same factories. Through their unity, they kept their
cultural backgrounds alive and well within their new environment. “As far as economic, social, political, and cultural matters are concerned, the majority of German immigrants and their descendants have not only been fully integrated into the American mainstream, in many respects, they have even co-created it” (Adams, 1993, p. 37).

Being German American is a very personal thing. We want and we find external independence here, a free middle-class way of life, uninhibited progress in industrial development, in short, political freedom. . . . We live according to what is customary in America, but we hold dear our German customs and traditions. We speak English, but we think and feel in German. (Adams, 1993, p. 37)

Adams (1993) stated that although the German Americans adapted and adopted new ways of life, their hearts remained the same, forever clinging to the culture of their homeland. Old world customs and traditions remained present in their homes.

**Ethnic Identity**

Ethnic identity “refers to a self-view that deals with a shared sense of identity with others who belong to the same group” (Schmuck et al., 1999, p. 175). German Americans as an ethnic group have their unique sense of identity. The idea of ethnic identity is not lost. It shapes all aspects of international relations as well as foreign and domestic policy, and political and economic perspectives (Kolinsky & van der Will, 1998). Still to this day, Germany remains the most generous to those seeking asylum and shelter from Eastern Europe and beyond (Kolinsky & van der Will, 1998). The ethnic identity of the German people has been a greatly shaped throughout their history by both exclusion from and inclusion with other cultures (Kolinsky & van der Will, 1998).

German immigrant ethnic identity was shaped by the way they were viewed in the U.S., which, in turn, was shaped by anti-German sentiment after the two world wars. The
identity issue that many immigrants and children of immigrants faced was one of a response to the backlash of the anti-German mayhem of WWI. Kazal (2004) explained:

The fall of public German-ness had consequences that extended into the 1920s and beyond. While some German organizations took tentative steps to reassert a public presence, they never again acted with the aggressiveness of the prewar years . . . German immigrants reached for new definitions of self that downplayed their German ethnic heritage. These new identities were shaped by a number of forces, included mass culture, the more conformist, 100 percent American’ nationalism ushered in by the war. (p. 10)

Many German Americans still struggle with exploring their cultural identity and, although much time has passed, there seems to be a silence in this cultural group (“German-Americans,” 2015, para. 3). The re-emergence of pride in German American heritage “has taken place in modest steps over the span of many years. Heritage societies continue to blossom across the U.S. and new interests in German history and language have taken root, as have efforts to address the injustice in the past” (Tolzmann, 2001, p. 127).

More Americans can trace their ancestry to Germany than to any other European country; yet German ethnicity has a “remarkably low profile” (Kazal, 2004, p. 2). The historical turmoil of WWI and WWII had profound effects on the perceptions of German immigrants in the U.S:

Although Lady Liberty may have worn a German visage, Americans have not always greeted German immigrants with the sympathy of fellow countrymen. From the beginning, the customs and language of German immigrants subjected them to at least some prejudice from other groups, especially Americans of British origin. (Ross, 2012, p. 2)

No other large immigrant group was subjected to such a pressure to abandon ethnic identity for their new, American identity as the Germans (Kazal, 2004). German immigrants twice saw their country of origin enter into a war with their homeland. This
and the stigma of the Third Reich and the Holocaust contributed to further abandonment of their identity (Kazal, 2004) “Anti-Germanism in America expressed itself through the passage of legislation that directly targeted what had been held to be the foundations of German ethnic institutions: the German language, education in German, and the German-language press” (Holmes, 2013, p. 40). Germans in America were boxed into a place where they were stripped of the most important part of their public identity—their language.

Kazal (2004) emphasized the importance of identifying the unhyphenated phenomenon, introducing the difference between self-identification of European American and American:

Unhyphenated identity seems linked in part to a family’s longtime presence in America. European American identity on the other hand, is grounded in an immigration saga seen as perhaps “the defining American experience”; ethnic identities become “ways of claiming to be American.” (p. 279)

Ethnic interests also crystallized around such cultural issues as prohibition and pride in the fatherland. But World War I raised the price of biculturalism too high. Interest-based ethnicity among the Germans faded abruptly; culture-based ethnicity faded more slowly under the impact of prohibition, the co-opting of much that had defined German culture, and the passing of the first generation keepers of German institutions. Traits attributable to German descent remained and were passed on within families, but the sense of common identity vanished (Conzen, 1979, p. 614).

In terms of German ethnic identity, there is a definite dividing line between Germany and America. Hegi (1997) found:

While several people I interviewed had thought a lot about what it meant to be German in America, others had to dig deeply as they spoke of their ambivalence . . . Our cultural identity seems to shift with time, leading to uncertainty and
Holmes (2013) suggested:

Concentrated pockets of this first-generation, more sensitive and less receptive to processes of assimilation than those of the second-generation, thus believed they had been given the task of preserving “Deutschtum” in America and maintaining the meaningfulness of German ethnic traditions for coming generations of German-Americans. Their efforts not only promoted pride in German heritage, but they also enabled the American public to conceive of the German-American as a homogenous whole, often ignoring the deep socio-political and religious divisions that existed therein. (p. 32)

Warikoo and Carter (2009) maintained that “scholars and researchers should first outline which aspects of culture matter, when and how those cultures are linked to ethnicity/race, and when that ethno-racial cultural identity is activated for students” (p. 385).

Nesteruk, Helmstetter, Gramescu, Siyam, and Price (2015) identified parental attitudes as a significant contribution to ethnic identity formation. These researchers elaborated on parents being the primary source of language and culture knowledge for their children. In order for a culture to thrive and be transmitted to future generations, there must be a community to nourish and foster growth. A sense of common identity is the lifeblood of a cultural community.

Lukas Foss (as cited in Helgert, 2014), a famous composer and German American immigrant, used musical expression to share his immigrant experience: “This immigrant experience can be understood as both a negotiation of multiple identities and an ambiguous relationship with the United States, and is expressed in music through text, preexistent melody, musical style, instrumentation, and other factors” (p. 315). Foss, born as Lukas Fuchs, changed his name to a more Americanized version once he arrived in the U.S. Nees (2000) explored the guilt of many Germans due to the history of the
World Wars. Nees noted that many Germans more closely will identify with their local regions rather than their country as a result of the shame of a tainted history of their country.

**Language and Identity**

Language is an integral part of one’s cultural identity. One can infer from the research that retaining one’s original language allows one to maintain his or her cultural identity. But is language the primary determinant of cultural significance? Warriner (2007) claimed that the assimilation of ethnic minorities through eradication of their languages and cultures is “not a distant memory but a continuing reality” (p. 345).

Warriner compared ideologies about language and the discourse of immigration with the lived experiences of individual learners that highlights a complicated relationship with belonging and exclusion in the U.S. Warriner noted that English proficiency, credentials, and test scores do not result in participation in society in the U.S. and immigrants are unsure exactly what does. Some immigrants stay isolated in their ethnic groups, and some branch out. “Despite a clear preference for English as their dominant language, most participants emphasized that their heritage languages connected them to their heritage cultures and influenced their sense of ethnic identity” (Nesteruk et al., 2015, p. 473). The participants in the Nesteruk et al. (2015) study discussed a sense of not fitting in during their years of growing up, but after lengthy struggles, they eventually negotiated between their culture and American culture.

Language acculturation and acquisition in the United States “appears to be overwhelmingly one-sided, even if American English contains many borrowings from other tongues, indigenous and immigrant; we still understand the English of the British
and they ours” (Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 864). English is widely spoken not only through the Americas but also throughout Europe. Language offers an example of another way that assimilation has taken place amongst American immigrants because many do come prepared to speak the language. Or, do they prepare enough so that, not proficient, they “get by” with enough English to navigate their way through important tasks and blend in? Although German Americans remain connected to the German language through German language schools and social connectedness, many formal German language programs through public schools throughout the U.S. have been discontinued due to the lack of participation and funding (Weiss, 1982). This has made it more difficult for the German language to thrive and survive in the U.S. Weiss (1982) reported:

The situation at Columbia is a prominent example of German’s sharp decline as an academic discipline at institutions around the country. The problem has been attributed by German scholars to reasons ranging from demographic changes and the general drop in the study of foreign languages to an apparent failure to make the subject relevant to a new generation of students. (para. 3).

Weiss further observed that before WWI, German was the leading foreign language studied in the U.S.

**Students From Immigrant Families**

Today, the children of immigrants constitute one tenth of the American population and one fifth of those under 18 (Waters, Tran, Kasinitz, & Mollenkopf, 2010). Therefore, understanding how they are integrating into American society is both theoretically important and a key policy issue. It is important not only to understand trends for the second generation as a whole, but why some of its members are succeeding and others doing poorly. What factors lead the children of immigrants to do better than their parents and what factors lead to downward social mobility? (Waters et al., 2010, p. 1168)

By their appearance, German immigrants can hardly be distinguished from many other White European immigrants, which makes them “culturally and racially similar to
American ethnic core groups” (Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 845). However, there are distinct
cultural values that German Americans have retained throughout the history of their
American immigration. In order to better understand the cultural peculiarities of German
Americans, one needs to distinguish between the generations of German immigrants.

The First and the Second Generation

While children who are born abroad are literally considered “first generation,” as
immigrants, the treatment of six-year-old arrivals as “second generation” is consistent
with social scientists’ recognition that “immigrant children adapt to an extent that makes
explained that the second generation refers to children of contemporary immigrants, the
as immigrant children who arrived in the U.S. before adulthood but were foreign born. It
is important to understand this distinction because intuitively it may seem that first
generation is what we used to describe those born in the U.S. to immigrant parents. For
the purpose of this study, I used Zhou’s (1997) definition of second generation
immigrants.

It is the second generation who often assume the role of language negotiation and
greater social interventions:

Students’ sense of accountability served to guide students’ emotional and
academic responsibilities, particularly as students articulated how their future
roles as children of immigrants and professionals would benefit their family and
alleviate their overall economic struggles. Students utilized their intuition and
awareness to indicate when their families’ were unstable or in crisis. These roles
are likely to remain within students’ lives in the future. Parents’ limited
proficiency in English and their challenges in negotiating social and medical
services as they age are likely to require parents to be even more reliant on their
children. (Yeung, 2011, p. 93)
Yeung (2011) investigated the experiences of children of immigrants in navigating higher education. Not only are these students creating better lives for themselves, but they are also entrusted with the lives of their family members. They remember that their family came to the U.S. for a better life and risked much to make it all happen.

College students in the U.S. do not always identify with a specific ethnicity and often do not know of their cultural heritage. Tanaka (2009) found that a large percentage of White students in the U.S. cannot trace their identities to a particular nation in Europe and are not able to “name the shared meanings of a particular ethnic culture. Each time Latino, Asian American, and African American classmates describe their families’ ethnic histories, it is the European American student who feels dissociated” (p. 82).

In higher education, immigrant students may be placed in the category of an entire first generation college student population. However, such categorization does not reflect an accurate picture of the students’ ethnic diversity. First generation college students are unique and should be recognized for the culture and ethnicity that they come from.

“Immigrant families need to be understood in terms of their unique history and culture, the immigrant experience, and adolescent development generally” (Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000, p. 535). Davis (2010) maintained that it is important for institutions to know how many first generation immigrant students they have in their student body. Davis cited managing “limited resources” as a reason to identify accurate numbers.

Baum and Flores (2011) pointed out some differences in accessing higher education:

Their difficulties are frequently compounded by inadequate information about college opportunities and how to access them, cultural differences, citizenship issues, language barriers, and, too frequently discrimination. By contrast, other
immigrants find the doors to U.S. higher education wide open and surpass native white youth in enrolling and succeeding in postsecondary education. (p. 172)

Parental Influences Shaping Student Experience

Children of immigrants often feel a sense of owing their parents for the opportunities they are fortunate to have within higher education and beyond:

Feeling a sense of indebtedness, education was a way for the children to give back to the families and communities that helped to push them toward success. With professions in such areas as medicine, law, social work, education, and public health, many students had an expressed desire to help their communities through their choice of degree programs. (Hohn & Mohammed, 2012, para. 10)

These students wanted to give more because of their opportunity for upward mobility. Parents and their children may experience a reversal in their roles; “the child is expected to serve as translator and mediator in the public world. A dissonant acculturation process diminishes the ability of parents to provide critical guidance” (Piedra & Engstrom, 2009, p. 272). Parents often gave all they could to help their children succeed until there was nothing left for the parent in return, and they still do. To this day, many adult students return to school after they have provided an opportunity for their children to receive a higher education (Davis, 2010).

Schuller (2015) found that there was a “systematic association between parental ethnic identity and child education. The contribution of parental identity measures to explain differences within the second-generation population is substantial and goes beyond ethnicity, years-since-migration, or socioeconomic family background effects” (p. 901). Schuller’s study identified the strong connection between parental influence and the ethnic identity formation and education of children of immigrants. Importance is placed on language formation and upkeep within the home. “Overall, the results point at integrated, rather than separated or assimilated family environments to be most
conductive for educational success of the second generation” (Schuller, 2015, p. 965). The more the parents integrate their ethnicity and culture into their children’s lives, the more the children will be educated about their ethnic identity and the more comfortable they will be with their identity.

Children of immigrants are fulfilling not only their own goals but those of their families and their extended families. “Essentially, children of immigrants are significantly influenced by the optimism of parents who likely came to the United States in search of a better life and the elusive American Dream, and, therefore, also have higher average expectations” (Wells, 2010, p. 1682). Additionally, “their sense of obligation may be further enhanced by awareness that their parents did not have the luxury of pursuing their own educational and occupational aspirations” (Yeung, 2011, p. 29). Driven by the sacrifices that their parents made for them to have a better life is something that children of immigrants consider when they navigate their educational achievement.

There is a belief that immigrant families are much stronger in their support systems than non-immigrant families. Fuligni (2007) found that “those who place a stronger value on familiar support, assistance, and respect are more motivated academically and have higher educational aspirations” (p. 98). With the support of community and family, students are more likely to have consistency in their academic, social, and emotional lives, keeping their goal of educational achievement in focus. Dorner, Orellana, and Jimenez (2008) studied how children helped negotiate for their families through language and translation. They emphasized that children of immigrants value relationships, family composition, and helping the family through translation. Something to consider is that the act of translation for important everyday tasks to help
the family could be useful in their own lives, personal, academic, and career (Zhou, 1997).

For many immigrants, relocating to the United States means leaving one cultural universe and entering a new one, a life transition that, unlike other forms of life transitions, can span decades and affect subsequent generations (Piedra & Engstrom, 2009). Immigrant families must grapple with a distinct set of cultural adjustments. Aside from adapting to a new society, immigrant adults rear children in a cultural context that is different, sometimes vastly so, from the one in which they themselves were socialized, and often that context includes speaking a language other than English (Piedra & Engstrom, 2009, p. 2).

Immigrants come to the U.S. at varying ages and times within their educational careers. Thus, assimilation occurs at different rates and times:

By attending U.S. schools, the children of immigrants experience an accelerated acculturation process, often putting them at a linguistic and cultural advantage over their parents. Therefore, parents who lack the personal and community resources to keep up with their children’s acculturation are decisively disadvantaged in maintaining an influential role in their children’s lives. (Piedra & Engstrom, 2009, p. 274)

According to Lehmann-Willenbrock, Allen, and Meinecke (2013), Germans as a people tend to be less comfortable with uncertainty than their U.S. American counterparts, and they very carefully analyze problems and think of all options compared to U.S. Americans who may find quick solutions. The study by Lehmann-Willenbrock, et al. (2013) suggested that German students are more concerned about the problem while U.S. students are concerned about the solution. This one trait of Germans may not have changed through the generations. Considering this trait of Germans as well as the trait of being highly disciplined, students of German descent do not necessarily prefer ambiguity
and tend to lean towards procedural environments. German students are particularly well suited to a college environment that may make them ideal candidates for higher education attainment (Schmuck et al., 1999). Fuligni (1997) found that students from immigrant families received significantly higher grades than those of their non-immigrant peers, even though they came from families where their parents were not familiar with the American school system and had limited English language acquisition.

A more significant correlate of their achievement was a strong emphasis on education that was shared by the students, their parents, and their peers . . . Apparently, the motivation and effort exhibited by first and second generation students enable them to overcome their more limited exposure to the language. (Fuligni, 1997, p. 360).

Furthermore, Fuligni’s study showed that even when students’ ethnic background was controlled, students who identified as immigrants placed greater prominence on educational success than their non-immigrant peers. Strong motivation was cited as a relevant focus on why students were so successful.

The Issues Surrounding Student Experiences

There are quite a few barriers that the students from immigrant families encounter, including educational differences, parental influence and support, community and culture, and socioeconomic differences. “Demographics in American higher education are changing dramatically. A recent study by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) reveals that 11.3 million people ages 16–26 (one in four) are first and second-generation” (Hohn & Mohammed, 2012, para. 1). Part of the problem is that higher education does not see immigrants as a targeted population:

Although ethnicity is a highly salient characteristic in the opinion of all campus members—students, faculty, and administration alike—neither faculty nor administrators think of immigrant students as a group. In their numerous data
collection efforts, campuses collect little to no data on immigrant status. (Gray, Rolph, & Melamid, 1996, p. 13).

If educators and administrators do not prioritize distinguishing the importance of this population to higher education, then we will not know how they continue to move towards attainment in higher education. “When pressed, respondents typically described immigrants as doing better than other students. Although immigrants are perceived as succeeding within higher education, the institutions serving them are encountering challenges linked to immigration” (Gray et al., 1996, p. 14). Perhaps these are challenges one faces when various groups of immigrants are not recognized as a unique and special population that must be targeted specifically. If educators and administrators want to improve access, outreach, and attainment, they need to know the population of students they are serving, especially when they encompass roughly half of the student body. Just because one cannot tell that a student is an immigrant or the child of immigrants by the color of their skin, mother tongue, or other obvious identifying features does not mean that one should give up on targeting this population in order to serve them better.

Gray et al. (1996) found “fragmentation” as a reason that institutions chose not to target immigrants as a special population. The majority of institutions believed that they would be further fragmenting or discouraging cooperation across groups if they were to provide special services for a particular group.

Educational Expectations of Immigrant Children

More than one in seven families in the United States is headed by a foreign-born adult. Children of immigrant parents are the fastest growing segment of the nation’s child population (Capps, Fix, Ost, Reardon-Amerson, & Passel, 2005, p. 1). However,
we seem to be making educational attainment harder for our immigrant families because of the way our system is built:

The lives of immigrant children, then, are structured by deep contradictions that seriously compromise their future well-being. Newcomer immigrant students enter an education system shaped by school reform policies that fail to consider their particular needs or realities. In the No Child Left Behind high-stakes testing climate, immigrant children are expected to achieve educationally in ways that are contradicted by the realities of academic language learning in American classrooms today. (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009, p. 328)

Additional barriers for children of immigrants include a lack of understanding of the U.S. higher education system, low English proficiency, and racism (Behnke, Piercy, & Diversi, 2004).

Nevertheless, children of immigrants place high expectations on themselves for succeeding at school. Studies, such as Goyette and Xie (1999), Hao and Bronstead-Bruns (1998), Portes and Rumbaut (2001), and St. Hilaire, 2002, that have examined the educational expectations of immigrants have generally supported this concept and have also found that children of immigrants have high expectations for higher education, most often higher than non-immigrant peers. Higher education is thus of great importance to the immigrant community.

Kilpi-Jakonen (2011) found that children of immigrants “display a great deal of educational resilience in terms of their higher continuation propensity to general upper secondary education” (p. 96), and German Americans are no exception in this regard. Their adaptability and flexibility in negotiating each of the various teaching styles of instructors and discipline make them ideal students within the American University. Educational resilience could be a prominent explanation for the success of the immigrant
and children of immigrant population within the context of U.S. higher education as we look for motivating factors of success.

Questions remain. How important are immigrants for higher education? How can U.S. higher education benefit from the immigrant student population?

Rosenblum et al.’s (2009) research revealed significant commitment among incoming students to the value of a multi-ethnic student body: “Students who were the children of immigrants expressed this value most strongly” (p. 337). Rosenblum et al. explained that second generation students from immigrant families make up a large portion of the U.S. higher education population when it comes to enrollment. While conducting interviews, the authors found that some second generation students criticize their first generation immigrant classmates for not speaking the English language or integrating themselves within the institutional culture. Rosenblum et al. (2009) discovered: “The children of immigrants—who are themselves the source of much of the diversity in American higher education—work hard to avoid engagement across difference despite their expressed desire for that” (p. 347). The reasons why they avoid such engagement remain unclear. This study sheds additional light on the phenomenon.

What is different about German American students when compared with other populations of immigrant college students? “Given the high premium placed on education by the German American community, it is no surprise that there have been a number of eminent educational reformers among its ranks” (Ross, 2012, p. 33). This community of learners may come to United States higher education with a high standard of prior education; their parents may have received a quality higher education experience. “American higher education, too, would not be what it is today without the influence of
German Americans. German immigrants were present on American college faculties from at least the early nineteenth century” (Ross, 2012, p. 34).

In studying the academic achievement of German Americans, it is necessary to understand the culture within their current environment as well as their culture of origin. These factors influence how they navigate through higher education and the importance they place on academic achievement. It is important to understand what is at stake for them and how they view the value of an education:

Such studies benefit from a close focus on a particular group; however, the disadvantage with these studies is the lack of discussion of the degree to which the social processes described are either particular to the ethno-racial group observed or emergent as a product of class, age, or another group that the group shares with others observed. (Warikoo & Carter, 2009, p. 384)

**Theoretical Perspectives on Ethnicity, Subjectivity, and Educational Attainment**

There are several theoretical perspectives that informed this study in terms of exploration of ethnic and cultural identity, subjectivity, and educational attainment of German American immigrants.

**Sociocultural Approach**

A sociocultural approach refers to both the social perspective and the cultural impact that something might have on an issue such as education. Aschenbrenner and Hellwig (2009) claimed that a sociocultural approach to learning explores interconnections between individuals and their social environment. The social and cultural environment may have a big impact on the way a person perceives himself or herself. A sociocultural approach assisted me in analyzing the interconnectedness of German American immigrant students within their environment and in understanding
their social nuances. It is important to understand the sociocultural environment to fully comprehend individuals’ values and belief systems relating to higher education:

Culture is the interconnection between the individuals and the objects in the environment through their usage in a specific and socially legitimate way. Moreover, culture is necessary to participate in the social environment. Because of that, culture is both a contextual and a cognitive phenomenon: the context influences and creates human cognitive structures and vice versa. (Aschenbrenner & Hellwig, 2009, para. 4)

Focusing on the culture and environment allowed for a complex analysis of the social interconnections, specifically through the focus group process. I relied on the sociocultural perspective during the group processes to guide me toward a better understanding of this cultural group.

**The Segmented Assimilation Theory**

The roots of the segmented assimilation theory can be traced to the 1700s, specifically to J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur’s 1782 book, *Letters from an American Farmer*. Ever since, assimilation has been “touted as the way in which Americans of different backgrounds would be melted into a new race of men” (Yoshino, 2006, p. B11).

Contemporary segmented assimilation theory focuses on understanding immigrants’ varied paths toward assimilation into American society (Nuñez, 2004, p. 1). The theory of segmented assimilation “attempts to explain the individual and contextual factors that determine into which segments of the host society second-generation migrants become incorporated” (Singh, Sausi, & Kanyane, 2014, p. 226). According to this theory, there are several possibilities for second generation immigrants to adapt within the context of their new cultural surroundings. There is the possibility of upward mobility, downward mobility, or positive perception while retaining their original migrant group’s values.
Segmented assimilation differs according to the issues experienced by the first generation of immigrants. Singh et al. (2014) studied Nigerian immigrants in South Africa and determined that those immigrants who obtained a higher education would secure a job and a seat in the middle class. For these Nigerian migrants, higher education allowed them to assimilate into their new culture and become part of the mainstream South African society. Higher education assisted them to achieve socioeconomic advancement.

Alba and Nee (1997) (as cited in Portes & Rivas, 2011) tested the segmented assimilation theory in studying immigrants and their descendants and found:

Many newly arrived immigrants take on labor-intensive, low-wage jobs when they first arrive to the country. They often then look to their children (the second generation) to improve the family’s economic situation through education and skill enhancement. However, their children must also compete with native-born populations and other immigrant groups for economic advancement, while also dealing with and confronting prejudices that may act as barriers to advancement. (p. 238)

These potential barriers to opportunities for mobility can then lead to a downward trend in assimilation (Zhou, 1997).

Alba and Nee (1997) considered a classical 1964 work on the assimilation studies by Milton Gordon. They credited Gordon with dissecting the concept of assimilation through seven dimensions:

Acculturation, the minority group’s adoption of the “cultural patterns” of the host society, typically comes first and is inevitable, Gordon argued. His discussion makes clear that these patterns extend beyond the acquisition of the English language, to dress and outward emotional expression, and to personal values. (Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 829)

Gordon found that acculturation could occur without being accompanied by other forms of assimilation, and the stage of “just acculturation” can last indefinitely. According to
Alba and Nee (1997), “the catalyst for more complete assimilation instead is structural assimilation, which Gordon defined as entrance for the minority group into the social cliques, clubs, and institutions of the core society at the primary group level” (p. 830).

Gordon (1964) (as cited in Alba & Nee, 1997) hypothesized that “once structural assimilation has occurred [. . . ], all of the other types of assimilation will naturally follow” (p. 830). This means that prejudice and discrimination will decline (if not disappear), intermarriage will be common, and the minority’s separate identity will wane. This further supports Alba and Nee’s (1997) discussion about how cultural traits from a specific ethnic group eventually lose their association with that group as American culture adopts them:

Over a longer time frame, the ethnic origins of a new element may be forgotten, and it becomes part of the mainstream repertoire, like the currently archetypal American recreational practices which as Thomas Sowell (1996) notes, are derived from those brought by German immigrants. (p. 834)

Segmented assimilation theory recognizes that assimilation may happen at different times for different generations for many external and internal reasons, including community support and educational achievement. Segmented assimilation also addresses the barriers that immigrants may face:

From a policy standpoint, the implications of segmented assimilation are clear. A sizeable proportion of legal immigrants with high levels of human capital is poised to follow a smooth adaptation path, with the majority of their offspring achieving high levels of education and moving solidly into the middle-class. At the other extreme, there is the mass of poor and unskilled immigrants coming to fill the labor needs of the American economy. These immigrants face the challenges posed by the poor areas where they settle with few individual resources and no external assistance. (Haller, Portes, & Lynch, 2011, p. 733)

Segmented assimilation stresses the advantages and disadvantages stemming from the immigrant community and the context of reception, and the disadvantages that the second
generation faces from being identified as and sharing institutions with racial minorities (Alba, Kasinitz, & Waters, 2011, p. 3). For new entrants into the labour force, including the children of immigrants:

This stark bifurcation means that they must acquire in the course of a single generation the advanced educational credentials that took descendants of Europeans several generations to achieve. Otherwise, their chances of fulfilling their aspirations would be compromised as few opportunities exist between the low-paid manual occupations that most immigrant parents occupy and the lofty, highly paid jobs in business, health, the law and the academy that these parents earnestly wish for their offspring. Without the costly and time-consuming achievement of a university degree, such dreams are likely to remain beyond reach. (Portes, Fernández-Kelly, & Haller, 2009, p. 5)

Portes, Fernández-Kelly, and Haller’s (2009) study was instrumental in identifying that a university degree and achievement are the aspirations of not only the students but their parents as well. Often all of a family’s financial resources are devoted to the most promising student in their household; all the hopes for the future ride on his or her success in higher education. The cultural community can be better understood by looking at it through the lens of cultural assimilation theory:

Perhaps the most useful contribution segmented assimilation theory has to offer is the idea that the pace of intergenerational acculturation—the process by which immigrants and their children learn the language and normative lifestyles of a new culture—plays an important role in the support and resources that second generation children can access to overcome external barriers to successful adaptation. (Piedra & Engstrom, 2009, p. 272)

Alba and Nee (1997) described how the second generation experience is different than that of the first in many ways, including living situation. When immigrants come to the U.S., they often live close together in ethnically uniform pockets, sometimes even in the same buildings. However, second generation immigrants are often more removed from that way of life:
Assimilation has had a central place in the American experience, and the issue of the continuity between the experiences of European Americans and those of new immigrant groups lies at the very heart of the doubts about the relevance of assimilation for the contemporary United States. (Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 863)

Within the context of the segmented assimilation theory, Waters et al. (2010) introduced three possible outcomes for the second generation immigrants: upward assimilation, downward assimilation, and upward mobility combined with persistent biculturalism. The authors found that family structures are important to acculturation and help determine whether a student will or will not preserve their home language and traditional culture, or whether they will forego their home culture altogether and assimilate to the American way of life.

Alba and Nee (1997) also introduced the 1965 work of Tomatsu Shibutani and Kian Kwan on ethnic stratification that employed Mead’s symbolic interactionism to develop their concept of social distance. When social distance is low, Alba and Nee (1997) observed that

there is a feeling of common identity, closeness, and shared experiences. But when social distance is high, people perceive and treat the other as belonging to a different category; and even after long acquaintance, there are still feelings of apprehension and reserve. (p. 838)

Sassler (2006) discovered an example of German exceptionalism showing that “working-age German daughters, particularly those in the second generation, were significantly more likely to remain at home than to attend school” (p.4). This is a unique finding that is perhaps more identifiable with the “old world” or traditional way of thinking where the women were in the kitchen, taking care of their families, and the men worked to provide for their families. This is a very different expectation from those immigrants who urge their children to become more “Americanized” and assimilate by
receiving a formal education. It is also possible that many immigrants did not have the money to send their children for a formal education past secondary school.

Previous research on the immigrant experience assumed that immigrants had to reject their ethnic and cultural traditions in order to assimilate to a new way of life. However, Nuñez (2004) observed that segmented assimilation theorists argue that ethnic and cultural ties may help facilitate further participation in the new culture (p. 11). Another valid reason to consider segmented assimilation theory when looking at immigrants is that families often immigrate at different times for different reasons—because of governmental policy dictates or because an ailing older member of the family is unable to make the trip. “Some family members make the journey to the United States alone, leaving others behind to emigrate later. Family separation means that family members will begin the acculturation process at different times and that reality strongly influences family dynamics” (Piedra & Engstrom, 2009, p. 276). By looking at parental influences at a deeper, more granular level, I believe we can identify some motivating factors of success for the second generation student population.

**Selective Acculturation**

Nuñez (2004) explained how classical assimilation theory assumes that immigrants would let go of their ethnic practices and adopt the new culture. However, more recent research indicates that retaining immigrants’ culture of origin might facilitate belonging in the new culture. “Segmented assimilation theorists use the term ‘selective acculturation’ to describe this sort of adaptation in which ethnic cultural values and practices support participation in mainstream U.S. society” (Nuñez, 2004, p. 11).

In selective acculturation, students and families retain certain cultural values and practices and at the same time that they engage in selected mainstream practices
of the host society. This process of “cultural shift” results in a bicultural existence and is supported by conditions such as a co-ethnic community of a sufficient size, engagement in different kinds of institutions (such as church and school), and a pace of cultural change that allows certain elements of the home to be sustained. (Nuñez, 2004, p. 11)

In a similar vein, some U.S. college students coming from immigrant families may not always feel they belong within the community of an institution. Nuñez (2004) claimed that selective acculturation theory demonstrates how students coming from various backgrounds may not need to conform to the “dominant cultural norms” in order to succeed (p. 12).

The concept of selective acculturation provides a framework for understanding how immigrant college students adapt to their U.S. culture in a university setting and how they may integrate parts of their original culture into their student experience. They may have left pieces of their own culture behind. Ultimately, selective acculturation results in biculturalism which may allow immigrants to achieve a comfortable ethnic identity.

**The Intercultural Theory**

When applied to college settings, interculturalism can be defined as a process of learning and sharing across difference where no one culture dominates (Tanaka, 2002). Tanaka (2002) was particularly concerned with breaking away from “hegemonic notions of identity” and making an entire campus feel a part of the cultural community. Tanaka explained how many campuses intend to include the greater multicultural community, but at the same time, some cultural groups can be inadvertently overlooked. For example, Tanaka described how one college’s dance department attempted to transition from Eurocentrism to multiculturalism, but this left White students without a way to connect. Tanaka, therefore, insisted on interculturalism as the most effective way of dealing with
diversity on student campuses; this would allow for the integration of all cultures, instead of giving specific cultures prominence. Tanaka’s study draws clear demarcation lines between multiculturalism and interculturalism and their enactments on college campuses. Within an intercultural framework, “the interactions between student, college, student major, family and close friends, and society are all considered important. Questions will avoid culturally loaded terms that might imply assimilation into a dominant culture, like persistence, integration, institutional departure, underprepared, or mainstream” (Tanaka, 2002, p. 284).

Tanaka (2002) introduced ways by which faculty can better address and integrate cultural identity and ethnic culturalism into their own classrooms for a more effective enactment of interculturalism on college campuses. Tanaka (2002) contended that researchers must “locate themselves” within the analysis under the risk of being ethnocentric and monological. In essence, Tanaka encouraged scholars to look at student development theories more closely to identify “power and authenticity” as well as re-articulation in order for interculturalism to take root.

The intercultural theory assisted me in finding out how second generation German Americans view themselves culturally and build their relationships with other students within the diverse milieu of American college campuses. If second generation German Americans are to assimilate, to what extent do they? I posed this question and similar questions to my study participants.

**Phinney’s Model of Ethnic Identity Development**

Ethnic identity can be defined as a “sense of self as a group member that develops over time through an active process of investigation, learning, and commitment”
Phinney’s (1996) model of ethnic identity development (1995) involves three stages through which an individual goes while developing a sense of identity. During stage one, an individual identity is unexamined; the individual has not yet accumulated or been presented enough information about his or her ethnic identity. Stage two involves research, examination, and exploration of ethnicity. Phinney referred to this stage as the “search moratorium.” Stage three results in identity achievement whereby individuals can identify as being informed and aware of their ethnicity and may identify as bicultural.

Higher education professionals may need to take into account the fact that some students may be undergoing complex processes of their cultural identity formation. Students “who cling to a strong ethnic or racial identity and subscribe to various practices of dominant society fare better in school than both ‘raceless’ individuals and those with more racial and ethnic nationalist orientations” (Warikoo & Carter, 2009, p. 379). Recognizing and honoring students’ cultural and ethnic backgrounds can enhance the cultural competence of all students and faculty and can foster a friendlier and safer environment on college campuses. Phinney (1991) (as cited in Warikoo & Carter, 2009) emphasized that “for disadvantaged groups, learning about ethnic or race culture can bolster self-esteem and, more generally, a strong ethnic identity mixed with a mainstream orientation leads to higher self-esteem” (p. 380).

College is the place where various levels of exploration take place for a student. Phinney, Ferguson, and Tate (1997) (as cited in Phinney, Jacoby, & Silva, 2007) argued that a “more secure ethnic identity is the result of a developmental process that typically
takes place during adolescence and young adulthood, leading to confidence in one’s own group membership and greater openness to other groups” (p.478).

Phinney and Ong (2007) described a commitment and a sense of belonging as the most important parts of ethnic identity. Within organizations and groups that celebrate a shared ethnicity, there is also a shared speaking of a common language, perhaps even an ethnic language school within the organization. Shared values, customs, traditions, language, and food are what make an ethnic group cohesive and distinctly identifiable.

Phinney (1989) maintained that as part of their complex adaptation from the culture of origin to new country, immigrants develop an identity as members of their ethnic groups within the larger society. Phinney, Romero, Nava and Huang (1999) examined three factors that supposedly influence the development of ethnic identity amongst adolescents from immigrant families. These factors are: ethnic language proficiency, cultural maintenance by parents, and social interaction with peers from the same ethnic group. Phinney et al. (1999) cited the outcomes from recent studies on adolescents from different immigrant groups that demonstrate a positive relationship between ethnic language proficiency and future educational and occupational aspirations (e.g., Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Portes & Scauffler, 1994; Phinney, Romero, Nava & Huang, 1999). A study by Phinney, et al., (1999) showed a strong link between language and ethnic identity, giving merit to the idea of reinforcing ethnic identity through language acquisition of the country of origin. Furthermore, they also concluded that parents and ethnic peers contribute to ethnic identity formation for adolescents in immigrant families. A model by Phinney, et al. (1999) (see Figure 1) was developed to show the interrelationships in immigrant families.
Figure 1. Proposed model of influences on ethnic identity. (Phinney et al., 1999)

Figure 1 shows that there are several contributing factors to achieving ethnic identity; between parental cultural maintenance, ethnic language proficiency, and in-group peer interactions, ethnic identity can be achieved. Of course, peer interactions and parental influence can also contribute to language proficiency if it is something that parents choose to introduce to their children and if peers also speak the ethnic language.

**Summary**

Research and scholarly works analyzed in this chapter have particular relevance to this study concerning the experiences of second generation German Americans. The history of German immigration to the U.S. is replete with the stories of perseverance, discipline, adaptability, and resourcefulness. German-speaking immigrants “supported whomever they thought could help them in this pursuit of land, prosperity, and security, and they resisted those they perceived to be blocking their efforts” (Fogleman, 1996, p. 151). German immigrants have not always been warmly received in American. The year
preceding and the years between the two world wars have been especially trying for German Americans. The trials and tribulations of the immigrant experiences have left some scars on the generations of German Americans down the line to the second generation. However, on the other hand, Germans have also enjoyed remarkable progress in adjusting to American life and have contributed a great deal to American society and education. The children of German immigrants have demonstrated perseverance and success in educational attainments.

German Americans can be rightfully considered “the silent minority” ("German-Americans," 2015) due to the fact that their many and extraordinary contributions to American society have often gone unnoticed and unrecognized. At the same time, many German cultural traditions have been integrated into the mainstream American culture and adopted as conventionally American. Understanding the overall framework of change within the immigrant experience of German Americans can help us “better understand who the immigrants were and what they were doing in their new world” (Fogleman, 1996, p. 13). Understanding the context of their new and changing world helps those within higher education to understand how to better serve the students from immigrant families as well as shed the light on the processes of how particular students such as German Americans come to persevere and succeed.

This study explored cultural particularities and individual characteristics of second generation German Americans navigating and succeeding in the American higher education system. While literature on many other immigrant populations abounds, there is a lack of studies about German Americans in general and second generation German Americans in particular. This study, therefore, fills in important gaps in existing
literature on the students of immigrants. German immigrants to the U.S. have made enormous contributions to American society and education. Studies such as this can provide acknowledgement of the legacy of the German Americans in the U.S. and allow for a deeper understanding and appreciation of the German immigrant culture within the higher education community. According to Fogleman (1996),

over the course of the immigrants’ search for prosperity and security, many succeeded and many failed. Those who succeeded often came to the country with significant wealth, or had family, friends, fellow villagers, or members of their religious group to support them along the way. (p. 153)

Educational attainment is not detached from this. Those who succeed typically have support throughout the process, whether it be financial, social, academic, or spiritual. Those who have persevered may reference their different support systems that were dually responsible for their achievements.

Segmented assimilation, social distance, selective acculturation, and intercultural theories were particularly relevant to this study because they inform its research goals and the content of data gathering tools. The studies analyzed in this chapter helped define the sociocultural context in which the second generation German Americans have adapted and contributed to American society and education. This study focused on those students—second generation German Americans—who “constitute much of the diversity of the contemporary American university” and its “multi-ethnic campus” (Rosenblum et al., 2009, p. 337).

German Americans have demonstrated unparalleled success in educational attainment. Studying individual lived experiences of second generation German American students can provide the framework for a better understanding of this population within the context of higher education.
It is my goal to have this research generate new knowledge about how those within higher education can work with students who are immigrants and who represent German Americans or children of immigrants. In this regard, it is important to investigate cultural and educational integration and adaptability of second generation German Americans and ways in which sociocultural contexts shape their identities.

This inquiry contributes to a better understanding of how culture intersects with identity and educational attainment, thereby adding to the studies that explore cultural arguments “to explain differential [educational] outcomes” (Carter & Warikoo, 2009, p. 284). Finally, this study aims at extending qualitative inquiries into how the students from immigrant families meet the challenges and attain success in American higher education.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In a social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity.

— Erik Erikson

This chapter elaborates on the conceptualization of the study within the interpretive paradigm and provides a detailed description of research design, data collection and analysis processes, evaluation criteria for research findings, and the role of the qualitative researcher in the research process.

The purpose of this study was to explore the sociocultural contexts in which second generation German American students paved their way to educational attainment in the U.S. institutions of higher learning and identified themselves as a unique cultural group in American multicultural and diverse society. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the traditions, beliefs, and values of second generation German Americans that distinguish them as a cultural group amidst American diversity?
2. What are the sociocultural contexts in which second generation German American students develop a sense of their ethnic identity?
3. How do these students approach instances of acculturation, assimilation, social integration, social distance, or stereotyping, should such occur in their educational and/or social settings?

4. What value do these students place on education and how do they succeed academically in higher education?

**Theoretical Positioning of the Study**

**Interpretive Inquiry**

Positioned as interpretive, or qualitative, this inquiry entails a special kind of thinking—thinking with a heightened awareness (Saldana, 2015). It involves taking a step back and looking at the issue from many different positions and angles. As qualitative researchers, “we construct in our minds the natural experiences we observe and the analytic connections we make with our data. There is no ‘truth’ external to us waiting to be discovered” (Saldana, 2015, p. 5). Within a naturalistic setting, qualitative research invokes the ability to interpret. The qualitative researcher is one who seeks to make meaning and sense of things. “More than a concept or series of techniques that can simply be employed, qualitative research is an intellectual, creative, and rigorous craft that the practitioner not only learns but also develops through practice” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 4). Qualitative inquiry also involves taking a multidisciplinary approach to research. Pulling from psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, and education, this study sought to provide a holistic picture of the research phenomena.

**Ethnography**

Conceptually and methodologically, “the sociological practice of ethnography dates back to the late 19th century and is rooted in the social reform movements” (Hesse-
Biber & Levy, 2011, p. 194). Ethnography, as practiced in education, “has been shaped by cultural anthropology, by an emphasis on the issues of writing about culture, and by how ethnographic reports need to be read and understood today” (Creswell, 2012, p. 462). Ethnography as a design is in alignment with this study precisely because it focuses on the practice of education embedded within distinct sociocultural contexts and by the participants whose identities have been shaped by these contexts, that is second generation German American students. Ethnography is purposeful and useful in understanding a targeted culture. It typically calls for addressing a greater issue and purpose. Adams, Jones, and Ellis (2015) described the following priorities as a common way to conduct ethnographic research:

- Foreground personal experience in research and writing
- Illustrate sense-making processes
- Use and show reflexivity
- Illustrate insider knowledge of a cultural phenomenon/experience
- Describe and critique cultural norms, experiences, and practices
- Seek responses from audiences

With culture at the center of this study, I found it most appropriate to conduct an ethnographic study. Some of the key characteristics of ethnographic research as stated by Creswell (2012) are:

- Cultural themes
- A culture sharing group
- Shared patterns of behavior, belief and language
- Fieldwork
Description, themes, and interpretation

Context or setting

Researcher reflexivity (p. 468)

Autoethnography

According to Raab (2013),

[autoethnography is] defined as a form of autobiographical writing and an approach to research that describes and analyzes personal experience as a way to understand cultural experiences. In doing so, it demonstrates the numerous layers of consciousness as a way to connect the personal to the cultural. (p. 2)

I found it fitting to include an autoethnographic approach when introducing this study because I personally have much to share as a researcher who identifies directly with this cultural group that I am studying.

My focus and motivation for this study were to make a contribution to my culture and my passion for U.S. higher education. Autoethnographical research is “expanding outside the realm of anthropology and merging into other disciplines, such as psychology and sociology” (Raab, 2013, p. 1), and by extension, in education. With autoethnography, there is an emphasis on self (Denzin, 2014):

The emphasis on self, biography, history, and experience must always work back and forth between three concerns: the concerns of performance, of process, and/or of analysis. There is a story to tell and within the story should be truth and understanding of the principle issues. (Denzin, 2014, p. 57).

The focal point of this study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of German American children of immigrants within the context of higher education and to investigate the issues surrounding their experiences.

Sociocultural Lens
To examine the experiences of German Americans through a sociocultural lens means to understand how they have been negotiating their identities and interacting with others within the sociocultural and educational contexts of American education, and in turn, to find out how these contexts have been shaping their identities and learning. The sociocultural approach to learning “deals with these interconnections between the individual and the (social) environment and may help us in our concerns to understand the occurring processes at work in a science-based way” (Aschenbrenner & Hellwig, 2009, p. 1). The sociocultural approach to investigating the experiences of the participants in this study allowed for a more holistic portrayal of these experiences.

There is an interconnectedness that binds the social and cultural together instead of isolating them. Lev S. Vygotsky (1896–1934) was responsible for connecting “the sociocultural approach on psychological and educational concerns. Influenced by Leont’ev’s thoughts, Vygotsky denied the strict separation of the individual and its social environment. Instead, they interact with each other, and cognitive development is the process of acquiring culture” (Aschenbrenner & Hellwig, 2009, p. 3). I remained interested in finding out how participants in this study connected their educational attainments with the contexts of their living and learning and how, if at all, their sociocultural contexts shaped the development of their ethnic identities.

**Relevant Theoretical Perspectives on Culture and Identity**

**The Segmented Assimilation Theory**

As noted in chapter two, the assimilation theory is associated with the founders of the Chicago School of Sociology who studied the integration of first and second generation European immigrants in the early 20th century (Burgess, 1926). According to
this theory, assimilation processes can enable each succeeding generation to show upward social mobility in education and occupation, be more integrated into the American mainstream, and show less ethnic distinctiveness in language use, residential concentration, and intermarriage patterns (Waters, et al., 2010, p. 2). This theory expands the possibilities for second generation immigrants. When conducting this study, I realized that there was a strong possibility that the children of these immigrants experienced upward mobility while being able to maintain biculturalism, upward assimilation, or they experienced downward assimilation. Segmented assimilation allows for more flexibility in the outcomes of children of immigrants which also allows for the idea that there are many factors that affect the outcomes. In this study, my goal was to discover whether “the context and level of ethnic embeddedness” was relevant when exploring the educational attainments of second generation German American students (Waters et al., 2010, p. 2).

**Intercultural Theory**

As stated in chapter two, Tanaka’s (2002, 2007, 2009; Tanaka et al, 2009) intercultural theory was particularly relevant to this study in that it explored intercultural behavior as “learning and sharing across difference where no culture dominates” and where racial tension declines while cross-cultural skills and overall sense of community increases. Especially in higher education, there is a prominent theme on campuses to celebrate diversity and preserve culture through education and learning. Students live together, work together, and sit in classrooms together and yet while some identify as certain cultures and ethnicities and celebrate their backgrounds openly, others do not even know their backgrounds. There is a wide spectrum of where students are within
their cultural and intercultural awareness. Through this study, I learned more about each participant and his or her college experience with cultural awareness. Participation in cultural or language clubs was just one way some students tended to identify socially with peers of certain ethnicities. They position themselves in a place to safely explore their cultures. What about other cultures? Do they take the opportunity to learn cross-culturally and expand their awareness by breaking the boundaries?

**Phinney’s Ethnic Identity**

As mentioned in chapter two, Phinney and Ong (2007) build on Ashmore’s (2004) theory of ethnic identity through self-categorization and labeling where there is identification with a group, commitment, and attachment, in addition to a sense of belonging and exploration. There is seeking that is essential to identity formation. I pursued to understand how the participants of this study developed a sense of their ethnic identity. Did they identify themselves as American, German, or both? Were they proud to be German Americans? How do and did they celebrate their culture? Did they go to school with German delicacies in their lunches or speak the language anywhere outside of the German classroom?

Much remains to be learned about identity development among second generation children of immigrants. Phinney and Ong (2007) described the achievement of a secure identity:

[It] derives from experience, but experience is not sufficient to produce it. Because one’s ethnic identity is constructed over time, the actions and choices of individuals are essential to the process. Ethnic identity is distinct in some ways from the other group identities, such as racial identity, but it also shares aspects of both personal and group identities. (p. 271)
This study aimed at uncovering the layers of experience that can shed additional light on ethnic identity formation and development.

**Research Design: Ethnography and Autoethnography**

This study focused on German American immigrant students as a cultural group. Ethnography was, therefore, the most suitable research design for this inquiry. It allowed for an in-depth exploration and adequate display of the culture “in a way that is meaningful to readers without great distortion” (van Maanen, 2011, p. 12). Ethnographic designs are “qualitative research procedures for describing, analyzing, and interpreting a culture-sharing group’s shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language that develop over time” (Creswell, 2012, p. 462). In most cases, “ethnography is interested in analyzing the making of social situations by taking part in the relevant processes and by observing how they unfold” (Flick, 2008, p. 90). Consequently, I examined social situations in which second generation German American students were engaged in educational processes seen through a unique cultural lens.

Autoethnography is part and parcel of this ethnographic study. Autoethnography is a qualitative method that offers nuanced, complex, and specific knowledge about particular lives, experiences, and relationships rather than general information about large groups of people (Adams et al., 2015). Because I, too, represented second generation German Americans, in this study, I constructed my own biography while at the same time uncovering nuanced knowledge about the lives of the participants as a cultural group. I am fortunate to be an insider of this cultural group; when going within to seek participants for this study, I believe that being native to the group proved useful. It allowed participants to have an open dialogue and offer information freely because they
were more inclined to share their story with someone who has possibly experienced many of the same themes and sensitive issues.

The Participants

Qualitative researchers use purposeful sampling, intentionally selecting “individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2012) p. 206). The participants in this study were selected based on whether they were (a) second generation German Americans, (b) college students at a four-year institution (college or university), and (c) resided in the Chicago area that contains a large German American population. Roughly 10% of the Chicago population identify as German (Kazal, 2004), which in turn, provided a fairly large pool of potential participants.

The participants were identified through personal connections at the Chicago area German Cultural Association. I contacted individuals directly and invited those who fit the selection criteria to participate in this study. With a direct relationship to the gatekeeper of this organization, it was a seamless entry to the site.

Initially, I sought to recruit approximately eight participants; however, I was fortunate enough to recruit 15. It was my hope to bring a gender balance to the study; however, I ended up with 10 females and five males. Participants were assigned pseudonyms and their identities are kept confidential in a locked document on my computer. Only I know the actual names of the participants.

Data Collection and Analysis Strategies

Building the ethnographic case “requires collecting data on the capacity for difference and for knotting differences into unities through which the social and personal life of individuals can be made to be ordered yet creative and thus evolving as a way of
life” (Schostack, 2006, p. 23). To accomplish my research goals, I used multiple sources to collect data and these included participant observations, individual and focus group interviews, field notes, documents, and artifacts.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Interviews are “the conversations with a sincere purpose to listen to people’s lives and record their experiences, their moments of crisis, their frailties, [and] their intimacies” (Schostak, 2006, p. 9). For the purposes of this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews that had a prepared set of questions that still allowed for the flexibility of open-ended conversation and dialogue between the researcher and participant. “While the researcher does try to ask each respondent a certain set of questions, he or she also allows the conversation to flow more naturally, making room for the conversation to go in unexpected directions” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 102). Semi-structured interviews allowed for a more organic process between me and the participants of this study because they all have unique experiences that contributed to the rich data.

A consent form (see Appendix A) was presented to the participant for a signature on the date of the interview. An interview guide (see Appendix B) was developed to assist me with staying on task and following an order for the interview (Creswell, 2012). Each interview lasted from one to approximately two hours.

As a qualitative researcher, I built a rapport with my participants prior to the formal interviews so as to garner interest and to see if those who fit the criteria were
actually interested in participating in the study. Having a working relationship that extends to trust and understanding allowed the participants to feel more comfortable sharing information in the form of both interview and through the focus group sessions.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a common technique within qualitative research. They “emerged in behavioral science research as a distinctive member of the qualitative research family, which also includes individual depth interviewing, ethnographic participant observation, and projective methods, among others” (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015, p. 1). In addition to individual interviews, a focus group provided the opportunity to know participants as a cultural group and helped identify group dynamics and interactions, which can only be acknowledged through group exchanges and synergy.

During the focus group, it was my hope that participants would “stimulate each other to articulate their views or even to realize what their own views are” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 91). However, a major problem with focus groups “can be that individuals may not share important experiences they have had because they are too embarrassed to share them in a group” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 91). I conducted focus group interviews with the same participants to obtain additional data through their interactions, which in turn, added to the richness of the overall data. Between three and five participants are typically recommended for a focus group. I was able to achieve three. The composition of the group, the structure of the interview guide, and the location of the interview “must flow from a well-defined research objective. Like all
other research, focus group research begins with and should be guided by a well-articulated purpose” (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015, p. 75).

As a qualitative researcher, it was important for me to personally conduct the focus group as the moderator. Although specific questions were prepared and outlined for the purpose of the group interview (see Appendix C), sufficient space was provided for flexibility and spontaneity to obtain authentic data. In order to better understand this particular homogenous cultural group, it was important to see the interactions between group members, and facilitation was done in a way that enhanced exchanges and meaningful communication between group members. There was also an opportunity to obtain clarification of the participant responses when needed, asking open-ended questions and allowing dialogue between the researcher and the group. Stewart and Shamdasani (2015) also suggested that when considering the order of questions, one should start with more general questions and move to more specific questions. They further recommend that questions with the greatest importance be asked first.

The role of moderator is important to consider as an intentional role within the focus group (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). As the researcher and moderator and sharing the same ethnicity with my participants, I believe I created a conducive environment to add to the success of the interview atmosphere. Moderators of the same ethnicity as the participants; “usually enhance relations and increase the willingness of participants to respond because participants tend to empathize and trust moderators of the same ethnicity” (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015, p. 92). Question probing and time management require special consideration when conducting focus groups and preparing to encounter issues.
Documents and Artifacts

Certain documents and artifacts were included as participants shared their stories and offered supporting documents or pictures throughout the interview process. In respect to any documents offered by participants, these were used only when anonymity could be maintained. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), pictures, documents, and videos may be valid data collection methods along with the interview footage. “Used with increasing frequency in qualitative research, images or visual materials such as photographs, videotapes, digital images, paintings and pictures, and unobtrusive measures are all sources of information for qualitative inquiry” (Creswell, 2012, p. 224). Found photography and researcher-produced photographs were used as an enhancement to the research.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in ethnographic studies follows several iterations of coding that ultimately result in the identification of meaningful themes or categories responsive to research purposes and questions. Transcribing the interviews and coding them to look for themes and categories was done with meticulous accuracy. I utilized three phases of data analysis that included descriptive methods, analysis, and interpretation. Descriptive methods were used to report on observations. This involved the creation of raw codes using theoretical perspectives that informed the study in the beginning of the process (see Appendix D). This stage is typically signified as open coding. Next, after reading and rereading the interview transcripts and considering other data sources, the process moved from open coding to conceptual coding, thereby clustering initially identified codes into the groups of meaningfully connected themes or categories. During this process, open
codes were examined line by line and used to examine generate patterns of themes and embodied facets of sociocultural contexts (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010, 2013).

Open codes were also considered in terms of some theoretical perspectives explored in this study and examined from participants’ perspectives. In this process, the transcripts were coded line by line to create meaningful themes or categories. In the analysis phase, essential features and interrelationships were identified. Finally, the interpretation phase addressed research questions and contexts. In this phase, themes were identified and positioned within the sociocultural contexts. Conceptualization of these themes was informed by the segmented assimilation theory, intercultural theory, and ethnic identity frameworks.

After coding manually, I decided to employ Nvivo software. “Nvivo offers a complete toolkit for rapid coding, through exploration, and rigorous management and analysis” (Creswell, 2012, p. 243). Also provided by Nvivo was the ability to use matrixes for comparison, which proved helpful because there was a great deal of data generated by these ethnographic interviews as well as the focus groups. The software offered many features that were useful for this study, including the ability to add memos and develop categories. In this study, interview transcripts were imported into Nvivo and coded. Raw codes were created based on the holistic patterns and observations made from a preliminary reading of the interview data, focus group data, artifacts, and autoethnographic data. After raw codes were formulated, the codes were refined and formally created to represent concepts from segmented assimilation theory, intercultural theory, and ethnic identity frameworks. Overarching themes were created from the code groupings, and the data were organized by research questions. Artifacts, focus group
data, and autoethnographic data were coded using the formulated codes and triangulated with results from the interview data.

The opportunity to interpret the data and thereby move towards a better understanding of the participants and their responses was a key component of the data analysis process. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) asserted:

[Data analysis] requires the researcher to be open to discovery, with data analysis and collection proceeding almost simultaneously. Interpretation of the data requires sensitivity on the part of researchers to the variety of multiple meanings in the setting and an awareness of their own personality. (p. 222)

As a qualitative researcher, I was thinking critically about how to triangulate and tie the themes together, analyzing the differences and similarities.

**Validation Criteria**

Creswell (2012) suggested employing validation procedures such as member checking, triangulation, and auditing. “The intent of validation is to have participants, external reviewers, or the data sources themselves provide evidence of the accuracy of the information in the qualitative report” (Creswell, 2012, p. 262).

Triangulation was one way to validate this study’s research findings, that is, obtaining data from multiple sources and applying multiple methods for their analysis. This “ensures that the study will be accurate because the information draws on multiple sources of information, individuals, or processes” (Creswell, 2012, p. 259).

Member checking is a form of corroboration (Saldana, 2015) whereby a researcher invites participants to be a part of the entire process of the research and considers the participants as co-researchers. Saldana (2015) argued that the researcher should both honor participants’ choice to be in the study and their choice to withdraw from the study at any point in the process. Allowing research participants to truly be
stakeholders within the research gives them a buy in to have a sincere interest in the research as well as the outcome of the study, to which they should be privy. Discretion is also an important part of the researcher-participant relationship. “Do not discuss anything that has been told to you in private by one subject with another. You want to be regarded as a person with discretion” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 98).

When writing down memos and notes after the process, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) recommended that the researcher be careful not to look suspicious or write too much while a participant is responding to a question because the participant will be curious and want to see what it is that the researcher is writing. This is something that I constantly kept in the back of my mind. When memos and notes are written, there should be nothing that the researcher would not want the participant to read. Private notes should be written in private so as to not attract attention or suspicion from the subjects. These are processes that I kept at the forefront of my research process.

To validate their research findings, qualitative researchers rely predominantly on Denzin’s (2014) notion of trustworthiness. The more transparent the researcher is in the data analysis, “the more trustworthiness and credibility [the researcher] will have with [his or her] reader. These steps are important for establishing the validity of your findings” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 339). The authenticity and transparency of this research made for a more credible process and outcome of the study.

**Researcher’s Self and Final Reflections**

Qualitative research is a subjective process by which qualitative researchers are always integrated and intertwined in the study. It is about how the researcher makes sense and makes meaning of the interpretations. “Sense is what we understand; meaning
is what we find relevant. If this is so, then subjective individuals will each construct their own meanings of what they personally experience” (Saldana, 2015, p. 60). Being part of this study was challenging because as a qualitative researcher, I “open[ed] up [my] own experiences for public consumption, which requires a degree of vulnerability on [my] part” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 212). However, on the other hand, this research was “empowering for the researcher-subject and raise[d] our self-consciousness and reflexivity” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 210). Reflexivity in qualitative research means having a “conscious awareness” of the experiences or interpretations of the participants with regard to the researcher’s perceptions (Saldana, 2015). Throughout this study, I reflected on my experiences as a second generation German American and filtered my own thoughts and feelings as I examined the experiences of my participants. Thus, reflexivity in qualitative research becomes a safeguard against potential researcher biases.

As I approached the data analysis stage, I kept on asking:

- What particular biases, if any, do I bring to and/or impose onto my research?
- How do my specific values, attitudes, and theoretical perspectives influence the research style I take on? How do my values, attitudes, and beliefs enter into the research process? Do I ask questions only from my own perspective?
- How does my own agenda shape what I ask and what I find?
- How does my position on these issues impact how I gather, analyze, and interpret my data? From whose perspective do I perform these actions?

(Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 39)
Reflexivity in ethnography “refers to the researcher being aware of and openly discussing his or her role in the study in a way that honors and respects the site and participants” (Creswell, 2012, p. 474). Creswell (2012) further explained that researchers understand that their interpretation of the site, participants, and environment is only one interpretation and that there may be other possibilities. As an ethnographer and insider who is native to the culture group, I studied and interrogated my own beliefs, ideas, and points of view. Through sharing my personal experiences and positioning myself as a researcher-insider, my conclusions led to new questions generative of further research (Creswell, 2012). If the ethnographer expects his or her participants to be transparent about their thoughts and considerations of the study, the ethnographer must be transparent as well.

The researcher’s subjectivity provides a level of self-awareness and self-exposure (Denzin, 2014). Understanding and “knowing your own ethical standpoint as a researcher is an important internal guide as to how you proceed in your research” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 83). Referring back to the holistic understanding that ethnography provides, one can infer that the holistic approach involves the perspective of the researcher as well. Unique to this study is my native position within the study because I share the culture investigated.

This study sought to provide “different ways of looking at and thinking about the social world, and then to stimulate independent reflection . . . as well as connection-making between them and your own memories of experiences” (Saldana, 2015, p. 7). Through autoethnography, the analysis of my own experiences was intertwined with that of my participants’. Autoethnography “can also be challenging, as researchers open up
their own experiences for public consumption, which requires a degree of vulnerability on their part” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 212). Decisions were made early on about the presence of the researcher in the text of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). “Some authors see writing about themselves in papers and books as a way of separating themselves from or revealing to others their personal bias” (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p. 201). By doing this, there was also an association that I provided transparency and honesty within the study as a native of the culture sharing group.

Venturing on this research journey gave me the opportunity to explore ways in which German American students from immigrant families leave their mark on American education and allowed me to reflect on my own experiences. Studying this group of immigrants and their place within the German American culture entailed a great responsibility throughout the journey. My goal was to be consistent and to honor all those who came before me, the ones who took the journey across storming seas and made it possible for them and their children to be where they are today, in the land of the free and the home of the brave.
Jetzt ist die Zeit und Stunde da,  
Das wir ziehn nach Amerika.  
Viel tausend Seelen gehts dort gut;  
Das tröstet uns und gibt uns Muth.  
Die Wagen stehn schon vor der Tür,  
Mit Weib und Kinder ziehen wir.  
Die Pferde stehn schon angespannt,  
Wir ziehen in ein fremdes Land.  
Ihr alle die mit uns verwandt,  
Reicht uns zum letzten mal die Hand.  
Ihr Freunde weinet nicht zu sehr,  
Wir sehn uns nun und nimmer mehr.  
Seid alle männlich und seid startk,  
Macht uns den Abschied nicht zu hart.  
Wir ziehen ja nicht aus der Welt.  
Auch da ist Gott, der uns erhält.

— Author Unknown

Now is the time, the hour has come,  
We are going to America.  
Many thousand souls go there,  
This comforts us and gives us courage.  
The carts stand just around the corner,  
With wife and children we go.  
The horses stand ready and tense,  
We are moving to a foreign land,  
All our relatives and bid us farewell  
Our friends aren’t crying too much  
We see now, or never more,  
Stay manly, stay strong,  
Makes the farewell not too hard  
We are not leaving the World  
There is God, He sustains and keeps us
Setting the Scene

The purpose of this ethnographic analysis was to understand the sociocultural contexts of second generation German American students’ in the U.S. culture and education. The data collected and analyzed was gleaned from semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and artifacts in an effort to shed light on the perspectives and experiences of German American students attending the institutions of higher learning. The data were analyzed manually and using Nvivo 11.0 software, having in mind ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches as well as a sociocultural lens. Three phases were conducted to analyze the data: descriptive methods, analysis, and interpretation. Descriptive methods were used to report on observations. This involved the creation of raw codes using theoretical perspectives that informed the study in the beginning of the process. This stage is typically signified as open coding. Next, after reading and rereading the interview transcripts and considering other data sources, the process moved from open coding to conceptual coding, thereby clustering initially identified codes into the groups of meaningfully connected themes or categories. During this process, open codes were examined line by line and used to examine generate patterns of themes and embodied facets of sociocultural contexts (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010, 2013).

Open codes were also formulated by the theoretical assumptions considered for this study and examined from participants’ perspectives. In this process, the transcripts were coded line by line to create meaningful themes or categories. In the analysis phase, essential features and interrelationships were identified. Finally, the interpretation phase addressed research questions and contexts. In this phase, themes were identified and positioned within the sociocultural contexts. Conceptualization of the themes was
informed by the segmented assimilation theory, intercultural theory, and ethnic identity frameworks.

For organizational purposes, I decided to group the participants into several categories. Table 1 displays the demographic information about the participants. As can be seen, the participant sample is composed of five males and 10 females, four of which are within the age group of 35 to 39, four aged 40 to 44, eight aged 45 to 49, and one in the group designated as aged 50 and older.

Table 1

Summary of Participant Demographic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Emilie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Franz</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Axel</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Nicklaus</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Kristian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Elisabeth</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Josfine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Johanna</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Francesca</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Brigitte</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Tristan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Hilda</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Heidi</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Gertie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Marta</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45-49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants were also grouped into three levels of German community involvement as either not active, somewhat active, or active. Active members were grouped in the active category because they were highly involved in community organizations and functions. The somewhat active members grouping contained individuals who participated in some community organizations or functions. Non-active
members were not highly involved in any community organizations or functions. Six participants were not active, three were somewhat active, and six were active in their communities.

As a result of the thematic analysis, the following themes emerged: Values and Beliefs, Identity Recognition, Intercultural Mobility, and Educational Values. The subthemes that emerged included: temperament, work ethic, tradition; transitioning, assimilation, self-categorized identity, language influence, support, closeness, experiences with coming to America, and difficulties and barriers. Older participants more frequently discussed assimilation, difficulty, self-categorized identity, language influence, support, temperament, tradition, transitioning, and work ethic. All age groups found closeness and experiences with coming to America to be significant subthemes. Assimilation, difficulties, support, and transitioning were more significant to males, and females more often emphasized experiences with coming to America, temperament, and tradition. Closeness, self-categorized identity, language influence, and work ethic were significant to both gender groups. Furthermore, non-active community members more frequently discussed assimilation, closeness, coming to America, and tradition, while active community members emphasized difficulties, support, temperament, and transitioning. Subthemes of self-categorized identity, language influence, and work ethic occurred equally between active and non-active community members.

This chapter gives life to the participants as individuals because readers get acquainted with their life stories as German Americans in the U.S. context. I have a strong appreciation for the time and energy these participants gave me to contribute to this study and the strong sense of pride in the people that I share this heritage with.
A list of participants eligible for the study was created using purposive and snowball sampling. Roughly 20 individuals matched the selection criteria and 15 of the potential candidates were invited to participate in the study. Participants were contacted directly, and appointments were scheduled in a private location of the participant’s choosing. Fifteen candidates participated in the study during a two week long timeframe. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by storing information in a locked file and using participant pseudonyms to keep identities anonymous. All participants signed consent forms and were briefed on the details of the study.

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted. Interviews and focus group meetings lasted approximately two hours. During the interviews, structured questions and follow-up probes were used to elicit detailed responses and gain an adequate understanding of the participants’ experiences. Reflective thoughts and emotions were recorded in field notes and observational records. During this process, “on the fly” notes were used; this is a method involving the use of key data points to assist with interpretation and bring familiarity to the observations recorded. Documents and artifacts, including pictures, historical resources, and traditional dress, were included in data collection and analysis to culminate emotional connections with the participants and provide an avenue to relive and reflect on the emotional experiences and thoughts associated with the documents. Interviews were then transcribed and uploaded in Nvivo 11 software. Interviews were first read to gain a preliminary understanding of the themes and patterns that emerged. Raw category codes were recorded to allow for a holistic interpretation of the data. Transcripts were reread and coded line by line to summarize patterns expressed during the interviews. The patterned data were then grouped into the
coded themes and subthemes. Themes and subthemes were compared by occurrence and significance in participants, and reflection was used to holistically analyze the contexts of the data. After themes and subthemes were generated, they were organized based on their responsiveness to the research questions and the theoretical lens considered for this study.

During the autoethnographic phase, my own thoughts and experiences were considered in the contexts of the participants’ experiences. I sought to incorporate thoughts on researcher biases, specific values and beliefs that shaped the interview process and influenced my perspectives on how I gathered and interpreted the information. I answered the same questions participants answered and reflected on the similarities and differences between participants’ experiences and my own. During the final phase, data from the interviews were triangulated with focus group and autoethnographic data.

**Wir sind die Deutschen: We are the Germans**

When interviewing German Americans, I found that all of the participants emphasized the importance of continuing heritage practices and learning the German language. These values and beliefs instilled in the participants closely reflected my own values as a German American. However, I soon realized that these participants offered uniquely salient interpretations and experiences that postulated new insights and perceptions that I incorporated in my own self-reflection.

**Emilie**

Emilie grew up in Illinois. Her mother was a German teacher at the local high school in the area. Her grandparents lived within close range from her home all her life.
She was a bright student, performed well, and wanted to please her parents by doing well academically. Her older brother was not as academically inclined, and she was the “smart one” in her family. She was highly involved in the German community and the local German club when growing up. She continued to seek opportunities throughout her academic and professional career to keep herself integrated in the culture by living in Europe during part of College as an exchange student and then while she worked for a German-based company. College was entirely paid for by her parents; she did not work during college. She spoke of her mother’s trip from Germany to Ellis Island by boat as a horrible experience. Her mother’s parents made it financially by buying real estate and renting it out. She often talked about not being able to “judge a book by its cover” because you never know where people came from as part of the lessons learned from hearing immigration experiences. She discussed how she felt that Germans did not accept her family as German after World War II, and that she felt some remorse over the fact that her Grandfather died fighting for Germany in World War II, but the German Government would not consider her family German enough to keep them in the country. She claimed to have an identity crisis due to the fact that she was unable to get German Citizenship from the consulate because they referred to her grandfather as Croatian and not German. This struck me as so important, although she passed right over these facts because they were so nonchalantly spoken. Her grandfather died in World War II; he was able to fight and die for his country, but when his own granddaughter tried to gain dual citizenship, she was told no by the German government because, according to their records, her grandfather was truly of Croatian heritage. I myself felt somewhat sorry for her and somewhat angry for how the government treated her and her family. Traditions
were very important to Emilie; she spoke of Christmas and the rituals and traditions they kept up every year that were German in nature. Emilie had been called a Nazi by a fellow second grader and this stayed with her to this day. She spoke of trying to find a nice German boy to marry, perhaps to fulfill her parents wish and partially because she knew she wanted her family raised in the same German tradition as she was brought up. She actually took it a step further and married a man who was born in Germany and spoke the language fluently. Emilie was very alert and excited about the interview and asked me to come to her home the same day I asked if I could interview her. I felt very comfortable in her home and we had a good time reminiscing before and after the official interview, talking of different nuances about being raised German American. We had mostly good memories of German school and trying to assimilate into American culture as teenagers but reverting back and becoming more German as we became older. She had prepared some things for me to eat while I was there, and this characterized what we call in German “gastfreundlich.”

**Values and beliefs.** Emilie’s perceptions on values and beliefs emphasized the German work ethic, keeping up traditions, and the importance of living responsibly. Emilie indicated that having a family and carrying on traditions was important to her family, but she was constantly encouraged to be self-sufficient and well educated. She touched on the roles that German values had on her academic pursuits and involvement in German traditions. She was also very empathetic toward individuals undergoing a refugee crisis because she was aware of her own family’s difficulties in coming to America. Emilie was instilled with moral values, but these values and beliefs did not come across as religiously scripted. Her values appeared logical, genuine, and altruistic,
and it was evident that she highly respected and appreciated her family and their struggles as German immigrants.

**Identity recognition.** Emilie recognized her unique identity, not only as a German American, but as an individual influenced by Eastern European experiences and values. She felt that identity was fluid and changed over time, and she remarked on a crate that her grandparents had brought on their journey to America. This crate was currently residing in her brother’s home as a unique family heirloom and centerpiece representing the hardships and adversity her family had successfully overcome.

**Intercultural mobility.** Emilie underwent particular experiences in college as a second generation German American. Despite difficulties with hearing impairment, Emilie was not inhibited in her educational pursuits. She provided an example of the resilience and hard work that were prevalent in many of the German American participants. Emilie felt this resilience was due to the values instilled in her as a child as well as her high regard for her German American identity.

**Educational values.** Emilie noted that her family supported her financially during college. This experience was common for many of the participants due to the emphasis on familial support and the importance of education in German American families. Emilie obtained a bachelor’s degree from X Midwestern University, double majoring in business and in German and minoring in French. During the interview, it was clear that Emilie was highly educated, but she was reluctant to pursue an MBA because it did not appear to be a logical decision for the small impact it would have on her career. This revealed the significance of the responsibility values described by Emilie and several other participants.
Franz

Franz was the only one of the participants in this study who actually was born in Germany and immigrated to the U.S. when he was quite young. It was not my intention to interview someone who had been born in Germany; however, he was present when I was interviewing his wife and asked if I would interview him too. He gave such insightful and deep answers that I could not help but also use his information as data. He grew up like many of us German Americans with immigrant parents, although there were slight differences in that he was not as involved in the German cultural community as those of us who were born here. His father and mother were both born and raised in Germany. He was highly educated and had a strong work ethic. He lived in Illinois with his pregnant wife. The day I interviewed him, he had arrived from being in Germany for a family member’s funeral. Prior to that, he had been back from vacation with his wife about a month before. He attended German cultural events because his wife’s family was very involved, but he did not seek those opportunities out himself. He found them a little “dorky.” We actually discussed that many of the ethnic Germans here are more German than the Germans who live in Germany. Those here wear the traditional garb on certain occasions, and we talked about how many Germans do not even own a dirndl or a leiwl. It is interesting because he said that he did not even own German traditional garb until he met his wife who was born here; she urged him to buy a pair of lederhosen. He talked about being proud of his Porsche, and I noticed that they only had German made cars in their driveway (Porsche and BMW). He was very relaxed and eager to discuss the opportunity to interview. I had not planned on interviewing him, but after interviewing his wife, he actually asked me if I would not mind if I interviewed him too because he
had a lot of the same experiences that she was talking about. His experiences, however, were from a different perspective because he came here when he was very small. He really liked the idea of calling German Americans the silent minority. He had said that, “no matter what you achieve, no matter what your opinions might be, however strong they might be, you always have to feel like you have to be reserved and be humble to some degree.” He thought this was because of the history Germany had with the war and war crimes. It was an interesting perspective that he felt like no matter what a German American did to contribute to society, they would still keep their heads down and keep going, rarely recognized for their great achievements because of crimes of the past of their people.

I really internalized this when he said it because I thought of my parents, my grandparents, and their accomplishments in life. Were they swept under the rug? Did they feel like they could not celebrate out loud when something good happened in their lives? It caught me off guard that there was a sense of sadness that overcame me when I considered how some German Americans were treated. I thought once more about how important this dissertation had become to me and how this stood for every time a German American could not show pride in who they were and pride in their home country. This interview took place in Franz’s home and on countless occasions he asked what he could get me or how he could make me feel more comfortable there. I felt at ease asking the “difficult questions” with him.

Values and beliefs. Franz provided a unique account of the values, traditions, and beliefs he was brought up with. Franz noted that the combination of his mother’s religious beliefs and his father’s work ethic gave him well-rounded perspectives on ethics
and morality. Franz pursued education on his own, despite his father’s wish that he learn a skill or trade. He emphasized that he had grown up with a mix of German sensibilities, but he also exhibited agency in making his own decisions and career choices that were influenced by a combination of the German work ethic and the American drive for opportunity. Some aspects of his personality he attributed to American ideals while others had a strong German influence, such as political awareness, which he perceived to be more prevalent in German communities than American communities.

**Identity recognition.** Franz mentioned the influence of the German language on his identity. When growing up, German was spoken in his household, and that contributed to developing and maintaining a German American identity. He believed that teaching traditions and maintaining German heritage in younger generations could help bolster a sense of German American identity. Franz discussed not growing up with a significant amount of traditional influence in his family, and he recognized that German American identity more significantly develops from emotions, habits, and the embodiment of German ideals.

**Intercultural mobility.** Franz’s particular situation incorporated a mix of German and American influences. Franz and his family were able to integrate into American culture due to the transferability of German values into American lifestyles. However, Franz also remarked on the feeling that he had to maintain a low profile due to stigma and blanketed associations with the Nazi regime. He felt proud to be a German American, but he also found that anti-German propaganda made it difficult to show his pride in his culture.
**Educational values.** Franz expressed his personal drive in attaining his educational goals and learning how to function in the academic system on his own. He attempted to immerse himself in knowledge and take advantage of educational opportunities. Franz graduated from X Midwestern University, and he felt that his experiences in self-teaching, learning English, and becoming actively engaged in his educational experiences contributed to his academic achievements.

**Axel**

Axel was a firefighter by profession. He grew up in Illinois, and his mother was a German teacher in a high school. He asked me to come to conduct the interview at his home, and when I walked in, he was actually eating strudel that his mother had made for him earlier in the week. He was having his strudel with a cup of coffee for breakfast; it does not get much more German than that. He asked me to have some as well, and I declined but felt very comfortable and welcome in his home. He also showed me a large crate that sat in his living room. He used that crate as a coffee table and it had large letters with his grandparents’ last name stamped in black on the side of the crate. He proudly told me that the crate was the only possession his grandparents and mother came to America with. They held everything they owned in that one crate and it had their names on it. Axel married an American and had three kids who all attended German school and German cultural club/folk dancing. He talked about being very spoiled with his mother’s food and not liking to go out to eat because the food was never as good as his mother’s. Although Axel was obviously very ethnically German, he was also probably one of the most proud of his American parts as well. He joked about being made in American with German parts when people would ask him what ethnicity he was.
Interestingly enough, when I looked around his house, I noticed that many of the knick knacks and artistry were German and had German sayings on them. Axel was witty and polite, to my surprise, he was one of the most informative and opened up to me in ways that many of the other participants had not. He talked about his pride in being American more than any other participant and beamed about his job of being a serviceman. He had taken quite a few trips to Germany over the years and was most excited to talk about when his mother and father took his entire family, including his children to Germany last summer for over a month. He said he was proud to share his heritage and home country with his children for the first time. He did not quite want them to go to Germany when they were younger for fear that they would not be able to appreciate it, but he had very fond memories of the trip that he shared with me. He showed me pictures of the trip that his wife took as well; they were increased in size and placed on their walls. In fact, one of their latest Christmas cards was of the family in Germany with all their German traditional dress—him, his wife, and his three children.

**Values and beliefs.** Axel described hard work, family values, and responsibility when describing what it was like to be a German American. For Axel, financial responsibility and conservation were significant values growing up, due to his family’s experiences working on a farm. Axel recognized how much his family had given up to migrate to America. He noted how his father would accidentally become sick after trying to cut off moldy parts of food in order to ensure that food was not wasted. Axel also mentioned the importance of recycling and repurposing when he was growing up. He remarked on the differences between his experiences and his family’s experiences, quoting his Opa’s brother: “We didn’t have all this stuff. We didn’t have toys. If you
wanted a toy, you went to the barn and you made one, and if you cut off your finger, well, you had nine more to go, so hopefully you didn’t lose any more.”

Identity recognition. When remarking on his identity, Axel first pointed out the influence of the German language. He noted that identification with one’s past is often integral to one’s identity. However, Axel also recognized that where one was born also shaped one identity. Because of this, Axel referred to himself as “American with German parts.” Axel was the only participant who identified with being an American first. Axel did not necessarily feel that he was completely assimilated, but he felt that being an American meant having a mix of identities that informed and shaped one’s values and behaviors.

Intercultural mobility. A significant factor in Axel’s identity experiences was his uncertainty about how he would be perceived by Jewish individuals, due to the stigma with being German. However, Axel found that the majority of his Jewish friends and acquaintances had been very accepting of him and recognized that he was not involved in the Nazi regime. Through his experiences, Axel found a way to resilience by incorporating German and American values into his daily life and recognizing that the past was not in his control.

Educational values. Axel noted that higher education was important in his family, but he was uncertain about what he wanted to pursue in his academic studies. Axel started out studying architectural engineering, transitioned to architecture, considered a career in the military, and then ended up becoming a firefighter. Axel described difficulties with having a learning disability, but noted that learning German throughout school helped him to understand language idiosyncrasies. After having
children, Axel realized that he wanted to obtain a four-year degree and did not want to promote education in his children without having completed a degree himself.

Eventually, Axel obtained a degree in fire management.

**Nicklaus**

I met Nicklaus at a local coffee house close to his home at his request. He responded just after securing the date with his wife’s schedule. His wife was currently a stay at home Mom. He married a woman who went to the German cultural club because of her father’s heritage and did folk dancing. Both of Nicklaus’ parents were born in Germany, and he was born here. He was the first in his entire family to obtain a college degree—in finance, nonetheless. His father did not quite understand Nicklaus’ schooling and profession because he worked with his hands as a tool and die maker. All three of his children were very involved in the German school and German folk dancing. He studied in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland by choice; he did not feel pressured by his parents to do so. Nicklaus was a family man who felt strongly about being the provider for his family. He preferred that his wife not work while his children were small; it seemed to be an issue of pride, although he never quite outright said that to me. I felt that Nicklaus appeared relaxed, but he felt obligated to get back to his family in a timely manner, so the interview was slightly shorter than what I was used to. He was also, as I learned, a man of few words and did not naturally want to expand on things. He did fight me when I tried to give him the thank you gift card for participating in my study. Out of all the participants, he was most comfortable with throwing in a German word here or there. I learned later that he really loved to speak the language in a social setting. We conversed a bit in German after the interview; he seemed to really appreciate the ability
to do that with someone in a more social context. You could find a German soccer game on in his home as well as some brats cooking on the grill in his backyard, which seemed to be the norm for Nicklaus. He appreciates German music and the German radio station which can be heard on Saturday and Sunday mornings.

Values and beliefs. Nicklaus described the values of hard work and triumph over difficulties. He noted that nothing in life comes easy, and one must work hard to obtain one’s goals. Nicklaus also recognized the importance of having a tight-knit family. Nicklaus indicated that he had to look out for his family, especially after knowing the hardships his family and other German Americans faced during wartime and transitioning to America. Nicklaus found German traditions that were celebrated in his home to be an integral part of his experiences as a German American.

Identity recognition. Nicklaus felt that his identity was formed through his participation in cultural activities, maintaining his German language, and attending German school throughout the years. Nicklaus also had experience studying in German-speaking countries and found cultural history and heritage to be important factors in instilling cultural values during one’s upbringing. Nicklaus further emphasized the influence of the American aspects of his identity. He discussed how his parents made it a priority to ensure that he would assimilate into American culture and not have problems during school. He noted that they spoke English more to him as he grew up so that he could transition more easily in American schools. Nicklaus found that his parents were highly influential in motivating him and providing him with the means to embody both German and American aspects of his identity.
**Intercultural mobility.** Nicklaus revealed that he had experienced difficulties due to stigmas of being German. However, Nicklaus described how discipline and values drive German Americans to focus on what is important in their lives. He noted that his family took steps to avoid situations that would single them out as Germans. He also described how his experiences abroad reflected the cultural values he was taught as a German American, but provided a different outlook on the experiences between German-born and German American individuals. German Americans have unique experiences in that they often underwent traumatic hardships and learned to adapt to a new cultural and physical environment.

**Educational values.** For Nicklaus, education had always been important. He emphasized how German values of work ethic, perseverance, and taking opportunities to better themselves had an impact on his academic achievements. He noted that his parents were very supportive, and he grew up having different perspectives that provided him with the ability to seek out particular opportunities.

**Kristian**

Kristian asked if I could do the interview at his home because his children were going to be in and out with their commitments, and his wife, who worked at a local hospital, would be out all day on a 12 hour shift. He invited me in and offered me something to drink. He was very hospitable. When we talked about his family, he joked about how his mother still had a very heavy accent after many years of living here; it was difficult not to identify her immediately as a German American. His whole family was extremely involved in German cultural activities. His children both went to German school and German folk dancing. His wife was not from the same cultural club; but both
of her parents were of German descent, and she was the first to be born here. Kristian’s sister lived abroad in the UK and worked for a German company where she used her German language skills. Kristian was involved in leadership with the German American community in Chicago. In fact, he happened to be one of the youngest vice presidents in the history of the German cultural club in the area. Kristian and I talked about how he was supposed to become an engineer because it was a respectable career in Germany, so he became one here at his Father’s request under a complete American higher education. When I asked him if he ever considered any career area other than engineering, he said no. His parents decided very early on that engineering would be the most respectable path for him, so he did it. He never questioned it and made sure that was what he aimed for from the very beginning. He took German throughout grade school and college, and he said it was helpful as a GPA booster because he already knew the language. He found it amusing that he began his German classes in the 121 level in college even though he was clearly far beyond the beginner’s level in German. He said he tried not to let on during school that he was not a beginner but he was able to pronounce things in class so nicely that people did catch on. He said it was interesting because instructors would find out he was of German descent and automatically expect much more from him than from the rest of his cohort.

**Values and beliefs.** Kristian described growing up with German values in his household. His family followed several German holiday traditions, and he was instilled with a strong work ethic, family values, and discipline. Education was very important and considered a priority in his family. Kristian felt that he had a different childhood
than others he knew due to the priorities and structure in his family; however, he embraced the values of hard work and dedication that he learned from his parents.

**Identity recognition.** Kristian stated that he grew up with German traditions and went to German school. However, he felt that his identity was more unique than simply being German American. He indicated that he did not really feel German or American. Learning the German language and culture did not necessarily help him create an identity or succeed professionally, but creating meaning from his heritage allowed him to put values and heritage into perspective.

**Intercultural mobility.** Kristian felt that dedicating a lot of time to cultural traditions when he was younger “stretched him thin” to other aspects. He was proud to be German American, but he also wanted to develop his own identity and interests. He also described the stigma of being a German, pointing out a memory where someone had spray painted a swastika on his parents’ house. Kristian emphasized how his parents did their best to not draw attention to the incident. Despite negative experiences, Kristian and his family understood that stigmas were often caused by fear and ignorance, and this did not shake their pride in their culture.

**Educational values.** Kristian indicated that his family had insisted he become an engineer, so he ended up becoming an engineer. His dad had been the primary motivator, even when Kristian felt like giving up on his degree. Kristian ended up going to graduate school where he felt like he flourished. He attributed his academic success to the German values and priorities instilled in him when growing up.
Elisabeth

This interview came to me by way of Axel’s wife, who was American and met Axel through a friend of a friend and joined the German folk dancing group with a high school friend for fun. Our children were in the German dancing group together. She called me to tell me she had a friend in one of her classes at school who she met and discovered that she was of German heritage and both her parents were born in Germany. She forwarded me Elisabeth’s information, and I called her myself. Elisabeth was very eager to help and asked if we could meet at a neutral location at a coffee house near her home. She was very open about her past and wanted to share as much information as possible. She would not accept a gift card for participating in the study. I did not know this participant prior to the interview. The main points that she touched on during the interview were values and strong traditions, especially with the Christmas holidays and family. Not many participants talked as much as she did about faith and altruism, although I feel that altruism in one way or another, mostly indirectly, was addressed in all of the interviews. It was just that Elisabeth was able to precisely put it into words. In fact, I would go as far to say that she was the most well-spoken and had a way with word choices and explanations that were very fluid. To my surprise, she had recently decided to continue her studies to become a German teacher. For someone who was not quite integrated into the cultural clubs or social aspect of Germanness, she was choosing to further the culture by way of the language, which I highly respect. In fact, it was a bit risky to go to school to be a German teacher in a climate where German language classes are declining.
Values and beliefs. Elisabeth indicated that her family celebrated many American holidays as well as German holidays. Values that were instilled in her included the values of hard work, trustworthiness, independence, faith, and altruism. Elisabeth felt that learning these values allowed her to carry on traditions and to develop a sense of meaning from her family’s stories. She felt that German qualities, priorities, and abilities to think critically distinguished German students from other students.

Identity recognition. Elisabeth revealed that she was proud to be German American, and she particularly valued her German roots. She also revealed times when growing up that she felt ashamed to be German when learning about the Nazi regime. Elisabeth felt that she would never be fully integrated into American culture. She indicated that as a child, she identified more with being German, and as she got older, she desired to assimilate into the American lifestyle. She considered herself to be both German and German American.

Intercultural mobility. Elisabeth stated that she felt somewhat isolated during college as a second generation German American, but she enjoyed learning about new cultures and languages. She felt that learning to respect her traditions and language gave her new perspectives on her heritage and family values. Elisabeth emphasized the importance of sharing traditions and stories with children.

Educational values. Elisabeth’s family was supportive of her educational desires. Education was important to her family, but she stated that they wanted her to be happy with her career choices. Now, Elisabeth felt that continuing education was very important, and she valued learning and acquiring new knowledge. In fact, Elisabeth
continued in her studies to become a German teacher. Elisabeth emphasized the German qualities of critical thinking as a significant attribute that contributes to success.

**Josefine**

Josefine was currently the president of a local German cultural club. She had a great deal to share with me, and although she is the CFO of a company and very busy, she wanted to schedule an interview as soon as possible. After I sent her an e-mail to contact her, she called me, and I got on her schedule within a day’s time. She asked if we could meet at a local coffee house close to my home because she had a meeting in the area. When I arrived, she was in the corner working on a business call and immediately ended the call when she saw me; she tried to buy me some coffee before I sat down. She was early to the interview and laughed about her German promptness. Probably more than any other participant, she wanted to know more about the study, my schooling, and where I was at in the process. Josefine lived in Germany twice in her life, once during her childhood and once later because she wanted to travel there for work and stayed there for a few years because her company had a satellite office there. She frequented Europe to this day and took her family on trips to Europe each year. Josefine was distantly related to me and opened my eyes to many family history stories throughout, before, and after the interview. I had no idea she had so much knowledge about our family dating so back so far. She let me know that when our family was forced out of their small German village in Romania by Russian soldiers; they left by horse and wagon. Apparently my paternal grandmother (Ruscheinski Omi) delivered a baby in the wagon on their trip to find a new place to settle; the baby lived about 13 months before she passed on due to starvation. The stories of what these people endured during and after the war just gave
me a huge dose of humility. They stole potatoes from the farms to feed their children; they made dresses out of curtains for their children so they had clothes. They knew to make something of nothing. Josefine was able to share this perspective and other stories from our ancestors on their immigration journeys. Now that my grandparents have passed, I truly appreciated hearing these stories of hardship and survival.

**Values and beliefs.** Josefine described her family as “very German.” Throughout the discussion, she emphasized the importance of German traditions and speaking only German in the household. She stated that she and her brother were expected to work hard, respect others, value their heritage and culture, and help family when needed. She went to German school and indicated that being around her grandparents and great-grandparents instilled values of respect and cultural appreciation in her and her brother.

**Identity recognition.** Josefine revealed that when she was young, she wanted to be an American. As she got older, she identified as German American. She distinguished being German American from German, and noted that being German American is different from being German. Josefine also stated that children in her family were far more assimilated into American culture. For Josefine, caution about her culture was also important. Because German Americans are very different from Germans, she stated that she did not want to be singled out by her American side.

**Intercultural mobility.** Josefine found that German traditions are becoming lost due to assimilation. She described instances of German American students not being able to speak German. Josefine found this particularly emotional, and she emphasized the importance of keeping culture alive. She also described stigmas of being German,
similarly to other participants. Josefine spent a lot of time during the interview discussing the hardships that her family went through while migrating to the United States. Josefine mentioned her grandfather’s experience of being forced into war, and she stated that many Americans do not understand that several German families were forced to fight during World War II. When discussing this topic, she stated:

Kids nowadays don’t even understand war. They have never lived through it and their parents have never lived through it. If their grandparents lived through it, although many of them didn’t at this point and before either, they don’t remember it or they won’t talk about it. I think we are in danger of another war because people don’t remember how awful it is and we don’t teach it.

**Educational values.** Josefine indicated that education was especially important to her mother, who did not have the chance to go to college. Josefine studied finance, received an MBA, and then went on to become a teacher. During the interview, she frequently mentioned problems in the American education system. She felt that education is very valued in the German culture, and Germans have very different standards of education than Americans. Josefine believed that Germans excel academically due to their values on work ethic and discipline.

**Johanna**

Johanna asked me to come to her home for the interview. We scheduled it for a week later because she was busy with her kids’ schedules and her husband’s schedule. Her husband was American and a CIO for a large food company in the area. Johanna was very open about her spiritual life as a Christian and her obligations as a philanthropist and as a Mother. She was very hospitable, and her children were at home and came in and out from time to time. Johanna put much emphasis on how her mother made things special while she was growing up, such as Christmas and birthdays. She did
the same for her children. She was probably the most religious participant, and she referenced her family and religious background several times, although she is probably one of the least involved in the German community. I felt that she held something against the local German community and politics. She said that her parents tried to get her involved in the cultural youth group as she grew up, but she felt like everything was a competition and that the girls frowned upon her just coming in, instead of starting when they all began as children. She never really felt comfortable or at home with the German community, so she immersed herself in more meaningful relationships at school and Church. Johanna chose not to send her children to German school or German dancing for fear that they too would be turned off by people not really accepting them when they would come there. She did not want them to feel the way she did, so she decided to put them into more Religious obligations and sports as well as music and theatre. Johanna and I would go back and forth while we spoke and she and I would throw a German word in there every so often, so I know she still remembers how to speak German. We laughed about not knowing the English words for certain things right away. However, she did say that her sister who was 11 years older than her was pushed by her parents much more to be a part of the cultural groups and to learn the language. We both agreed though, that hearing the parents speak German at home when we were growing up made it easy to pick up the language fairly quickly.

As I got to this point in the interview process, it occurred to me that for people like Johanna, it was about the things they took with them: family, traditions, holidays, birthdays. It was not necessarily about the Germanness; it was more about what comes from being German-American within their respective families.
**Values and beliefs.** Johanna referenced several German traditions in her family when growing up. She described them as “special” and felt that strong family values were instilled in her. She had always respected her parents and adhered to their rules, and she recognized the sacrifices her parents made to put her through Catholic high school. She described how her parents focused on saving money and ensuring that their children lived comfortable lives. For Johanna, family values were the most significant values in her life.

**Identity recognition.** Johanna felt that her identity aligned the most with the German American identity, and she did not consider herself very American. She stated that she was Americanized, but her German roots were deeply embedded in her personality. Johanna noted that her life in America made her realize how grateful she is because her relatives in Germany live completely different lives. She stated that she has the best of both worlds. She felt particularly connected to her Christian faith and the moral values that she grew up with, but she was also able to assimilate into American culture. Johanna also discussed how German Americans, at times, place more emphasis on their German heritage than Germans themselves.

**Intercultural mobility.** Johanna discussed living a sheltered life from the hardships of being a second generation German American. She had not encountered negative perceptions of Germans, especially because her parents had such a strong influence on her perceptions of her culture. She mentioned that her parents did not want to talk about their past experiences and difficulties. It was very difficult for them to talk about the war and the hardships they faced before moving to America. Johanna saw the
strength and perseverance in her family, and she did not let any stigmas about Germans influence her beliefs and pride in her heritage.

**Educational values.** Johanna stated that education was a priority in her family, particularly because her parents were not able to continue in education. She ended up becoming a teacher and felt pride in her occupation because Germans often place value on the importance of teachers. She mentioned some influence of gender roles in her family because her mother emphasized the importance of going to college to find a well-educated husband. However, Johanna felt that she has been able to adapt, and she emphasizes with her daughter the importance of education and self-sustenance.

**Francesca**

Francesca is a distant relative of mine, and both of her parents were born abroad. This interview was conducted via Skype because she lived in Michigan and would not be in town any time soon. She was quick to get back to me after I asked if she would be interested in participating. She married an American man and had two small children. They were not involved much in the local German community, although she did take German in school and wished they were more involved. She was more concise in her answers than other participants, and she had a very matter of fact way about her. Francesca’s mother raised her and her brother almost completely on her own because her father passed away when they were very young. Francesca’s mother was known as being a tough woman in the family because she was able to raise her two young kids without help all these years. Both children were well educated and successful, Francesca a business woman and her brother an artist. She was close to her cousins and aunts and uncles when she was growing up because they were around more to compensate after the
loss of her father. She, not her brother, was involved in the German community by choice. She said her mother gave it as an option, not a command like many other parents did. She was a big fan of skiing, which is a German favorite of the winter sports. She was athletic and played soccer which is another thing she felt like she did because of the German traditions and her family being involved in the Green-White soccer club that was comprised of mostly Germans at the time. She valued independence and spontaneity at the same time. She moved out to Michigan where her uncle and cousins lived, but all the rest of her family were still here in Chicago. She was adventurous to say the least, traveled and still travels quite a bit to exotic places and valued what the world has to offer where culture is concerned.

**Values and beliefs.** Francesca indicated that family values and closeness were important in her family. She also mentioned that financial responsibility was imperative, and she had to pay for her own books and school materials. Francesca noted how her mother wanted her to balance the family’s checkbook and pay the bills so that she could learn the value of money, despite it being her parent’s money. Francesca and her brother both started working at 14 and were expected to learn how to work hard and be self-sufficient. Francesca found that focusing on family was more important than material possessions.

**Identity recognition.** Francesca considered herself German American, but she recognized the strong American influence on her identity. Still, she attempted to remain active in the German community and joined a German youth group when she was young. Now, Francesca instills German values and traditions in her children. She emphasized
that she felt fully integrated as an American, and she is proud to share her unique German American history with her family.

**Intercultural mobility.** Francesca mentioned that she never felt ashamed to be German American and never experienced significant humiliation in any way. However, she noted that people often assume that she is Jewish because of her last name. She described how her family migrated to America, and mentioned that her parents sacrificed everything to create better lives for their children. German immigrants often migrated to the Chicago area and created German neighborhoods. It was important for Francesca to have family nearby to avoid feeling isolated.

**Educational values.** Francesca stated that she never doubted that she would pursue education. She mentioned that her family supported her college decisions and valued her educational pursuits. Francesca had attended law school without finishing, but recognized that it would not benefit her financially to complete an MBA. She did not feel that being German American affected her educational experiences. Francesca described cultural characteristics of German Americans, but found these characteristics to not be true for many German Americans she knew.

**Brigitte**

Brigitte was also a distant relative of mine and lived close to my house. She invited me over, and we had scheduled the interview by talking to each other at German school when we were dropping our children off. She listened intently as I explained the study and seemed interested in what the outcome would be. She had four girls, and her husband was born and raised in Germany. He was also at home but was in the next room watching a movie. We scheduled the interview for a time when her kids would all be
asleep so we could have the house in quiet, which she explained was not often. Brigitte was raised in a very strict and traditional German household. Neither of her parents had more than a high school education and her father was in the trades. Her parents got married right when her mother got out of high school and was a homemaker her entire life. Brigitte was a registered nurse for a local hospital on the labor and delivery floor. Brigitte said she had difficulties learning while she was small; she thought it was because she only spoke German with her parents at home and had a difficult adjustment to the English-speaking school environment. Brigitte had a longer path to higher education; she started after high school at X Midwestern University and did not feel comfortable there. She left after a year there and stayed home to accrue some credit hours at the local community college while she figured out what it was that she wanted to do. She then decided to attend a small liberal arts college close to home. It was there that she decided what she would do with the rest of her life and really felt at ease in the environment. She began to flourish academically with the support she needed and she credited the size of the college as well as the size of the classes. She said she knew once she got there that her deficiencies would no longer be a problem because she had the support from teachers that she needed. Brigitte who fostered the language and culture with her four girls was also considering moving to a district where German is taught in school because her district had cut the German language program a few years back. It was important to her that her children have the option at the very least to learn the language.

**Values and beliefs.** Brigitte stated that hard work and honesty were her two most important values. She acknowledged the difficulties and hard work her family had to go through to come to America and respected her family for the sacrifices they made and the
suffering they endured. She strongly detested the stereotyped association of German values with the Nazi regime. Brigitte knew that her family had suffered greatly during the war because her grandfather was forced to fight and her grandmother was forced into a concentration camp. Brigitte stated that her family’s experiences taught her how to persevere.

**Identity recognition.** Brigitte felt that identity developed with the experiences of her family. They spent a lot of time with other German Americans and kept traditions alive. Spending time with other immigrant families gave Brigitte a sense of community and belonging. Brigitte stated that her family was good at integrating into American culture to ensure that they were not singled out, but they kept true to their heritage in private. She also emphasized that she did not feel fully assimilated into American culture and was uncertain how American culture is defined. She stated that she was very supportive of Americans and the American spirit, but she also follows her German cultural traditions.

**Intercultural mobility.** Brigitte described fears of being stigmatized due to Nazi associations, but indicated that she was fortunate that she did not experience discrimination or difficulties. Brigitte felt that she could never be ashamed of her culture because she would never let anyone make her feel that way. She did, however, express concerns about stigmas and wished that there was not a stigma associated with German culture. Brigitte found that staying true to herself and recognizing that she could not be defined by cultural ignorance allowed her to maintain her identity as a German American.

**Educational values.** Brigitte noted that hard work and responsibility was very important in her family, so it was necessary for her to get a good education and make a
living for herself. She stated that her children going to college was not necessary as long as they could adequately support themselves. She understood the hard work her family had gone through, and indicated that her parents experienced difficulties with putting her through college. She did not have support with the college process from her family because they did not have experience with educational pursuits, but her parents went into debt to pay for her education. Brigitte mentioned that she felt she did not have support from schools, and no one was available to adequately help her throughout the process. She worked hard to accomplish her educational goals, and the majority of what she learned was self-taught.

**Tristan**

Tristan met me at a local coffee house by his home at his request. He was very busy because he worked from home in his own editing company, wrote books, and had a career in radio. He free-lanced quite a bit, and he had three boys at home as well a wife of Irish American heritage. He was somewhat late to the interview, which he assured me is not characteristic of him. He went to get some coffee before sitting down and was eager to share his stories, although he seemed somewhat nervous about what I might be asking him. He was uncertain about what he could possibly add to the study because he was not much of an “academic.” I assured him that he did meet the criteria, and he would be a great addition to the study. Once he got going, he really had a lot to contribute. He mentioned several times about how he did not quite take school seriously all the time and actually during college, spent time on and off academic probation. He laughed about the experience. He said he was so immersed in his radio show that he would spend late nights working in the radio department and he did not worry too much about his classes.
Once he knew he was on probation, he said he would kick it up a few notches for a semester, get straight As, and then go back to his typical ways after getting off of probation. He said he knew this was frustrating for his parents because they knew he was intelligent but lazy. Tristan said he tried to send his kids to German dancing for a while but made the mistake of making fun of the experience at home, so they did not want to go anymore. His sister would take them for a while, but once they were old enough to decide for themselves, he said he did not promote it enough, which he was remorseful about. He could definitely break in and out of speaking German and was asked to host and emcee many events in the German community. He had a leadership role in the German Green-White Soccer club which he said he did in honor of his father. His one son still played soccer for the club. Recently, he had actually written a history book about the club to document their accomplishments through the years.

Values and beliefs. Tristan stated that loyalty and trustworthiness were values instilled in his family. He felt that his family’s values and expectations had an impact on his educational pursuits. Tristan also emphasized that some of the values instilled in him were not only part of the German culture, but also resulted due to his family’s immigration experiences. Tristan described his family support and his experiences spending time with other German immigrants when growing up.

Identity recognition. Tristan indicated that he never felt American in the U.S. and never felt German when living in Germany. He felt his experiences were unique to German Americans, but he could not deny the German part of himself, even when he did not want to take part in cultural traditions when he was younger. Tristan revealed that he was teased for being German, and he wanted to be more American when he was a
A teenager. He wanted to identify with his American friends and felt somewhat embarrassed by some of the German traditions. Now, he regretted rejecting German traditions when he was younger and tries to incorporate them into his children’s lives.

**Intercultural mobility.** Tristan described experiences with anti-German hysteria and stigmas. He mentioned that he was teased while growing up, and he had experienced racism during a job interview. Tristan was always on guard about being a German, especially in his career with radio. Tristan indicated that he had many experiences with discrimination and hatred toward Germans. Tristan had obviously been affected by these events, but he appeared to not let these occurrences bring down his spirit.

**Educational values.** For Tristan, not going to college was not an option in his family. He always knew that he was going to pursue a degree, but he indicated that he was more of a “flaky, creative type” than the typical German American college student. Tristan got a degree in advertising to appease his father because a degree in journalism or film did not meet his father’s standards. Tristan felt he was different from the image of the typical German American student.

**Hilda**

At her request, Hilda and I met via Skype because she was managing children’s schedules and lives and lived about an hour and a half away. She was happy to participate. I actually contacted her because her mother and my mother were friends and they were talking about my project. Her mother suggested to my mother that her children met the criteria, and she was sure they would want to participate. I contacted all three of my mother’s friends’ children, but only Hilda responded that she wanted to be a part of
the study. Hilda was married to an American man and her children (two boys) were not involved at all in the German community or language classes.

Most of Hilda’s stories and memories were Religious and familial in nature. Hilda was highly active in the Boy Scouting community and served in leadership roles in the organization. She had chosen that path for her family both because of the distance from the cultural club as well as not finding her fit with the club when she was more active there as a teenager. She held onto more relationships from her college years than to the friends she had made in the cultural club. She was also very musical, which is held in high regard in the German culture; perhaps it came from her mother who served as the music leader for the German youth group for many years.

**Values and beliefs.** Hilda stated that religious values, respect, and responsibility were very important in her family. Hilda mentioned that mannerisms, behaviors, and beliefs were highly influenced by religion. She was taught to respect her elders, succeed in school, and be responsible. She attributed her father’s business success to his intuition and abilities to work well with others. Hilda took part in several German holidays and traditions, and she found tradition important to reflecting on one’s heritage and history.

**Identity recognition.** Hilda felt that she identified as a German American, but was more influenced by her American side. She had experience with German traditions and culture, but her lifestyle was very Americanized. Hilda was not as actively involved in the German community, and she did not feel that German traditions were applicable for her to daily life. Hilda felt completely integrated in American culture. However, Hilda treasured taking part in German culture and traditions. Her German roots provided deep connections to her family and her family’s experiences.
**Intercultural mobility.** Hilda felt that her German values and beliefs of hard work and independence led to a belief that she did not need help or accommodation from anyone. Hilda indicated that Germans are able to easily integrate into American culture; therefore, the term “silent minority” expresses German wishes to not draw attention to themselves or their needs. Hilda mentioned that German Americans tended to be resourceful and worked toward meeting their own needs rather than bringing up issues. She was able to integrate into American culture while still valuing German traditions and customs.

**Educational values.** Hilda indicated that she had to go to college due to her mother’s wishes. She had always known that she wanted to become a teacher; so obtaining a college degree had always been a significant goal. Hilda found that the stereotypical German traits instilled in her were helpful during her educational pursuits because she was taught to work hard, maintain goals, and act responsibly. Hilda stated that her parents were very supportive of her educational pursuits, but she also had a strong drive to succeed academically.

**Heidi**

Heidi’s parents were both from Northern Germany; I really had to find a place within me to keep from having a certain bias about that. There was a little bit of an old mentality that I tried to shake but still considered that Northern Germans are slightly more conceited or uppity than those in the middle or south of Germany. They do speak a more formal German versus the slang I was used to. However, Heidi was also married to a “schwob,” or one that shares in my culture, so she had adapted quite a bit to a mixture of both Northern and Southern German. She asked if I could interview her in her home.
since her husband was traveling and she was home with both of her children. She asked if I could come over after a holy day of obligation at church because my church was close to her home. When I walked in, her mother was in the kitchen cleaning up her pantry and helping her reorganize the kitchen. She was very hospitable and asked if I wanted anything. It took about half an hour before we were able to get the interview going because her kids were in the home and getting ready for bed, and her mother was also in the home and wanted to know about the study. She was the one participant to become emotional during the interview when I asked about her parents. As she recollected memories about her Father when growing up, she cried tears of joy and tears of longing for her Father. She also became emotional about all her parents had done to give her everything she has today and to provide her with a secure upbringing. She was very open about her Religious life and how strong that part was for her growing up and still is in adulthood. She passed on the German school and the religious piece to her children who are involved in many things. She and her husband promoted soccer for them but also music and playing instruments. They wanted them to have all the experiences that make a well-rounded childhood.

**Values and beliefs.** Heidi described the responsibility values instilled in her growing up. She was always taught to be financially responsible, and she related a story of how her family recommended she save half of her paycheck; however, she chose to save more because she recognized the value of money from an early age. Heidi also described family-oriented values, skepticism, and a lack of trust in banks. She noted that her father kept cash in the house because of a reluctance to trust outside individuals due
to their experiences and difficulties growing up. Heidi also described a strong work ethic and a propensity for self-sustenance in her family.

**Identity recognition.** Heidi stated that she identified with being German American and was proud of her culture and heritage. She mentioned that many German Americans she knew with Americanized families wished they had the amount of German influence on their lives as Heidi’s family. Heidi felt lucky to have traditions and German culture in her life. Heidi felt that she was integrated into American culture, but identified more with her German heritage.

**Intercultural mobility.** During her childhood, Heidi had felt concern over her German heritage due to Nazi associations. Heidi questioned whether being German made her a bad person, due to the connection with Hitler. However, growing up, her parents assured her that she had nothing to do with Hitler and continued to instill pride in German culture and values.

**Educational values.** Heidi felt that her parents were very supportive of her college decisions, and education was considered necessary in her family. Heidi described how her mother pushed her toward a degree in nursing, but she felt that this career was desirable and appropriate. She actively sought out education and felt that constantly learning new material was important to her. She stated that this concept was a value instilled in her by her parents. Heidi also indicated that her parents actively sought to teach her life skills and ensure that she could be self-sufficient.

**Gertie**

Gertie lives a distance from me, so this interview was conducted via Skype. I had known Gertie my whole life through association with the German American cultural
group, and our parents held leadership positions when we were young. We had also traveled to Germany together when I was just 6 years old. Gertie was now a nurse, obtaining her PhD, and highly educated. Her whole family was educated, and both of her brothers were engineers with advanced degrees. She married an Irish American, and her children attended German school and German folk dancing. Of all the participants in this study, she was probably the most involved in the German community. She was so willing to help that she advertised the study to others in her local area to see if she could gain more participants. We probably spent the majority of our time together off the record, catching up with one another and reminiscing about the good times we had traveling abroad with the German cultural group when we were younger. Gertie’s father ran the German Day festivities which were attended far and wide. She sent both of her boys to the German dance group and required them to attend German language school. I knew Gertie practiced her German cooking frequently because of some of the social media pictures she posted. She loved speaking German too and spoke with a slightly different dialect, perhaps with a southern twang, so there were times where I was not quite sure I understood her correctly. As I may have mentioned several times, we speak a different dialect than the proper German and there are some differences that families might use within that dialect. Gertie was strongly and forever a German who was very proud of her culture and always will be. She worked hard to continue the culture and further it to future generations through volunteer work with her German cultural community.

**Values and beliefs.** Gertie found that family values and work ethic were values that were instilled in her growing up. Gertie stated that her parents taught her to be
responsible and to have pride in what she did in life. She was also taught financial responsibility and to not take anything for granted. Gertie mentioned that at times she was stereotyped as a German for being “anal,” but she found this quality to be necessary to success. She did not understand why anyone would not want to put forth their best efforts in achieving their goals. She felt that work ethic was a strong value held in many German immigrant families, especially because they had to prove that they could become upstanding citizens in American society. Gertie connected traditions and customs with a sense of community and belonging as a German American.

**Identity recognition.** Gertie felt that she was both American and German American. She mentioned that as she became more proficient in English, her parents would speak to her in German and she would answer back in English. She also mentioned that at 15, she joined a youth group. Gertie stated that she believes identity changes over time as an individual tries to discover who he or she is. She described how her German American culture gives her a sense of home and connection to her heritage.

**Intercultural mobility.** Gertie felt fully integrated as an American, but she also keeps German traditions alive. She mentioned that she does not view herself or her parents as minorities. When growing up, she experienced German stigmas and name calling, but she stood up for herself and her family. Gertie recognized the hardships her family went through with German stigmas, but her family always valued their culture and continued to instill pride in their heritage.

**Educational values.** Gertie always knew that she wanted to pursue higher education. She earned a bachelor’s degree from X Midwestern University and then certification from a local community college. At the time of the interview, Gertie was a
physical therapist assistant. She felt that her experiences and work ethic allowed her to be a productive student. However, Gertie attributed this to her personal attributes and experiences. She did recognize the influence her German American upbringing had on her educational values.

**Marta**

Marta was willing to help when I reached out to her and her sister, and she was the first to respond back to me. We knew one another from participating in the German folk dancing group. She also attended the same college I attended, but several years before me. Marta was a physical therapy assistant and, although I see her from time to time at German gatherings, she was not anywhere near as active as she used to be when she was younger. She was unmarried and lived on her own. She had kept in contact with her closest group of friends from when she had been in the German cultural group. They were still very close, and she credits that to all the travel and trips they took while she was in the youth group. She said they also “get” each other because of how they grew up in very similar types of households. Her mother lived in Argentina for some time; however, she lived in a German community within Argentina so they also integrated that culture within the culture of the Danube Swabians. Her grandparents were a very big part of her life and now that they are gone, she values her cultural upbringing even more. She actually wrote me a thank you letter after the interview because she said she missed talking about the culture and German upbringing so much since her grandparents passed; the interview was a way for her to remember it all and she was filled with good memories about her childhood. Soccer was always an important part of her home and still was. She said after the last World cup, her family was still reeling from the big win. She
identified hard work ethic several times in various contexts and I believe that was no accident. She really credited that in her journey toward adulthood in making her a successful individual. She believed that the immigrant experience of her parents and grandparents made for a hard-working and grateful people. She said they never looked for handouts; they were always grateful for what they had because they worked for it and earned it.

**Values and beliefs.** Marta stated that preserving cultural traditions and values were important to her family. She was expected to have a positive attitude, work hard, acquire an education, and be responsible. She emphasized the importance of keeping traditions alive while learning how to adapt and move forward. Marta found that she wished she were better about using the German language more often, but she noted that she attempted to instill cultural values through family and a German children’s program. Education has always been a priority in her family.

**Identity recognition.** Marta primarily identified with her German roots. She was Americanized, but considered herself German American. She felt that she also identified with the immigrant experience of having to work hard and persevere during difficult times. She felt that staying true to one’s heritage is important so that it does not become lost. However, Marta also recognized that some traditions are out of place in American society. She worked actively to preserve her culture and heritage while also maintaining her own identity.

**Intercultural mobility.** Marta found that she identified with other German students growing up. She worked hard to ensure her core values and experiences were not forgotten or overshadowed by her American experiences. Marta felt pride and
comfort in her German culture. She did not mention instances of trying to become more Americanized or fit in with American ideals. Marta was determined to achieve her own goals, but she was influenced by core German values.

**Educational values.** Marta described the significance of education in her family, especially as the first female in her family to pursue a degree. She stated that her grandparents’ wish was for her to go to college and obtain an education. Marta highly valued her educational pursuits and was happy to make her family proud. She felt that her strong work ethic and dedication allowed her to become academically successful, and she remarked on the different educational experiences her father went through to complete grade school prior to immigration. She felt that German immigrants all have unique stories and experiences, and she found it important for hers to persevere and not take her education for granted.

**Summary**

I approached the participants’ profiles from the position of this study’s research questions, focusing on the notions of German American values and beliefs and emphasizing thoughts and emotions centered on work ethic, tradition, temperament, and closeness experienced by the participants. I also found some essential characteristics that determined their self-identities, the influence of language, and the experiences of coming to America. This, in turn, allowed me to describe intercultural mobility that deals with the perceptions of difficulty, assimilation, and transitioning. Finally, the individual experiences of the participants demonstrated examples of the German American work ethic and high regard for responsibility as well as the importance of support.
The information obtained during my interviews with these participants represents the milieu of distinct cultural experiences of second generation German Americans. Throughout my undertaking as an “inside” researcher, the experiences documented by German American participants shed light on the values and beliefs, identity recognition, intercultural mobility, and educational values themes reflected in participant discussions. Group and individual meanings associated with the emerging themes will be discussed and analyzed further in chapter five.
CHAPTER FIVE
DATA ANALYSIS II

*I believe that man is in the last resort so free a being that his right to be what he believes himself to be cannot be contested.*
— Georg C. Lichtenberg

**Sociocultural Perspectives of Second Generation German Americans**

In this chapter, the participants’ experiences are discussed and analyzed to shed light on the multifaceted, dynamic spirit of German Americans living in the United States. The analysis of the data has resulted in the identification of several meaningful themes that speak to the study’s research questions. Thus, thematic analysis in the first section addresses the first research question, whereby discussing German American values and beliefs, emphasizing the thoughts and emotions centered on work ethic, tradition, temperament, and closeness experienced by the participants. Subsequently, the second research question is addressed in the second section, reflecting on the themes of identity recognition using self-categorized identity, language influence, and experiences with coming to America. In the third section, themes of intercultural mobility that focus on perceptions of difficulty, assimilation, and transitioning speak to the third research question. The fourth section focuses on the discussions of educational values raised within the fourth research question, describing salient experiences and examples of the German American work ethic and high regard for responsibility as well as the importance of support.
“With Hope and Honest Strife”: German American Values

American, the New Homeland
The German citizen settled in this land
He sought a home, success with his hand.
In his old home he was at war’s edge,
But with confidence he jumped a new hedge.
He was determined to build a new life,
With hope and honest strife,
Into the New World, America, he placed his best,
With God and courage, he’d prevail the test.
Fifty years ago he arrived to regain,
To his spirit and zeal, he gave free reign.
He adopted a new way of life,
To progress and growth belonged his strife.
He proved his knowledge of outer space, as
A craftsman he achieved first place.
The arts hold him in high esteem,
German traditions, beliefs, and values play an integral role in shaping the identities of German Americans living in the United States. The introductory poem provides a salient example of this phenomenon because it reflects the emphasis on hard work and family values that were portrayed in the German American participants. When conversing with participants on the influence of German tradition on personal values, I sought to address questions that were aimed at unpacking the traditions, beliefs, and values of second-generation German Americans that distinguish them as a cultural group amidst American diversity. Specifically, selective acculturation of the German American participants was explored by recording participant reflections on daily life. This was necessary to analysis because selective acculturation involves the deliberate preservation of ethnic community values while incorporating economic and interactive forms of integration within another community. By analyzing selective acculturation influence, I was able to systematically gain perspectives on the ways in which the German American participants maintained their community identity. During this process, values and beliefs were emphasized in discussions of participant experiences.

**Values and Beliefs**

Values and beliefs was a significant theme when discussing academic and cultural experiences as second-generation German Americans. The values and beliefs theme was
analyzed as a higher-level theme due to the participants’ emphasis on this theme as a highly influential aspect of growing up as German Americans. Observed subthemes included work ethic, tradition, temperament, and closeness. Work ethic was the subtheme that was discussed the most frequently. During analysis, values and beliefs were shown to be significant factors when describing how second-generation German Americans cope with transitioning to the United States, maintain familial bonds, and persevere during difficult times.

**Work Ethic**

This subtheme centers on experiences and beliefs regarding dedication, hard work, and responsibility. Work ethic was mentioned more frequently by the older participants and by the females. Within groups engaged in community involvement, there were no differences in beliefs on work ethic between not active and active community group members. Work ethic was described as a stereotypical German trait and an important belief upheld by German families. Gertie described the value of work ethic:

As I had mentioned above family is a value that was instilled but also work ethic has played a major role as well. My parents have taught me that one needs to have work ethic and pride in what you do in all parts of life. This started at an early age with learning what the value of an education was.

Marta further elaborated on the importance of work ethic within a German American upbringing:

I think an advantage, a definite advantage, is the work ethic. I think that is something unique to immigrants, and immigrant-descended populations. I think that could probably apply to more than one ethnic group, of course, but the idea of work ethic. Work hard. Again, finish what you start. To see it through. To not let yourself get frustrated to the point where you would allow yourself to quit. Life’s tough, you know? While education maybe difficult in and of itself, it’s
nothing compared to what collectively, our ancestors have gone through. To learn that, to be able to persevere because of that, was always a distinct advantage.

Francesca also described work ethic and responsibility values:

It was also very important that we learned the value of the dollar at an early age. My brother and I both began working at the age of 14 and were required to pay for our own clothing and school books. When I turned 16, it was legal for me to be on my mother’s checking account and from that point on, she insisted that I be the one to write the checks to pay the bills and balance her check book. It was her money, but I learned the importance of turning a light off when you leave the room.

I share the sentiments of these participants when it comes to work ethic. I recall at an early age that my parents would talk about the importance of doing well in school, making sure I got good grades, and definitely they never let me miss school unless I was on my death bed. I remember trying to get out of a test one day in grammar school and my mom checked my temperature several times. I stayed under the covers an extra-long time so I could possibly heat up my body temperature, but to no avail; I went to school that day. My parents were both hard workers and if they were sick or tired, it did not matter; they still went to work and they expected the same of me with school. They treated school as my job. They were also very adamant about not being wasteful and I think that was tied in to their work ethic. They did not work hard just to waste; they worked hard to make something of themselves and their families and to provide. That stays with me today; my co-workers joke with me that I do not miss work for any reason. When I am sick, I still show up; that is absolutely something I learned from a young age. I suppose it comes from all my parents endured during the war and throughout the immigration process. Nothing was going to keep them down, even a little cold or flu. The Germans are a strong people, and they have gotten through a lot and persevered to be where they are today. This is probably why the Germans, at least the ones I know, are
fairly religious people. I remember my grandmother would always say, “Wie Gott will.” Basically, in a nutshell, it means let God’s will be done. Germans, especially the older generation, trusted in God because what else could they believe in when they saw such terrible things during a time of war. I even remember my grandmother laughing the first time I brought my first son to visit her when he was a couple of weeks old. I had a pair of athletic pants on him and she thought it was the funniest thing that he was wearing these cute little pants. They did not have anything like that; they gave birth in covered wagons while they were on their way to find safe ground during the war. My grandmother told us about when she birthed her sister-in-law’s baby, Engelberta, who did not survive the long trip in the covered wagons and died because of starvation because there was not enough to eat. My grandmother brought out a pillowcase and showed me how they would swaddle their babies in a pillowcase and tie them up with string so they were nice and snuggled in their swaddles. They made do with what they had, and what they had was next to nothing. I think that is why the German Americans of today are appreciative of everything. Everything they have and do not have, if that makes sense.

**Tradition**

This subtheme focuses on practices and customs passed down through families. Tradition was a significant theme for the older participants and for the females. Tradition was also more frequently discussed by individuals who were not active in their communities. Tradition was a moderating subtheme that had a significant effect on participant experiences despite whether participants continued enacting traditions and engaging with their communities or not. Gertie described German traditions:

One fond tradition that still remains is getting together to make Christmas cookies. I think as I become older, I cherish those family times more and more.
Music is always something that has been part of our lives, and dancing. Now it’s time to begin to teach my niece and nephew the ropes. We get together on the weekends a lot to enjoy each other’s company and call that “our church.” I love to learn from my Mom how to make ethnic German meals, some of which I started learning how to make standing on a chair when I was little in the kitchen helping my Mom. Another tradition was being part of the German youth group of the Donauschwaben. Soccer was also a big part of our family.

Nicklaus also described his German family traditions:

Seeing as today is St. Nicholas Day, my children put out their boots by the front door last night before bed, in hopes that St. Nicholas would leave them a special treat. Lo and behold, there were the traditional apples and oranges and little chocolates. That, along with today being the second Sunday of advent, and lighting that second candle on the advent wreath, as we celebrate and exist in our very decorated home with a combination of Santa Claus and St. Nicholas type decorations. Everything in my life tends to have a little German flair, and the holidays are notwithstanding.

The most recognized tradition from the participants in this study revolved around the Christmas holiday, starting with St. Nicholas to Christmas. Germans are filled with rich tradition during the holidays and in Germany of course, with their Christkindlmarkets which are becoming increasingly more popular here in the U.S. Our family still bakes many Christmas cookies each holiday and my parents give them to neighbors, coworkers, really everyone they know. When my parents were still in Europe, my mother especially has fond memories of the Christmas holiday. She remembers on St. Nicholas night that both Nickolaus and Grampus would come to the town, and the bad children would be told that they would need to go into Grampus’ sack and be beaten with his stick, and the good children would get fruits, nuts, and chocolate from Nickolaus. I suppose it reminds me a little of when children in the U.S. are told they will get coal in their stocking if they are not well behaved. We have modified this quite a bit in our family, but the sentiment and sense of a special night still remain.
My parents did the same with my sister and me as they do with my children. We sit down and have a special meal on “Nickolaus abend,” which is the evening of Nickolaus. We still put our boots out at the front door while my parents pretend that they are getting things “ready” in the kitchen. My dad then goes out and puts the fruits, nuts, and candy as well as toys for the kids near the respective child’s boots and then he rings the bell loud for everyone to hear that Nickolaus was at our house. We all still pretend and go along with it, even though I am 32 and my sister is 44 years old. We run to the door and the kids are always surprised and elated with their loot. My mom especially starts yelling and screaming that Nickolaus was here; I am still shocked that she can put on a display like that year after year so the kids are more inclined to believe.

My mother still talks about Christmas being such a special time for her in Salzburg, Austria, in the refugee camp for displaced people. She said although they had nothing, they shared their one bedroom apartment where the rest of the displaced people lived, behind barbwire fences and a small shed to hold their extra belongings. My mother’s parents kept their shed filled with chickens. Her mother would use the eggs for baking and making chicken goulash; only one day a week was for eating meat. The American soldiers were on the other side of those fences. My mother said that although they were refugees, she never actually heard the word “flüchtling” in explanation for what they were; the word means refugee. She did not know until years later, when they were in the U.S. already, that they were actually refugees and that they were very poor. During Christmas, she said her mother would bake and bake for days, all the traditional Christmas cookies of their culture. She would invite the rest of the people from the barracks and they would celebrate. She would use the eggs to make Eierlikör, or spiked
egg nog, and she would share that with all the other people who lived around them to celebrate the Christmas holiday. My mother never really knew they were poor, and the holidays were a time of warm memories for her. They knew how to make something from nothing.

Children would learn poems and German Christmas songs during the holidays and perform them for the older relatives and their teachers. We still keep this tradition in the German cultural club. I still remember playing the role of Mary in the German play at the Museum of Science and Industry during the Christmas season as I grew up. We used to meet at the German club, take the bus to the Museum, perform our play and dance with the folk dancing group, and get back on the bus to go back to the clubhouse. Every year would also include a club Christmas party where the children would perform their poems, sing songs, dance with the dance group as well as put on the nativity play, once again for the parents and grandparents at the clubhouse. I keep this tradition close to my heart as my children continue to be involved in this yearly tradition. It is a rite of passage of sorts for them to have to learn the traditional poems that their relatives and those before them memorized and recited for their elders. It is a way to keep their culture and the memories of their relatives alive in their hearts during the holidays year after year.

In my parents’ home, we celebrate Christmas on Christmas Eve; Santa comes instead of “Christkind,” which is who would come to visit when they still lived in Europe. Directly translated to the Christ child, he would visit with a special gift for the children. Now, Santa comes to our home with many, many gifts and the children are still subjected to singing the German Christmas songs, although we have added some of the
American favorites such as Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer and Santa Clause is Coming to Town. It was always strange to me that we would celebrate on Christmas Eve, or in German, Heiliger Abend, when all my friends were celebrating Christmas the next day after waking up early and celebrating on Christmas day.

Temperament

This subtheme centers on beliefs and behaviors is associated with instilling good manners, appropriateness, and ethical behaviors in individuals. Temperament themes occurred more often with the older participants, the females, and the active community members. This subtheme was not explicitly mentioned as often as other subthemes, but was observed as an underlying subtheme in participant discussions. Tristan discussed this theme by expressing his views on reliability:

Number two is what I mentioned first off is the reliability; your word is your bond. I have no patience for not being there when you say you’re going to be there. My boys are totally reliable because of that. They know that if they make their commitment to something, they will be there. They have accepted that that is the ultimate German compliment; if somebody counts on you, that’s the ultimate compliment from a German.

Axel also discussed this theme by elaborating on moral and selfless beliefs instilled in him by family members:

But there were some things that really stuck out, as far as how to be helpful to people. That’s another thing that was really big and not changed. When I was little, I would always hold doors open for people, especially the women and elderly. . . . But I would shovel driveways. I had old neighbors. They were older than my parents. Shovel their driveways. I had five driveways right around the house that I shoveled since I was like 10 years old, where I would shovel a 200 foot driveway for 75 cents. But it was always about . . . Some of that was with me. Oma always said, she goes, “No matter how poor you are, you always have something to offer, even if it’s just time. There’s always something that you can do.”
It was not about the money for these participants; their families knew poverty. They knew what it was like to have nothing of your own, no possessions. Or to have to little in terms of personal possessions that you can fit your entire family’s belongings into one crate and take it with you on a transatlantic trip to the U.S. from Europe. The German Americans I found through my own experiences as well as those of the participants in this study were concerned with “doing the right thing.” In fact, Kristian told me a story about how his father made him return to the store after he stole a pack of gum when he was young. He said his father drove him all the way back to the store and made him go in to the clerk and tell the clerk that he purposely stole the pack of gum and did not pay for it. He handed the gum over as well as the money from his pocket in the exact amount that it would cost to buy the gum. He talked about how the clerk handed the money and the gum back and told him it was okay. Kristian said he felt relieved, but his father would not allow him to keep either and this set the tone for how he was to do the right thing and follow the rules.

My parents were no exception to rule following. I attended Catholic school so there were many rules to be followed. I remember staying quiet during mass, always doing what I was told, getting good grades; those things were of great importance. As I got older, I was a little bolder and from time to time, I would do things that were not, as one would say, in the rulebook. I remember one day in 6th grade, I was chewing gum in class, which was strictly prohibited. I was called to my teacher’s desk so she could check my mouth for the gum she saw me chewing. I quickly swallowed the gum before I got to the desk and she checked my mouth and did not find anything. I was relieved, but the very next week, I was not so lucky when I was unable to get the gum down in time.
remember being so absolutely ashamed and scared after receiving the equivalent of a
detention, which our school called a JUG (justice under God). I actually had my sister
sign the slip because I was too scared and ashamed to bring it home to my parents. I told
them only this year about how I received punishment for chewing gum in class. Along
with being disciplined, doing the right thing, and being as good as your word, Germans
are also big on doing for others and making sure their people are taken care of. I have
really noticed that many of the German Americans I associate with, and especially in my
family, we take care of our elders, especially our grandparents. I never knew my great-
great-grandparents because my parents were a bit older when they had me. I did, however,
develop an extremely tight bond with my two remaining, living grandparents. My Tata,
maternal grandfather, and my Omi, paternal grandmother, were a very big part of my life
growing up. I lived with my grandfather in the upstairs three-flat that he owned in
Jefferson Park because my husband and I were newly married, and the location was
equidistant for our work situations. My grandmother lived close to the school I attended
for my master’s degree and I went to visit her at least once a week. We would shop at the
grocery store, have dinner together, and play German card games. I made sure to help
both of them with writing out their bills, taking them to the bank, taking them grocery
shopping, and the thing they most appreciated, just spending time together.

I feel so fortunate now that my parents instilled this value into me, to take care of
the grandparents, because I got to know them and their stories so deeply that I have a
better understanding of what they went through, along with an immense respect for who
they were and what they endured to bring their families to America. My Tata and Omi
both passed away during the time I spent working in this program. I wanted so badly for
them to see me get to this point, but alas, it was not meant to be. Both of my grandparents lived the rest of their days at home; there was no such thing as a nursing home, and many German Americans agree. It is an unspoken rule that you take care of your parents and grandparents by any means possible. I can still remember the sound of my grandmother’s voice during Christmas, singing the alto to the familiar German Christmas songs. I will hold that with me, always.

Closeness

This subtheme involves a sense of belonging, familial obligation, and bonding between individuals. The subtheme of closeness was equally observed in the age and gender groupings of the participants. Closeness was also more frequently mentioned by participants who were not active community members. Closeness was particularly significant as a generalizable subtheme in various age and gender groups. Tristan described closeness with the siblings in his family:

The thing that I emphasize most with my boys—this was emphasized to me by my father—is the importance of family. Friends come and go, but family is there forever. Even if you hate each other’s guts right now, you have a common bond, a common heritage that will be with you forever. You’ve been brought up the same way, by the same people, in the same direction. My brother, sister, and I have that bond now. My sister and I, we didn’t get along at all when we were kids, not at all. But now we’re close because of that. There’s something there. That’s number one.

I saw an emerging theme come from closeness; participants who most aligned with not participating actively in their communities had more of an emphasis on closeness of family. I found that intuitive and that it made sense because when you do not have the support of the German community to fall back on, you must rely on someone or something and that something would be your family, especially when your family has endured such prominent events to get where they are today. I would also say
that from the individuals I interviewed, I got the strong sense that their families and their German cultural community members would do anything for them. I can speak personally to this because once my fellow family and community members knew that I was working on this project, within days, I had 15 interviews set up. I was humbled that they rallied around me to help me with this project. In fact, I remember asking on the day of the focus groups if one of the individuals could help me with a book that she had in her possession from her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law was a German American writer and poet and I wanted to see if I could borrow a couple of her books. She asked me to meet her at the clubhouse in Des Plaines so that I could get the books from her while she was volunteering at the club to cook for a party the club was having. I walked in and noticed that there were a few ladies in the kitchen cooking ethnic foods for the event. My friend Helga immediately helped me get the books and wanted to discuss the study with me a little more. She wanted to see if she could be helpful in finding more study participants and asked if I needed more people or any more information. The ladies also let me know the times that the library would be open during the week where there were more German resources that I could tap into. They wanted to know more about my project and listened intently. They also wanted to know if I would be interested in coming to speak to the ladies club about my dissertation and about the results that I found. Closeness is a true theme in this research because it has been shown that these people stick together; the old saying goes: Leid halten zusammen; or people stick together.
Synthesis of Subthemes

Work ethic, tradition, temperament, and closeness were grouped under the broad theme of values and beliefs because participants perceived these subthemes to be integral to their culture and upbringing. Work ethic and tradition were considered more important to older participants, temperament and tradition were more significant to the females, and closeness was valued equally by age and gender groups. Participants attributed such values and beliefs to their academic and professional success.

“The Soil You Walk On”: Embodiment of German American Identity

Amerika, die neue Heimat

Der deutsche Bürger ließ sich nider hier im Land,
Er suchte in der freien Welt ein Heim, sein Glück.
In seiner eig’nen Welt stand er am Kriegesrand,
Mit Zuversicht und Hoffnung sah er sein Geschick.

Es war bestrebt ein neues Leben hier zu bau’n,
Im ehrenvollen Schaffen in die Zukunft geh’n.
Der neuen Welt, Amerika, galt sein Vertrau’n;
Mit Gott und Mut wird er die Forderung besteh’n.

Vor fünfzig Jahren ist er tapfer angekommen,
Den Geist und seine Willenskraft ließ er nicht ruh’n.
Die neue Lebensweise hat er angenommen,
Dem Fortschritt und dem Wachstum galt sein reges Tun.

Im Weltraum hat er seine Wissenschaft bewiesen,
In jedem Handwerk ist als Bester er bekannt.
Die Kunst und die Musik hält ihn gepriesen,
Nur oftmals bleibt sein wahres Wirken ungenannt.

Er half Amerika seit Jahren aufzubauen,
Zur Sicherheit, zum Schutz des Landes trug er bei.
Er kann voll Zuversicht in seine Zukunft schauen,
Und wahre Dankbarkeit bewegt ihn stets auf’s Neu.

Durch seinen fleiß’gen Arbeitsmut tagein-tagaus,
130an der Geborgenheit im neueum Heimatland.
Im Herzen blieb er true dem lieben Elternhaus;
Als gutter “Bürger” ist er weit und breit bekannt!
Catherine Grosskopf

Young German Americans
(An unsere Jugend)

You citizens of this great land,
Your blessings- please, do understand.
Don’t walk around, sad and depressed,
And fail to see that you are blessed!

The soil you walk on- is the best,
The work, the play and all the rest.
The freedom here- it tops the world,
Far better than a house of gold!

The U.S. flag- let it rise high,
For all to see upon the sky.
For liberty, justice- let it stand,
So cross your heart and raise your hand!

For you, advantages are many,
Opportunities you have are plenty.
So bite the bullet- sing the song,
Tell of good things, the list is long!

We’re known as “Danube Swabians”,
Today we are no longer aliens.
We lost our home, we lost our land,
Arriving here with empty hands.

Some years ago we crossed the ocean,
A thriving spirit set us in motion.
We worked and prayed helped build this land,
The American way- we understand!

You’re sons and daughters of German descent,
Be proud of your heritage- don’t let it end.
Build on good character-set your goals high
As Americans, your heritage do never deny!

P.S.:
Learn the Language-
Preserve Your Heritage

The significance of heritage appreciation in shaping participant identity was reflected across all participants despite different ages, genders, levels of education, and levels of community involvement. When relating the participants’ experiences to Phinney’s model of ethnic identity development, I was interested in finding out how the sociocultural contexts in which second generation German American students develop a sense of their ethnic identity. According to Phinney, the three stages of identity development include the unexamined identity, exploration of ethnicity, and the recognized identity. The unexamined identity occurs before an individual realizes or understands the implications of one’s cultural heritage. Exploration of ethnicity occurs when an individual begins to question, explore, and analyze the facets of his or her heritage. Finally, the recognized identity occurs when an individual identifies with his or her ethnicity and maintains this identity to form a sense of community and belonging. By exploring ethnic identity, I was able to observe patterns in how the participants formulated their identities. In this process, identity recognition became a significant theme that emerged during data analysis.

Identity Recognition

Identity recognition was a significant theme that surfaced during the participant interviews. Data on identity were grouped in the identity recognition theme because all of the participants fully recognized their identities as concrete entities and did not perceive their identities as unexamined or incompletely actualized. Observed subthemes included self-categorized identity, language influence, and experiences with coming to America. Self-categorized identity was the subtheme that emerged the most often.
Identity recognition was categorized as a higher-level theme because participants considered identity to be crucial to their self-efficacy and success, particularly in education.

**Self-categorized identity.** This subtheme focused on how the participants described their identities according to their own situations and levels of cultural influence. This subtheme was discussed most often by older participants; however, self-categorized identity was deemed significant equally among males and females as well as different levels of community involvement groupings. In this analysis, self-categorized identity differed from simple identity categorizations because these participant associations with identity, as German Americans, were generated by experiences rather than geographical boundaries. Nicklaus elaborated on his self-categorized identity.

I think I developed my own sense from my experiences in participating within German cultural things, German language, attending German school throughout the years, and also my own personal experiences, studying overseas in German-speaking countries, interacting with the people on a day-to-day level, and getting a sense from their perspective on what their culture means, and past history and things like that.

Elisabeth similarly described her self-categorized identity and discussed how her identity became formulated through her experiences with her cultural heritage.

I think my sense of ethnic identity is developed by carrying on the traditions I grew up with, cooking and providing the same types of foods for my family, becoming a German Teacher, using German in my house (not as much as I should, but interjecting it when I can’t think of the English equivalent), explaining the culture or perspective when asked by my kids, and still being in contact with relations in Germany.

Josefine further described self-categorized identity by elaborating on her multifaceted identity that has changed over time.

That has changed over my life. When I was little I wanted to be only American. Even when we lived in Germany, I wanted to be American. As I get older, I’m
very clearly German-American. I’m not from Germany; I’m very careful when I explain to people that we’re ethnic Germans. Although I have lived in Germany, my family is not really German. My mother had a German passport when she came here. My father had no passport; he was a displaced person. I identify with those cultural things. Americans don’t consider me American, and Germans don’t consider me German.

Most of the participants identified as German-Americans first and foremost; however, there were a couple who emphasized pride in their American identity first. All participants believed that identity changes and evolves over time. I am no exception to this. In my early childhood, being German was all I knew. We were more German than the Germans in Germany were because we were ethnic Germans who needed to work harder to keep our heritage in a new land filled with others amongst us. By far, I have more dirndls (traditional dress) in my closet than my cousins in Germany do. I also probably know more ethnic dances than they do. I was not always proud of this though; most of my life I was proud to be German until I found out that not everyone felt that way. Some of the negative experiences I endured, such as being at a primarily Jewish high school and being called a Nazi by some of my Jewish classmates, was a negative experience that greatly influenced my identity. I did not want to be openly German anymore, so I was more American than anything and I slowly stopped attending German cultural events over time. Until I had my children and I decided I wanted them to participate in the events I did as a child, I had not stepped foot into the cultural club for years and years. When I had children, I was reminded of all the good memories the club membership provided me throughout my childhood. I wanted my children to have those same experiences and also learn the language. I became more concerned with not forgetting where I came from. I watched my parents and grandparents get older, and it made me feel more of an allegiance to my culture and ethnicity. If I were asked to
describe my cultural identity over time in terms of a visual, I would have to say that it would look like a deep valley, and I am on my way back up, for now.

**Language influence.** This subtheme centered on how language influenced the participants’ identities and connections with German heritage. Language influence was more significant to older participants than younger participants. Still, language was considered an important identity factor for the gender groups and community involvement groups. Language was considered to be a way to develop a sense of community with other Germans and German Americans, but the participants also were aware of the importance of speaking multiple languages due to expectations and assimilation requirements as second generation Americans. Because education was valued by all of the participants, learning English became crucial to their success. The participants described the importance of maintaining the German language to connect with their families and heritage. Franz described how language had shaped his identity recognition.

I think just kind of growing up with it in our house. We spoke German a lot. We never stopped speaking German at home. We always spoke German growing up. That, of course, contributed to it. The traditions we had at home with the holidays and those kinds of things. I still think the identity of working hard, playing less, was always kind of there.

In a similar vein, Nicklaus elaborated on his language experiences.

I think I developed my own sense from my experiences in participating within German cultural things, German language, attending German school throughout the years, and also my own personal experiences, studying overseas in German-speaking countries, interacting with the people on a day-to-day level, and getting a sense from their perspective on what their culture means, and past history and things like that.

Heidi also described her language experiences while learning English.
Growing up very lazy, it was one of those where they would speak it and you’d just speak English back. When I was smaller, I remember that there was a little bit more German involved, but I definitely spoke English as my primary. They spoke a lot of English for having come from Germany but a lot of that discussion just between the two of them was often in German. We call it Germalish because it was completely . . . And you’d understand the conversation half German, half English and it all blend in. My funniest story from that being messed up here from the German and English. I was at a seventh grade sleepover by my girlfriend’s house, getting ready for bed and just like, “Hey do you want to wash cloth?”

“Waschlappen” is the German word for washcloth. I find myself from time to time thinking of the German word for things before the English. It is interesting because I feel like I do this now most often with my children because of my desire for them to know the language. I am saddened that many high schools have discontinued their German language classes, especially since at one point German could have been the preferred language of the U.S. I believe that knowing German has made it easier for me to catch on to other languages and for me to have a better understanding in my current profession as an advisor. When I meet with international students or students who do not have a good command of the English language, I am slow to jump to impatience or conclusions with these students. I am quick to ask them about their culture and home country. I wish people would have done that for my family when they were immigrating to the U.S. One should never lose their home language. My grandparents, as I mentioned previously, had a small plaque sitting in her home that said “Hier wird Deutsch Gesprochen,” or “Here we speak German”; language is an important piece of the puzzle of keeping and maintaining identity. My grandfather used to take me to German school when I was a child; he also paid for me to attend German school. I remember to this day being proud of my perfect scores to show him when I received my report card at the end of the year. These were straight 1’s because they gave numbers instead of grades,
as it was in Germany when they lived there. I am not sure if I really earned those grades or if it was the fact that all of the teachers were close friends with my family; however, for the sake of my ego, I will go with the thought that I must have been very gifted in the language.

We have continued this rite of passage in my immediate family because my father now takes my children to German school, helps with their lunches, and picks them up when school is over. He pays the tuition bill and I can only hope that I can do the same when the time comes for me to pass the gift on to my future grandchildren. I anticipate that there will be days in the future where my boys will want to go to a soccer practice or play basketball instead of attending German school, but for now I will enjoy that they like going to German school and bringing home new words each week. I hope that there are certain words, like “waschlappen,” that my children will say or, in the future, they will even think in German before they say the English word for it.

**Coming to America.** This subtheme centered on participant experiences with familial narrative and immigration stories. For the participants, storytelling, reminiscing, and recognizing hardships were integral to formulating identities and values as American immigrants. This subtheme was more prevalent in older participants, the females, and the non-active community members. This subtheme was particularly significant for females because resources and access to education were more accessible to females in the United States. Both genders had to adapt to new lifestyles, but female participants frequently experienced drastic lifestyle changes and recognized new opportunities for their female children. Despite opportunities to build a better future for children, participants described experiences of hardship as well. Even if family members did not want to talk about their
experiences, participants expressed the importance of recognizing the difficulties that their families faced when migrating to the United States. Francesa described her family immigration stories, stating:

They were stories of hard work in poor living conditions. Both of my families grew up in small farm towns and did what they could to survive the wars. They were simple and happy with what they had but wanted more for their children. They sacrificed everything to come to America. Once they came to America they made German neighborhoods within Chicago and made sure to have family all around them.

Franz described familial immigrant stories and the tough decision to migrate to America:

Well, I think the immigrant stories we heard were more modern day, not what you would consider your classic Ellis Island kind of stories. I think for the most part it was difficult to pack up everything and leave Germany. If you can imagine my family saying, “Let’s leave everything behind” and my mom leaving her job that she liked very much. My father saying, “Look you have a great future over in the States.” Leaving friends, family, and all that behind and coming over to the States was a huge move for everyone.

Emilie also elaborated on the story of her family’s difficult transition to the United States:

She came over on a boat. It was pretty horrible. They had all the women I think on one side of the boat and the men on the other. Everyone was sick. I think it normally would have been like a one week trip. It took them 2 because there was high seas. I know there was a lot of vomiting going on in that boat. Then she came up to Northern Minnesota I think around the age of 10. The first place that they had . . . Both her parents were factory workers, so she would let herself in after school. She basically was a latchkey kid at age 10. It was too dangerous for her to turn the furnace on, so she would sit there wrapped up in blankets and eat chocolate until someone came home and turned on the heat. Isn’t that awful?

We know the journey was not pleasant of course; the week to two weeks on a cargo ship to venture through the rough waters of the Atlantic was less than enjoyable. Additionally, it was a process in itself to even be able to get on that ship that the German American participants knew little about. It was not that these individuals all of a sudden one day decided that they would buy their tickets to the U.S. and become permanent residents of the U.S. It was a long, drawn-out process to get here—one that went beyond
the rough seas of the boat ride. When individuals and families decided they wanted to be able to come to America, they first needed to have a sponsor who was going to be their point person and contact person here in the states. They would need to have a job ready and a place for the family coming over to live. They needed doctor’s visits, appropriate shots, and up-to-date health requirements. They needed quite a bit of paperwork, and for my mother’s family, they were displaced persons who did not have any official citizenship. Before they could come to the U.S., they applied for Austrian citizenship because that was where they were temporarily living in the refugee camp. They were denied citizenship because they were told there were too many Austrians seeking citizenship, and that they could not even take care of their own people. They then went on to receive German citizenship, even though they were living in Austria at the time.

My parents and grandparents who came to the U.S. chose to keep their German citizenship, due to the timing of when they came over. They would have had to renounce their German citizenship if they adopted American citizenship, something they were not willing to do at the time. They all remain German citizens to this day.

**Synthesis of Subthemes**

Self-categorized identity, language influence, and experiences of coming to America were grouped under the broad theme of identity recognition because the participants emphasized the importance of these subthemes in formulating a sense of belonging, comfort, and pride within the participants, especially when feeling isolated during their schooling. Self-categorized identity, language influence, and coming to America emerged most often from the older participants. Self-categorized identity and language influence were deemed significant equally among males and females and the
participants having varying levels of community involvement. Subthemes related to immigration to the United States were more significant to females and non-active community members. Because non-active community members had a deep-rooted sense of identity and belonging with family members, community involvement was not something that was necessarily sought. For these participants, family was more often emphasized than community involvement.

“A Thriving Spirit”: Resilience in German American Citizens and Intercultural Mobility

Anfangen ist leicht, beharren eine Kunst
To begin is easy, to persist is an art
— Friedrich Heinrich Wilhelm Körte

During my discussions with the participants, several striking experiences of hardship, resilience, and difficulties in transitioning had an impact on my journey of researching components of German American identity. I was interested in exploring how the participants approached instances of acculturation, assimilation, social integration, social distance, or stereotyping, should such occur in their educational and/or social settings. Acculturation and assimilation and downward mobility tenets of segmented assimilation theory were particularly addressed. Acculturation and assimilation refer to the integration into another culture, and downward mobility involves the difficulties with integrating into urban classes, with poverty, and with other negative aspects of undergoing “Americanization.” During my analysis, I found Intercultural Mobility to be a significant theme that emerged from participant experiences.

Data were grouped into the theme of Intercultural Mobility because the participants experienced both positive and negative aspects of acculturation. Subthemes that were observed included discrimination, difficulties, and barriers, assimilation, and
transitioning. Subthemes of discrimination, difficulties, and barriers occurred the most frequently. These themes were analyzed as lower-level themes as participants did not consider them to be highly influential to their experiences as German Americans and academic endeavors. Still, Intercultural Mobility has had an effect on the participants’ perspectives of their identity and academic achievements.

**Discrimination, Difficulties, and Barriers**

This subtheme involves the reflection on hardships and difficulties while transitioning and being educated in the United States. The participants described difficulties with interacting due to language barriers, identity shame due to Nazi history and World War II, and difficulties with balancing traditional German customs with American ideals. Older participants, males, and active community members more frequently described experiences of difficulties and barriers as second-generation German Americans. Emilie described difficulties during school as a German American, stating:

> When I was in second grade, some kid called me a Nazi. That was a big to do because my family, they weren’t Nazis and they weren’t even where you could be a Nazi. My one grandfather was actually drafted into the German army not to be a Nazi, but because of where they lived and of the German descent. I couldn’t even get German citizenship because the German consulate would say, “Oh, he was Croatian.” That was a little lesson for me that if my grandfather died fighting in a German army, but he wasn’t German enough to be considered German, then what am I? There’s a little bit of an identity crisis going on there.

Gertie also elaborated on difficult experiences:

> I can only remember one time when I was called a Nazi as a child. I was in grade school. Maybe in fourth grade. I initially began to explain in my fourth grade mind that WWII was a long time ago and that my parent’s nor I had anything to do with the War and it is not right for you to be calling me names. I felt at that time that I explained myself and stood up for me and my family. Now on the other had I continue to hear stories of how my Father and his brother would get bullied and beat up in grade school because of their names, Wilhelm and Nikolaus, the clothes they wore and the food that they brought to school to eat for lunch to the point where they would not eat their lunches and go hungry for the
fear of being bullied. They would run home from school to get away from the kids chasing them in homes that today they would not catch them. When they did come home a little beat up, they would explain to their Oma that they just fell off their bike or slipped and fell.

Kristian described an experience with discrimination and difficulty:

When I was at home with my parents, I’m trying to think that somebody may have spray painted or shaving creamed a swastika, either on the fence or on the garage but I can’t ... it was so long ago and I remember somebody writing something. It was probably one of those things too, where I saw it and my parents probably at the time, just redirected you to look at something else and not to focus on this or kind of like, protected you or blocked you from it. That’s the only time I can ever remember somebody where you felt like, really? That kind of stuff.

Josefine described difficulties with language barriers:

When he first got here he didn’t speak any English and he was working in the factory with everybody else. His coworkers taught him that thank you was shut up. Every time his boss would say something to him, he’d smile and say shut up. They clearly made fun of him and the fact that he was an immigrant. Eventually the boss said he’s always smiling when he tells me to shut up. He must not know what this means and got somebody to translate for him what he was saying. He was mortified. They made fun of him because of his language. That’s the one that always comes to mind because I just can’t picture him doing it, a mean thing to anybody.

I was surprised at Kristian’s response because of the severity of the crime committed that would now be punishable by law as a hate crime; however, he was so passé and nonchalant about how he told me the story, almost like he did not even want to talk about it. He seemed somewhat nervous telling me about it, and I can imagine why. He has tried to repress that memory for years and years, and his family did everything they could to not have their children remember that event. He talked about agreeing with Germans Americans as the silent minority because they were supposed to keep their heads down, do their work, assimilate and not draw too much attention to themselves because of some of the negative attention they received. They got rid of the spray paintings themselves and did not report it to police because they did not want to draw any
attention to it. I too never told anyone about how I was called a Nazi outside of class by the same boy who had asked me to the school dance and then uninvited me because he found out about my German heritage. I was shocked and saddened that people would jump to such conclusions about something they did not even know about. Surely my family was not a family of Nazi’s, but I took that with me always and when I was asked about my heritage during high school, I was rarely forthcoming about it.

I wanted to be American for what it was worth during high school, and I became a chameleon to fit in amongst my Jewish friends. I attended the temple with them, and I actually found that some of our cultural traditions were quite similar. That is probably why I clung on to their culture so deeply while in high school, so I could be engaged and immersed in something that felt familiar and comfortable to me without being persecuted for it like I was for my German heritage. I even decided to discontinue taking the German language in high school for my Junior and Senior years because I had had enough of people associating me with German culture and language. I can safely say now though, that when someone asks me about my culture and where I came from, I am no longer ashamed to tell them that I am 100% German. In fact, my response is that I was made in American with German parts. I need to keep reminding myself though that people should be educated on the Germans and the Nazi party when they come up with these misconceptions or the cycle will continue. Not all Germans are Nazis—Nazis were a political party that took over Germany. The people did not all agree with the Nazi philosophies and actions and were killed when they made it publically aware that they disagreed. I wish I would have had the wherewithal to tell my high school counter parts about this, but I kept my mouth shut and my head down.
Josefine’s story was actually about my paternal grandfather that I never knew, as he passed away before I was born. I had not heard this story before I conducted the interviews, and neither had my father. My grandfather came here to the U.S., and it was his idea, for his family and most of his brothers and sisters as well as parents all remained in Germany. He convinced my grandmother that it would be a better life here, and she was very reluctant to make the journey away from everyone and everything they knew. Shortly after they arrived here in the U.S., my grandfather became ill and he died from complications from diabetes not soon after. I was so saddened to hear this story about him because everything I had heard about him was that he was the most gentle and kind soul, and his coworkers who knew he did not know the language took advantage of his situation for the sake of their humor. My grandfather did not have any health insurance, so my grandmother picked up cleaning jobs to make up for the lack of working he was doing. She made cash money and had little command of the language at that time so she would take the cash and pay for his medications. Once he passed away, the doctor told my grandmother that she needed to get to the bank immediately and take her money out. My grandmother continued to work for a nice family on the north shore to make ends meet. They paid cash for their home in the city of Chicago, so she made sure to have a tenant in the top floor of her home to help with the bills. My father, who was the only son, was also helpful when he paid in towards helping purchase the house from the paychecks he was making as a mechanic early on and then later on as an electrical field. Assimilation This subtheme centers on how participants became integrated into American customs and lifestyles. The participants stated that they felt different and isolated at times, but
identifying as German Americans kept them fulfilled and engaged with various communities. Assimilation was more often mentioned in older individuals, males, and non-active community members. For non-active community members, assimilating into American lifestyles and keeping up traditions at home was more sought after than being involved in community traditions. Tristan described assimilation and identity as a German American:

I kind of felt like I was an immigrant myself, because of the way I was brought up. I didn’t really feel like an American when I was a little kid, even though I was born here. Because we were so German at that time. (…) Then, we moved to Germany and there I felt like an American. Then we moved back to America and I felt like a German again. I do feel like I do understand the immigrant experience.

Axel also discussed identity and assimilation into the United States:

Honestly, I say I’m an American German, identify with the American part first. The German is a huge part of me. Everybody at work refers to me as a German, even though there are a couple ... I think there’s another first generation German person on our department. But I’m the one they refer to as the German. They ask me about different heritage. They tease me about certain things that happened during the war that weren’t the nicest of things. But that’s part of my work. I identify as an American first.

Heidi further elaborated on mixed influences as German Americans:

I’d say a mix. We definitely did American things and my mom would cook American. She’d do macaroni and cheese but the next day it was [inaudible 00:07:16] and she was from the North so everything was potatoes. I didn’t know anything about noodles until I met Rob, I was like, “What’s spatzle?” Never did any of that. It was part of her culture that we had that stuff. We’d go bowling but then we’d go to the German alley and we were very involved with the Kolping Society growing up as a kid.

Franz described instances of downward mobility and how his family created new identities based on their particular situation:

We just kind of let all that go by the wayside. We had no real traditions. After, again, we hit this point in time where 6th, 7th grade in school when I was 12 or 13 years old we all just kind of found our own identities. We didn’t keep a lot of
traditions alive. Christmas kind of fell apart for us, watching soccer games, none of that was maintained. I think it’s just kind of a special case for us, being our family that we are. There are some issues there that we can delve into some other time but I just think that we kind of grew apart as a family, for one thing, but also we lost our identity as befitting to a certain culture.

It is interesting because assimilation can be thought of in so many different ways. People refer to the U.S. as a melting pot, but I, along with one of my participants, disagree; I see some people melt into the pot, but they are more like a fruit salad because they do not all necessarily melt, and I like the idea of not melting. Immigrants bring different things with them here in the U.S.—traditions, beliefs, and languages. How bland and boring it would be to assimilate completely into an entire American culture? Then again, what is American culture? Is there such a thing? I see a China town, a Greek town, a primarily Latino little village, you can find pockets of food and culture in each of these areas, culture that has not been tainted by the melting of original culture in to becoming completely American.

Kristian mentioned that he is an American German and clearly stated that he was an American first. I cannot quite relate to that because I am not sure there is one before the other. I live here, I am an American citizen, I speak English day in and day out, but I do not think I would say that my American self-identity is more prominent than my German self-identity. I have had American flags in and around my home, I do not think I have ever flown a German flag off of my house though, but that is most likely because of how it would look to others and how I feel the need to keep part of my German identity silenced in front of others, at least the pride piece.
**Transitioning**

This subtheme involves participant experiences and family stories of becoming accustomed to the United States. Older participants, males, and active community members more frequently described experiences with transitioning. Participants discussed difficulties with learning a new language, going to school, and finding communities to interact with. Nicklaus described transitioning to the educational system in the United States:

> My expectations were ... I don’t know that they were very concrete. Not having parents that went through that process, I felt very behind at times, not really understanding how things worked, what the experience was going to be like. I think I tended to take a little bit of a backwards step in not being as involved, probably, as I normally would have, just from a lack of understanding and knowledge of what things were available, what things would be helpful. My parents always encouraged me to talk with other people about it. It wasn’t the same without having that first level of experience from them, to try to understand what that whole situation was going to be like.

Brigitte discussed how community and friends helped the transition process:

> I think it just came with the experiences my parents gave me. I mean we were always going out doing dancing. We were always around people who celebrated the same culture. They had uniformity that they shared. I think we just got it from sharing with our people. They were all friends with people who had immigrated as well. As time has passed on we have become friends with their children and now our children are friends and it just keeps going down. We’re very lucky to have that cycle of ... I think it was everything that they did at home. That they kept true to that. We were very good about becoming American for the people to see but at home we still ate our goulash, style brat, and all our good German food while becoming Americanized for the public to see.

Kristian discussed language barriers and difficulties in transitioning to a new country:

> My parents, they didn’t know any English. They came here. They lived with a couple of other immigrant families in a house. They were sponsored and they went to night school to learn English and the story my dad always had was he had to introduce my mom as, this is my wife and just in ... just literal translation is that this is my woman. It was always just the story that came out of it but you think about how long they ... where they’ve come, not really having the formal schooling and literally just hard work.
When it comes to consideration of transitioning to the U.S. higher education system, individuals discussed that they did not quite have the assistance of their parents when it came to understanding how to navigate things. Their parents helped in ways that they knew how, mostly financially. It makes sense that they did not know what to do other than help financially so their children did not have to worry about that aspect. The participants in the study felt more of less on their own when it came to applying for school, financial aid and being able to persevere through school when they got there. There were a few participants that even mentioned not being able to make it in school when they went away, so they ended up back home so they could familiarize themselves with the U.S. higher education system and how things worked by going to community college or transitioning to a smaller private school where there was a little more hand holding. Not having parents who knew the system seemed to hold them back in terms of support and understanding. Every one of these participants was eventually able to get through and persevere and graduate with a four-year degree. I remember my parents knowing nothing about financial aid or how it would work. In fact, the first year I went to college I did not even fill out FAFSA because I did not really know what it was or what it could help me with.

Eventually, I learned that if I wanted to get my master’s degree, I did not really need to pay for it if I received an assistantship and from there I learned more about the system and how it could work more in my favor. I still remember being nominated by a faculty member for the Senior of the Year award at Elmhurst College and I was not able to express what College has done for me. In particular, I was asked if I had experienced any barriers throughout the college process. If you asked me that now, I would tell you
that I was so reluctant to share with anyone that there were any barriers at all and that I had difficulties transitioning to college. I wish I would have shared with them what it was like to be a first-generation student, particularly a first-generation student to a parent of immigrants. It was a unique experience that not everyone can say they have had. That is also why people that share this experience band together, so they can support one another. However, at that time in my life, I was reluctant to continue membership with my fellow German club members, so I was too stubborn and independent to admit I needed anyone to rely on. I also think it is part of the German culture to not admit weakness or failure, there was nothing that was going to stop me from persevering and I did not need anyone’s help to do it. I know now that I can admit for the betterment of owning up to the honesty of the process, that there are hardships that one must endure through any process to be able to come out on top in the end.

Subthemes of discrimination, difficulties, and barriers, assimilation, and transitioning were grouped in the Intercultural Mobility theme due to participant perceptions of these experiences as dynamic, changing experiences and perceptions rather than concrete and latent embodiments. Older participants, males, and active community members more frequently described experiences of difficulties and barriers and transitioning as second-generation German Americans. Assimilation, however, was more frequently described in older individuals, males, and non-active community members. Participants faced difficulties with bullying, learning a new language, and hard work, but felt that their identities were stronger because of close familial bonds.
“With Constant Hard Work and Want”: Chronicles of German American Academic Success

*Alte soll man ehren, Junge soll man lehren*
*The old ones shall be honored, the young ones shall be taught*
— E. B. Mawr

One particular aspect of German American identity was significantly abundant in participant experiences—the importance of education. The value of academic success and responsibility was prevalent in all participants, regardless of their own academic achievements. When interviewing German American participants, I wanted to uncover the value German American students placed on education and to observe how they succeeded academically. Here, intercultural theory on community and engagement in academic settings was used to address such themes of academic success. Intercultural theory focuses on learning and sharing within multicultural communities in academic settings in order to better understand and relate to diverse student body populations. Throughout my research journey, I became acutely aware of the emphasis on educational values as a prominent theme that emerged from participant data.

**Educational Values**

Information was grouped in the educational values theme because participants accrued various perceptions on education based on the influence of American academic ideals as well as traditional German belief systems. Subthemes of work ethic and responsibility and support emerged during data analysis. These themes were analyzed as higher-level themes due to the familial emphasis on higher education and the German American embodiment of perceptions of academic prowess as crucial to success.
Work Ethic and Responsibility

This subtheme focuses on German American perceptions of the factors necessary for academic success. For older participants and females, work ethic and responsibility was mentioned more frequently. However, beliefs on work ethic and responsibility were consistent between not active and active community members. Participants described the importance of excelling in school, especially because their parents often made substantial sacrifices to give their children better lives. Axel indicated the importance of education while emphasizing intercultural values:

There are things that I think that the Germans came with, and that was the hard work ethic, strong family ethic, and a huge emphasis on education and bettering yourself, and to always do the best that you can. A lot of that was to overcome the changes that they went through in their lives, coming to a new country, a new place, and doing those things. But honestly, I can’t say that that’s specific to Germans because I see other people coming from other countries that are second generation. A lot of them have similar motivation factors.

Marta described the importance of education as a significant opportunity for females:

Well, first of all, and I’m sure this is true for you, too, that the expectation was that you were going to work hard. You were going to go to school, and you would work hard. For me, myself, I, of course, have two brothers and two male cousins. It was for me, in my generation, it was the . . . I would be the first female attending college with regard to my education. My mom finished high school and had, I don’t know, maybe a community college course, or something. Like nothing. Actually, a cousin of my other side as well had some associate courses, but my mom did not graduate from college, and neither did my aunt, either of my aunts, for that matter, neither did my other cousin. That was kind of a big deal for me, personally. That was my grandparents’ wish that I would make it to college, and that I would make it through college.

Hilda also described the educational values and work ethic instilled in her family:

I was a bit of, school came very easily to me so I was a bit of a lazy student. They very much kept on me that I needed to always try my best, do better, and be more careful. They knew if I came home with Bs, they knew I could do better and they were right. I could get straight As if I applied myself. They just knew me very well and so they were always saying, “Now, you need to take your time, you need to focus, and you need to get this done.” It instilled in me a sense of
responsibility that I needed to bring home good grades or I was going to get in big trouble because my parents knew that if I wasn’t bringing home good grades it was because I was messing around.

There was never a time where I remember being able to use the excuse that something was too hard, or too time consuming. In fact, there was never a time for excuses or failure; you were to work hard and make sure you did well. In fact, I can tell you that there are at least two valedictorians on the list of participants who helped with this study. They are extremely bright females who knew the challenge of maintaining a good work ethic and knew what their families expected of them; moreover, they expected the same of themselves. I remember it being very important to my parents that I would get on the honor roll and be recognized for academic achievements. It was also important to me to prove to myself that I had the ability and aptitude to do well in an academic setting.

**Support**

This subtheme centers on familial assistance. Support subthemes were the most prevalent in older participants, males, and active community members. Active community members considered community support and bonding to be a driving force in German community participation. Participants described emotional support and bonding with family members as well as financial support in education. Support was considered a fundamental aspect of German American culture. Emilie described the support she received from her family during college:

My parents definitely financed all of my college. They didn’t want me to have to be worried, to take out loans. I was pretty lucky in that. They definitely encouraged me too. I mean it wasn’t really a question of would I go and I always wanted to go.

Elisabeth also described educational support:
My parents were active in my educational pursuits but not overly involved. They let me chart my own course but guided me at times they thought I might be struggling in, i.e., dropping a class in college because of a bad grade. They would talk to me about my decision, and be respectful about it. They insisted all five children had to study German in high school. I studied to become a German teacher to preserve the culture and language. I also lived on a foreign language floor at NIU for two years, where we had to speak only in our target language with anyone else studying that language, my roommate, and eating dinner four nights a week for an hour and a half with a member of faculty and fellow German-studying students. My parents supported my decision in becoming a teacher, in addition to supporting my siblings’ decisions: marketing, criminal justice, and chemistry majors.

Gertie emphasized support and familial bonding, stating:

I have a very loving family that has always supported each other through every aspect of life. My parents have been married for 40 years and I have two siblings. It was instilled in us that family is and should always be a top priority. We grew up with two sets of grandparent’s that had very different dynamics. One over the other we were closer to, growing up. Holidays and birthdays were something we always celebrated, and just getting together for dinner during the week or on the weekend’s was of course an added treat. Now that my grandparents have all past on, I fondly recall all those memories, and we as a family, relive them by telling stories.

The support also comes in ways of resourcefulness. Each participant had their own level of resourcefulness that they were able to use, which I think is a testament to the culture and immigration experience. Use the resources around you and make do with little. In fact, make more than do; make a lot from the little you have. Many of the parents of these participants did not know how to help their children outside of financial assistance, but what they did give them is the ability to use the resources around them and seek out resources that would help them with educational attainment. For example, my parents taught me the unique skill of relationship building and socializing, as well as making connections. Because of that, I was able to really navigate a bit easier through different experiences in college. I had a literature instructor who knew and respected my work in the theatre, so she gave me extra points for being involved in various shows. She
actually gave the class extra credit for coming to see me in one of the shows I was in during college. She allowed me a little slack during class because she knew the long hours spent in rehearsals and appreciated the work that the Fine Arts students did on campus. I believe I took every single class that instructor taught, and I am forever thankful for her generosity. I also had a mentor who helped me to resource the theatrical talent I had and integrate it into my love for psychology. I am grateful for those who saw things in me and helped me harness those and transition them into things that were helpful to get me to the point of graduation. Without that, and those helpful resources, I am not sure I could have done it. Support is integral to making a reality from the idea of educational attainment.

**Synthesis of Subthemes**

Subthemes of work ethic and responsibility and support were grouped in the Educational Values theme because participants considered such values necessary for educational success. Work ethic and responsibility subthemes occurred more frequently in older participants and females, whereas beliefs on work ethic and responsibility were equal among non-active and active community members. Support subthemes occurred more frequently in older individuals, males, and active community members. Participants believed that the work ethic and support systems instilled in their families were unique and especially valuable to their academic and professional careers.

“I Take Pride in Being a German American”: Group Narratives of German American Identity

Throughout conversations in focus groups, Values and Beliefs, Identity Recognition, Intercultural Mobility, and Educational Values highly influenced the daily lives and experiences of the German American participants. Focus group data were
triangulated with interview data to find patterns with recurrent themes and subthemes. When triangulated with interview data, older participants found assimilation, coming to America, self-categorized identity, language influence, support, temperament, transitioning, and work ethic to be the most significant subthemes. Younger individuals more often emphasized subthemes of closeness. Tradition was equally significant among age groups. In addition, non-active community members considered assimilation, closeness, coming to America, self-categorized identity, language influence, tradition, and work ethic to be the most significant subthemes. Active community members emphasized subthemes of difficulty, support, temperament, and transitioning.

When examining the prevalence of themes and subthemes in particular participants, it became evident that a collective conscious was more integral to their perceptions than individual variance in their experiences. Participants felt proud of their heritage and continued to incorporate it in their lives as they saw fit. The participants strongly associated their German American identity with morality, responsibility, and ethics, and these values were reflected in their mannerisms. These participants displayed substantial resilience despite negative experiences and found their hardships to be integral to their identities as part of a community known for its ability to overcome.

While continuing on the journey of ethnographic analysis, it was important to incorporate documents and artifacts in the documentation of German American experiences. During artifact analysis, Values and Beliefs, Identity Recognition, and Intercultural Mobility were found to be the most significant themes. Observed subthemes included closeness, tradition, difficulty, and self-categorized identity. Pictures of ships, immigration papers, traditional attire, and community and family photographs were
included in analysis. The photographs were discussed with participants, and participants expressed familial bonding, difficulties, and the maintenance of family traditions and German heritage. Such artifacts were highly important in unpacking the significance of particular themes. The participants not only acknowledged the significance of certain artifacts, they cherished these items as physical representations of their unique experiences and journeys, as individuals and as a community.

Finally, the last stage of the ethnographic journey involved personal reflection on German American identity through the use of autoethnography. Autoethnographic data analysis was included to examine the accuracy and significance of patterns in observed themes and subthemes. Values and Beliefs, Identity Recognition, Intercultural Mobility, and Educational Values were prevalent themes. Assimilation, difficulty, self-categorized identity, tradition, and work ethic emerged as the most significant subthemes. These data confirm the interview and focus group findings with an emphasis on values and beliefs that were highly influential in shaping German American identity. German American identities are perceived as concrete and recognized entities. There are both positive and negative aspects of acculturation, and perceptions of education have been influenced and informed by American ideals and German beliefs centering on work ethic and responsibility. My autoethnographic account of German American identity and educational values states:

My parents, from the very beginning, brought me up to believe that I was intelligent enough to pursue higher education. I never believed that because I was a girl, I was any less fit for higher education than anyone else. I excelled in the school setting and found it important to bring home only As. I remember my father very adamantly wanted me to be a righty. I was definitely preferring my left hand and he would make it his job to keep taking the pencil from my left hand and putting it in my right. It was something back from when he was going to school and growing up in Germany that people shouldn’t use their left hands to
write. Needless to say, I had horrible handwriting, still do. I remember getting my only C in Grade school in none other than penmanship. I cried so hard because I knew my parents would be disappointed and I wanted nothing more than to make them proud. I heard ever since I was young that my family came here to make something of themselves and I had felt a huge weight on my shoulders to produce.

Furthermore, another passage describes assimilation and the influence of hybrid identities:

I believe that I feel fully integrated and yet at times I look at some of the customs of others or lack thereof and I am astonished at the lack of ties to one’s culture others have. Some people have assimilated too well over time where they have forgotten where they came from. I am made in America with German parts and I hold that Germanness close to my heart because it has given me my core values and strong emphasis on education, family and strong work ethic. It has also given me the strong tie to my grandparents. I was very close with both of my grandparents and they passed during the second year of my doctoral studies. Part of the reason I wanted to pursue this study was for them and in their honor. They gave of themselves so others could have a better life. I admire that.

These findings are reflected in the emergent themes of Values and Beliefs, Identity Recognition, Intercultural Mobility, and Educational Values. However, this ethnographic account differed from interview responses and focus group responses in that it did not as significantly emphasize experiences with coming to America, language influence, support, temperament, transitioning, or closeness. This does not mean that such themes are not present in my perceptions and experiences of being a German American. However, this provided new insight into how other German Americans experience their own unique heritage and personal circumstances while allowing for me to reflect on embodied aspects of my own experiences that I had not quite understood. Throughout this process, I have been able to reflect on my personal biases, thoughts, and beliefs. This contributed to my acquiring a substantial amount of new knowledge and information about my own family that had not been previously examined. I have found
my German American identity to be an integral part of who I am, morally, physically, and emotionally and, throughout my ethnographic journey, I have realized that this is something that I share with others.

**Reflections**

When discussing what it is like to be a German American, the participants reminded me of my own college days. I would see many students around me skipping class or missing class for frivolous reasons. I have to be honest and say I too thought about missing class from time to time, especially the early morning classes. I did not quite have the conscience to follow through with it all too often though, especially when considering the money I would be wasting by missing class would run through my head. I calculated the cost down to each class session and found that missing one of my literature classes would actually be like throwing over $300 in the garbage. I could not be wasteful like that because I was not taught to be wasteful. It was the kind of mindset I was raised to be in—to not throw anything away. When Kristian discussed some of the values instilled in him, he mentioned a story about his father becoming physically ill because he was eating food that had gone bad. He did not want to waste the food, so he cut off the moldy parts and ate it. He said he had also made a few of those bad decisions and ended up becoming sick. He talked about it being the way he was raised—to not waste because his parents knew what it was like to have nothing. They easily made something from nothing. I can tell you that to this day, I think about my grandparents and how I could come into their homes, find very little in their refrigerators, and minutes later we would have a feast on the table. With some deli meat, eggs, and potatoes, my grandmother would start cooking in her kitchen at the ripe age of 93; she knew how to
make something of nothing. My grandfather was the same way. He did not really know much about cooking, but what he did know was to put out everything you had for guests, even when it is your granddaughter visiting you from the upstairs apartment. These are the values I take with me—the ones that sustained me throughout my journey of higher education, the values of not taking things for granted and not being wasteful, indeed leading to persistence and perseverance.

I had quite a bit to maintain during these interviews, internally. I knew that I experienced the very things I was asking these individuals about. I had grown up in an immigrant family. I experienced education, which was presented to me at a very young age, to be the most important thing; it was a number one priority. I saw my family turn it on and off right in front of my very eyes and I learned to do the same. What I mean by this is that when we were with our German friends and relatives, we were German. When we were with our American friends, neighbors, schoolmates, we could very instantly be American. Although the accent my father carried would never quite go away and my lunches never really looked like the lunches of my American schoolmates, we did our best to assimilate into the American culture—if there really is one. The personal biases I held during these interviews were mostly that I had gone into them knowing most of the participants and believing that they too had trod a very similar path that I had gone down. What I did not know was that I would find out their pathways were not all as similar as I thought and their ideas about being German in America and their values were not the same values that I held dear or prioritized.

In some ways, I felt disappointed with myself that I had not known more about my participants because some of them were distant relatives. I was hearing stories for the
first time about some of the immigrant experiences that touched my own family. It was a blessing but also upsetting to me that I did not know more prior to these discoveries. I also had some biases and misconceptions about some of the people who were mentioned as being such significant and remarkable role models in my participants’ lives. I learned about some of the behind the scenes events that I had no idea about. It definitely changed the way I look at certain people in the German community now. My very first participant said in part of her interview, “I learned that you can’t judge a book by its cover,” and that is what I took from this whole process. You really cannot assume you know things about people and where they have come from, where they have been, and what they have been through. You never know their story until you ask. For some, all you need to do is ask; they are anxiously waiting to tell their stories. When presented with difficult questions about their past, some participants seemed nervous and some anxious just to share information because no one had ever asked them about their past, their history. Some did not think growing up in an immigrant household was significant, but what I did try to do during these interviews, was to help them remember and feel that their stories were significant and relevant. In every interview, the last thing I asked participants was to share a piece of advice with the next generation of German Americans, whether it be their own children, nieces or nephews. Almost every response was to be proud of your heritage and never forget where you came from. A few added: to never lose the language and to continue the traditions of their family and the home country. Moving forward, I feel like every generation that we produce loses a little bit of the culture, or perhaps it is that it changes. Either way, we must teach the new generations in our family what being German American is all about or we just may lose our culture and our history. If we do
not keep talking and telling our stories, who will?

**Graphic Summary of the Study**

Figure 2 depicts the four main themes that emerged during the data analysis:

Values and Beliefs, Identity Recognition, Intercultural Mobility, and Educational Values.

*Figure 2. Main themes from the study’s data analysis.*
Figure 3. Subthemes that emerged from the study.

Figure 3 displays the 11 subthemes that emerged from the data analysis. In no particular order, these are: temperament, work ethic, tradition, transitioning, assimilation, self-categorized identity, language influences, support, closeness, experiences of coming to America, and difficulties and barriers.
to America, and difficulties and barriers. Older participants found the subthemes of assimilation, difficulty, self-categorized identity, language influence, support, temperament, tradition, transitioning, and work ethic to be significant aspects of their German American identities and educational values. Closeness and experiences with coming to America were significant among all age groups. Additionally, males more frequently discussed assimilation, difficulties, support, and transitioning while females emphasized experiences with coming to America, temperament, and tradition. Both gender groups valued closeness, self-categorized identity, language influence, and work ethic. Finally, non-active community members emphasized assimilation, closeness, coming to America, and tradition, while active community members found difficulties, support, temperament, and transitioning to be the most significant subthemes.

Subthemes of self-categorized identity, language influence, and work ethic were consistent among active and non-active community members. Figure 4 shows these themes and the categories describing German American students.

![Figure 4. Graphical representation of German American students.](image)

The interview data were triangulated with the analysis of field work and the artifacts that the participants provided. Focus group responses added to the data obtained during the individual interviews. Specifically, the responses obtained from the focus
groups differed from those in the individual interviews in that older participants emphasized coming to America and younger individuals emphasized closeness. Tradition was valued equally among age groups in focus group data. Furthermore, non-active community members found self-categorized identity, language influence, and work ethic to be significant subthemes. Subthemes observed in active community members were the same for interview and focus group participants. Values and Beliefs, Identity Recognition, and Intercultural Mobility were found to be the most significant themes during artifact analysis, and the observed subthemes included closeness, tradition, difficulty, and self-categorized identity. In autoethnographic data analysis, Values and Beliefs, Identity Recognition, Intercultural Mobility, and Educational Values were the most prevalent themes, and observed subthemes included assimilation, difficulty, self-categorized identity, tradition, and work ethic.

Based on the information gathered through interviews, focus groups, and autoethnographic data, German American identity experiences were formulated from the narratives. In Figure 5, the construction of the German American participants’ identities are illustrated based on individual self-concept from the values and beliefs passed on to them in their upbringing, identity formation from the impact of environmental factors on individual experiences, cultural belonging through ethnic group membership, and a sense of place in society by choosing to assimilate, integrate a mix of cultural and American traditions, or rejecting assimilation.
German American identity was found to be dynamic and integral to academic success. Upholding traditions, maintaining familial bonds, and engaging with communities assisted the participants with finding motivation and meaning in their lives, the participants did not have to rely on German community organizations and functions to promote German American values and beliefs. The recognized identities of the participants significantly influenced their lifestyles and educational pursuits. German community involvement and school functions were beneficial to participants, but self-sustenance and strong family ties were shown to have the most influence on academic and professional success. With these data, new themes have been uncovered that acknowledge the resilience, strong ethic, and the steadfastness of the German American community. Overall, I have found the participant accounts and my own perceptions of
German American identity to be uniquely salient, while also exhibiting a collective unconscious of particular embodied ideals that thrive within the German American spirit.
CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

Aus Schaden wird man klug
— Strauss
Adversity is the mother of wisdom

Discussion of the Findings

This ethnographic study investigated the experiences of second generation German Americans using semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and artifact analysis. This study sought to examine how participants embody and conceptualize their heritage within the institutions of higher learning. Several studies and theoretical perspectives informed the discourse of this study and proved to be responsive to the participants’ experiences, including segmented assimilation theory, intercultural theory, and Phinney’s model of ethnic identity development.

For instance, segmented assimilation theory prompted me to explore the participants’ experiences for themes of acculturation and assimilation, downward mobility due to acculturation and assimilation, and selective acculturation. Intercultural theory informed the analysis of the interactions between German American students and their counterparts coming from other cultural backgrounds as well as ways in which German American students develop a sense of community. Phinney’s model of ethnic identity development was useful to consider when analyzing the stages of development of second generation German American students. What follows is a discussion of this
study’s findings in terms of their contributions to existing studies and theories and ways in which the findings respond to the research questions posed for the study.

First, the findings of this study speak eloquently to its research questions. In the beginning of the study, I questioned: What are the traditions, beliefs, and values of second generation German Americans that distinguish them as a cultural group amidst American diversity? This research question focuses on the conceptualizations of traditional values instilled in German Americans. Participant responses reflect the importance of maintaining German traditions and heritage. Next, I posed the question: What are the sociocultural contexts in which second generation German American students develop a sense of their ethnic identity? This research question centers on the ways in which participants describe their identities. The participants indicate that they experience unique ethnic identity formulations that incorporate dualistic aspects of German and American values.

Further, I asked: How do these students approach instances of acculturation, assimilation, social integration, social distance, or stereotyping, should such occur in their educational and/or social settings? This research question focuses on how participants describe their experiences with transitioning and integrating into American society. Responses incorporate individual beliefs about multifaceted identities. Finally, I asked: What value do these students place on education and how do they succeed academically in higher education? This research question focuses on participant perceptions and experiences with higher education. Responses tend to incorporate strong work ethic and the acknowledgement of duty and responsibility.
Within the thematic analysis of the study, the following themes were examined: Values and Beliefs, Identity Recognition, Intercultural Mobility, and Educational Values. Observed subthemes in the study included: temperament, work ethic, tradition; transitioning, assimilation, self-categorized identity; language influence, support, closeness, experiences with coming to America; and difficulties and barriers. Results of this study indicate that older participants more frequently discussed assimilation, difficulty, self-categorized identity, language influence, support, temperament, tradition, transitioning, and work ethic, but all age groups found closeness and experiences with coming to America to be significant subthemes. Males found assimilation, difficulties, support, and transitioning to be more significant, and experiences with coming to America, temperament, and tradition were more often emphasized by females. Both genders found closeness, self-categorized identity, language influence, and work ethic to be significant. Non-active community members more often placed emphasis on the subthemes of assimilation, closeness, coming to America, and tradition, while active community members emphasized difficulties, support, temperament, and transitioning. Self-categorized identity, language influence, and work ethic were considered important for both active and non-active community members.

Focus groups confirm the individual interview findings, but there are several differences. For instance, in the focus groups, older participants emphasized coming to America as a significant subtheme, while younger individuals emphasized closeness. All age groups found tradition to be a significant subtheme. In addition, the subthemes found in interview and focus group data for active community members are consistent. However, non-active community members emphasized self-categorized identity,
language influence, and work ethic. In addition, artifact analysis revealed Values and Beliefs, Identity Recognition, and Intercultural Mobility emerged as significant themes, and significant subthemes included closeness, tradition, difficulty, and self-categorized identity. Autoethnographic data analysis revealed the themes of Values and Beliefs, Identity Recognition, Intercultural Mobility, and Educational Values and the subthemes of assimilation, difficulty, self-categorized identity, tradition, and work ethic.

**Research Findings and Segmented Assimilation Theory**

There has been considerable interest in understanding the experiences of integration and assimilation of immigrants in the United States. Segmented assimilation theory is one theory that provides interpretations of the processes immigrants use to assimilate into society (Nuñez, 2004). In segmented assimilation theory, there is an emphasis on the distinction between new immigrants and old immigrants. These distinctions manifest in the ways in which immigrants adapt and transition into a new society. In this sense, old immigrants are also distinct from their future generations growing up in American society based on the particular assimilation patterns immigrants choose to take. In segmented assimilation theory, these assimilation patterns are comprised of upward mobility and downward mobility experiences. Upward mobility allows for immigrants to move into a higher social level with more opportunities and avenues for success (Nuñez, 2004). Downward mobility refers to moving into a lower social level as a result of socioeconomic and cultural barriers (Nuñez, 2004).

In this particular study, the experiences of German Americans prove to take forms of both upward mobility and downward mobility. German Americans have been able to become successful in their careers and active as influential members in their
communities. However, German Americans have also experienced difficulties resulting from language barriers, anti-German hysteria, immigrant discrimination, and difficulties in adjusting to a new environment. This study’s participants confirmed that education serves as a mediator between upward and downward mobility factors. The German American participants may have experienced difficulties in learning English, facing discriminatory experiences, and assimilating into American culture, but their parents actively found ways to provide them with an extensive education in order to advance beyond the limitations of downward mobility.

A critique of segmented assimilation theory, from the data analysis, centers on the ability of this theory to accurately describe immigrant experiences. Although several aspects of upward and downward mobility were observed in participant responses, the extent of immigrant abilities to integrate into different segments may be, in some cases, more influenced by socioeconomic status and historical contexts rather than individual agency. However, it is also essential to note that the work ethic and resourcefulness instilled in German Americans may have a different effect on segmented assimilation experiences than with other ethnic groups.

**Research Findings and Intercultural Theory**

Intercultural theory focuses on the nature of information sharing activities that take place in locales where there is a lack of emphasis of one particular culture on individual interactions (Tanaka, 2009). This theory has been frequently used to describe educational experiences and approaches to acknowledging diversity from multiple groups of people without overlooking the cultural experiences of other groups of people.

Intercultural theory prompted me to examine the perspectives of German American
students and their relationships with other students in the United States. The findings of this study indicate that the participants felt comfortable in interacting with other students when their American identities were in the dominant spheres of their educational interactions. However, the participants felt less comfortable with expressing their German heritage due to fears of isolation and stigma. This does not mean that the participants did not take public pride in their heritage. Rather, the participants indicated that they expressed their cultural heritage in situations they deemed appropriate.

After interpreting data from the study, intercultural theory can be critiqued because, in some cases, it may fail to acknowledge instances where ethnocentric ideas of appropriate behavioral interactions are based on predetermined or biased concepts of how particular ethnic identities are defined. Nonetheless, intercultural theory provided insight into understanding cultural maneuvering in public spheres of society.

**Research Findings and Phinney’s Model of Ethnic Identity Development**

Phinney’s model of ethnic identity development is framed by the use of three stages in identity formulation (Phinney & Ong, 2007). The first phase incorporates the unexamined perception of one’s identity. During this stage, individuals do not have a knowledge base of the implications of their cultural heritage. In the second phase, individuals begin to make sense of and reflect on their identities. In stage three, individuals formulate their identity as informed by their exploration of identity during the first two phases. The effects of commitment and a sense of belonging within one’s ethnic identity shape the interactions and perceptions individuals develop. Some individuals may seek to acquire a sense of commitment and belonging by participating in cultural events, customs, traditions, and language. Other individuals may feel strong ties to their
identity through nostalgic experiences or personal associations. Within this theory, several contributing factors are considered integral to the formulation of identity, including parental cultural maintenance, ethnic language proficiency, and in-group peer interactions.

In this study, the participants indicated that their ethnic identities were informed the most by parental cultural maintenance. Language proficiency and in-group peer interactions were important components, but did not holistically reflect the experiences of the German American participants. Language use was deemed an important factor of identity, but participants were able to maintain a sense of belonging without language factors. Furthermore, the participants more often described familial experiences than friendships. However, participants did create meaningful friendships with other German Americans to create a stronger sense of community.

The Phinney’s model of ethnic identity development can be critiqued because this model may be considered too broad to accurately describe how individuals formulate their identities. While shared experiences and similar cultural perceptions were described in this study, not all of the participants shared the same identity influence or process. Identities ranged from “German American” and “American German,” to “American with German parts.” The participants described varying levels of parental cultural maintenance, language proficiency, and in-group peer interactions. However, the extent to which the participants valued and embodied their identities, despite amounts of traditional influence, appear to be associated with a sense of comfort and nostalgia.
Immigration Experiences of the “Silent Minority”

Extensive literature on the U.S. immigrant experience allowed me to consider particular circumstances of immigration of German Americans to the United States. As a result, I found that the concept of the “silent minority” is applicable to the experiences of the participants of this study. Research by German-Americans (2015), Fogleman (1996), Kazal (2004), Tolzmann (2000), Angelini et al. (2015), Carlson (2003) emphasized the difficulties German Americans faced as immigrants living in the United States as a result of immigration fears held by Americans, anti-German hysteria during WWII, and the need to adapt to a new environment and lifestyle. The term “silent minority” is frequently used in research on German American experiences to express the lack of recognition and acknowledgment of German heritage within the United States. Interpretations of reasoning behind this lack of recognition range from the ease of assimilation experienced by many German immigrants to the fear of outward expression of heritage that would draw attention or single out German immigrant families. In this study, participants were asked what the term “silent minority” meant to them. When discussing the term, Axel provided a response that summed up participant interpretations about the subject:

What my interpretation of a statement like that is if it is, it would be in reference to the German people that have come here, the German immigrants, is that they came here and they kept quiet. They were afraid of retribution from the war. They were afraid of . . . They got enough hassling for taking American jobs. “I should have your job” type of comments were made. Those are things that my grandma and grandpa told me. I think they really kind of kept quiet, tried to learn the language and assimilate into the American culture, or into America, as fast as possible without having to stir up too much trouble, or too much attention. They kind of kept to themselves. I think that’s what silent minority would mean to me.
In this account, Axel reflects the common view of how German immigrants and second generation German Americans presented themselves in the light of political and social dissonance resulting from WWII. Participant accounts indicate that German immigrants sought to stay out of the limelight, blend in with American culture, and avoid any potential altercations that could jeopardize everything they obtained in the United States. Not only did German immigrants face bias anti-German hysteria, German immigrants also were confronted with “the immigrant experience” in a country where first generation Americans felt concern about their job security.

When attempting to make sense of what it means to be in a “silent minority,” factors associated with cultural maintenance must also be considered. Although Fogleman (1996) and Angelini et al. (2015) found that German Americans integrated while maintaining cultural distinctions at the center of their personal activities, the participants expressed multiple understandings of the role cultural heritage plays in their daily experiences. Non-active community members did not necessarily keep German traditions at the center of their activities. Instead, they relied on values, beliefs, and familial support systems to remind themselves of their heritage and culture. Keeping traditions alive, though important to many participants, was not indicative of the extent to which participants identified or embodied their German American cultures.

Additionally, Fogleman’s (1996) finding that German immigrants sought opportunity in America is found to be true for this study’s participants. However, participants also indicated that, in many circumstances, their families were forced to migrate and create new lives as a result of warfare in Germany. This study found that opportunistic endeavors are apparent, but they do not holistically reflect the shared
experience of German Americans. However, the finding by Kazal (2004) and Tolzmann (2000) that German Americans frequently experience bias and anti-German hysteria is significantly evident in the participant experiences documented in this study. The ability to assimilate and to use resourcefulness while integrating into American culture reported by Carlson (2003) is confirmed by the experiences of participants in this study. It is unclear whether this resourcefulness resulted from pressure on German immigrants due to anti-German bias, the influence of German values, the hardships experienced while migrating, or the combination of the three. Still, German American participants expressed resilience in their experiences and indicated that a duality of identity was commonly experienced. Therefore, this study found that living as a “silent minority” may not be entirely indicative of past fears, but a far more complex, nuanced facet of German American identity.

**German Values, Ethics, and Higher Education**

Findings on the influence of German values in education, educational emphasis within German culture, and experiences of work ethic situate the participants of this study in the larger framework of studies by Röhrs (1995), Nees (2000), Altbach (2011), and Hagy and Staniec (2002). These studies revealed that educational systems in America are significantly influenced by German educational systems. Furthermore, educational attainment has been shown to be embedded within German culture. The findings of the present study reveal that the German Americans in this study highly valued education and considered education to be integral to their career development and societal contributions in the United States. Participants expressed the importance of educational opportunities available to them that were not necessarily accessible to their parents. In many ways,
familial and cultural values emphasizing the importance of learning, applying knowledge, and obtaining an education were the foundation for academic endeavors in participant career choices. Emilie’s response on educational values represents the shared view of the German American participants:

I would say a strong work ethic, being responsible. Actually my husband I were just talking about this for my grandmas. It was very important that the house was clean, that I marry a German man and have German babies, and just do everything very German like. That was the priority of my grandparents, but that’s not necessarily what my parents instilled in me. They definitely wanted a good education for me. I mean they wanted me to get married and have a German family too, but they definitely wanted me to be able to be self-sufficient and take care of myself and actually be a good contributing member of society.

Emilie, and many other participants in this study, indicated that, alongside the family values instilled in participants, academic pursuits were significantly important. As described by Altbach (2011), holistic educational attainment and well roundedness highly influenced participant experiences. In many ways, the success of the German American participants in this study can be attributed to the drive instilled by their parents, as German immigrants in the United States. The importance of education in immigrants was instilled so as to provide students with better access and credibility as contributors to society. The present study found that obtaining education is a necessary and successful endeavor for second generation German Americans.

Expressing Culture and Identity

German American culture can be defined as a unique manifestation of a duality of identity maintained through organizational involvement, cultural events, language, and building social relationships inside and outside of social spheres of identity. Studies by Kolinsky and van der Will (1998), Schmuck et al. (1999), Holmes (2013), and Nesteruk et al. (2015) have contended that cultural interactions and interpretations of meaning are
influenced by diverse ideological perspectives. The term Kultur was elaborated on in chapter two, but merits review:

In German, Kultur came to signify intellectual, spiritual, or artistic areas of creative activity that contributed to the self-enhancement of an individual, or group, or the whole nation by remaining aloof from the common purposes of social, political, economic, or technical life. In English, culture and civilization have been perceived as complementary aspects of social organization and development. (Kolinsky & van der Will, 1998, p. 2)

This statement reveals that the concept of culture differs between German and English perceptions. Whereas English interpretations signify culture as a part of social interactions, German interpretations consider culture to be separate aspects of social and individual experiences. This distinction is found to be prevalent in the German American participants. For instance, Nicklaus’s response summed up the participant perceptions observed about their identity:

I definitely would say I’m German American. I am first generation American and I’m very proud of that. This country has provided an opportunity for my family to do well, and be rewarded for their hard work. The German background is still very important. The ethnicity, the heritage, the values, and the cultural experiences are things that I treasure today and I’m passing down to my children.

Nicklaus’s response that, politically and economically, he identifies with American customs and practice and, socially, he identifies with his German background signifies the emphasis of culture as a separate aspect of intra- and interpersonal relationships. This indicates that the duality of identity experienced by the German American participants reflects the idea of Kultur rather than an embedded cultural experience with dominance by a particular culture. Further, the German American participants noted that this duality made them distinctly different from native Germans, who experience different social and political spheres. In addition, studies provided interpretations on culture identity applicable to the present study because Schmuck et al.
(1999) found that German students were less extrinsically oriented due to their cultural influences, Kolinksy and van der Will (1998) found ethnic identity to be shaped by exclusion and inclusion in other cultures, Holmes (2013) found identities shifted over time, and Nesteruk et al. (2015) found that parental influence largely shapes German American identity.

Language and Heritage

Warriner (2007) contended that language is central to an individual’s identity. Language assimilation has been documented as having both positive and negative effects on immigrants. Learning English at an early age allows for immigrants to easily integrate and succeed within their society—an aspect some parents may find more important than preserving tradition. However, the eradication of language can also lead to isolation and a loss of cultural belonging and connection to one’s heritage. In the present study, the participants indicated that language was an integral aspect of their experiences as German Americans. The participants felt that speaking their language at home and with family and friends allowed them to preserve the connection to their heritage while still being able to assimilate into American society. In Franz’s interview, he noted the significance of speaking German at home and the influence German traditions had on his experiences:

I think just kind of growing up with it in our house. We spoke German a lot. We never stopped speaking German at home. We always spoke German growing up. That, of course, contributed to it. The traditions we had at home with the holidays and those kinds of things. I still think the identity of working hard, playing less, was always kind of there.

Franz felt that the German language connected him to his identity, but whether or not language was present in his everyday life, the foundation of his experiences will always be influenced by German heritage and language. This response sums up how the
majority of participants described their experiences with language. Although they revealed that the decline of German language use had a negative effect on German Americans in the United States, they actively sought ways in which to preserve the German language, whether in daily use, at cultural events, or within close-knit family gatherings.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings of this study signify that German American experiences are dynamic and fluid and do not rely on community involvement to promote a sense of cultural belonging and meaning. Ethnography and autoethnography proved to be effective methods for uncovering detailed, nuanced, and authentic accounts of the participants’ experiences within the historical and sociocultural contexts of their lifeworlds in U.S. higher education. My engagement in this study as an ethnographic researcher brought forth new insights into what it means to be a second generation German American in today’s higher education in the U.S.

Given the scarcity of scholarship on first and second generation immigrant students in American higher education and specifically, second generation German Americans, the findings of this study can serve as springboards for further research. First, this study can be developed into a longitudinal research study on the first and/or second generation immigrant students of diverse European origins, focusing on their specific historical backgrounds and their relevance to academic success as well as the barriers to it. American immigrant experience is a story of both glory and tragedy. Some European ethnic groups suffered oppression and persecution in their native lands and sought refuge in America as a land of opportunity and new beginning. Newly arriving
immigrants made considerable sacrifices for a better future for their children. Yet little is known about how the children of immigrants deal with the painful histories of their parents or grandparents.

This study demonstrated that second generation German Americans, even though academically and professionally successful, share an awareness of stigma associated, unfortunately and unfairly, with the affiliation of all German people with the Nazi regime during WWII. The participants in this study provided numerous examples of being unfairly treated and stereotyped in this regard. It is worthwhile, therefore, to expand the studies on stigma consciousness, which are typically conducted with African American populations, to include similar studies that focus on various ethnic groups of European decent that carry the weight of their ancestors’ histories of oppression and discrimination. A mixed-methods comparative study may serve well to address the phenomenon of stigma consciousness perceived and experienced by different racial and ethnic groups within the historical, sociocultural, and political contexts of American society and education. Such studies can contribute to interracial and intercultural dialogues among diverse student audiences thus fostering a better understanding of American diversity and the ways in which we can build a more peaceful and productive world at large and the world of education. Subsequently, higher education faculty, administrators, and staff can benefit from these constructive dialogues in terms of adjusting their policies and practices so these are conducive to meeting the needs of all students. In the same vein, studies such as this can contribute to a better understanding of the refugee crisis as an unfolding history in the United States and Europe.
Further research on German American identity might specifically examine the physical and mental processes of identity development in German Americans and the phenomenon of resilience and its roots embedded in the immigrant experience of German Americans. Subsequently, such study can contribute to existing theories of resilience and their implications for the practice of American higher education.

My goal is that this study will create space for further productive conversations among higher education professionals regarding the many issues that the students of immigrants of diverse ethnic backgrounds confront in their pursuit of academic success. I am charging myself with the duty to continue this study and research ways in which its findings can be practically applied and yield positive results. I am also calling upon others to become change agents, wherever they see fit, to foster inclusive and positive learning environments for all students in the institutions of higher learning.

**Final Thoughts**

*Es war einmal . . .
Once upon a time . . .*

There was a young girl, a girl that had a strong, and some say stubborn personality. She took the adversity and fears in her life and turned them to launching pads to face her weaknesses head on. I am this girl. I know what it is like to forget the English word for china hutch and call it a “schrank” to someone who does not speak the German language. I know what it’s like to hear stories of war, starvation, and times of devastation. I also know what it is like to hear the stories of my grandparents and my parents and know that women were not always put at the forefront of education in their day. I could not see that happen in my own family. I wanted to give my boys something
to be proud of and see strong women achieve their life long dreams and passions. I wanted them to see the impossible and realize that it was not impossible.

When I began this journey, I wanted to blend my passion for higher education with my own personal history and contribute to not only the field of higher education as a researcher, but also to my family, my heritage, and to honor where I came from. I remember sitting in a history of higher education class during my master’s program at Loyola University Chicago, and my instructor started the class with a saying written on the board: “from whence we came.” I take this with me because, wherever we go, whoever we become, we must always remember where we came from.

Going into the interview process, I assumed I would hear a lot of what I already knew, what I already felt. I truly could not have been more wrong. I learned so much from the participants in this study, some whom I had no idea of the struggles they journeyed through and some whom I could not help but spend way beyond the amount of time we had allotted for the interview, asking more and more questions. I learned about my own family through these interviews, stories that had not come out until now. I kept thinking back to these stories throughout the journey and it made me more assured that this dissertation was meant to be, in honor of my family, my heritage, and my own journey. I kept thinking back to the saying by Maya Angelou: “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said; people will forget what you did; people will never forget how you made them feel.” Countless times I was contacted by the participants in this study about how they felt to be included, how I reminded them of the good times with their grandparents and how they had not thought about in years. During one of the interviews, one of my participants talked about the importance of “giving your word”
and that you need to honor what you say you will do. I recently received a message from this same participant and after I responded, he sent me another message that said he knew I meant what I said. I gave my word and my word was my bond.

Throughout this journey, I learned of many hardships and things that brought me to feel anger and rage, like when my one participant talked of having the word Nazi spray-painted on his garage door when he was a young child. However, for every story of shame and adversity, there were two stories of perseverance, kindness, and success. Perhaps that is why these German Americans were so successful; there was no one who could keep them from achieving whatever it was that they had their mind set on. I began this journey with an idea and I could not be more proud of the way it has turned from an idea into a dissertation, the greatest achievement of my academic career. I wanted to leave my mark, and here I believe it is—something to tell the stories of those who were silenced. There were times I asked my grandfather about the war and he would not talk about it; perhaps it was too painful or too difficult, or maybe I waited too long until his memories were cloudy. I tell you, never stop asking. Never stop learning about your history, your family history that needs to be documented, remembered, and honored. You should always remember from whence you came.

This dissertation process is something I equate with a fairy tale. It had its trying times, its twists and turns, and there were absolutely days where I never believed I would get to the end. By the grace of God, I started with a few words, and then by the end of the process, writing felt natural and cathartic. It is my sincere hope that this work is not the end of the road for this research topic.

*Da hatten alle Sorgen ein Ende, und sie lebten in Freude zusammen*
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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM
APPENDIX A

Consent Form

Dear participant:

My name is Nicole Ruscheinski Herion. I am a doctoral student in Higher Education and Organizational Change (HEOC) program at Benedictine University, Lisle, IL. I am conducting a qualitative research, An Ethnographic Study of the Second Generation German Americans Leaving their Mark on the U.S. Higher Education, in which you are invited to participate.

The purpose of this study is to explore the historical, sociocultural, and educational contexts in which the second generation German Americans identify themselves and are received by others as a unique cultural group within the larger American society. Additionally, I intend to examine the pathways of this generation to educational attainment and economic advancement.

The following research questions guide this study: (a) What are the shared cultural beliefs and values of the second generation German Americans? (b) What are the historical and sociocultural contexts that have been shaping ethnic identity of the second generation German Americans? (c) What are the social contexts within which the second generation German Americans experience acculturation, assimilation, and social distance in American society and higher education? (d) What are the pathways to educational attainment and economic advancement for the second generation German Americans?

This research is very important to me because I have yet to find a significant study that addresses the questions that I have about this cultural group and why/how they may have been so successful in the area of educational attainment in the U.S.

Upon your consent, I will make observations of your cultural activities, such as social gatherings, open group meetings and dance rehearsals. I will invite you to participate in individual and focus group interviews. All interviews will be conducted in person at a location of your choice. During the interview, I will ask a series of questions pertaining to a variety of your experiences as a representative of second generation German American. The interviews may last from approximately one to two hours. They will be audio- and/or video-recorded (pending your consent) and transcribed verbatim. The interview transcripts will be presented to you for verification of accuracy.

There is no known risks in this study. Your participation is strictly voluntary and you can withdraw from it at any point and without any penalty to you. You are guaranteed full confidentiality and anonymity when participating in this study. Your identity will be kept fully confidential. A pseudonym will be assigned to your name and your actual name will be known only to the principle investigator (me).
For confidentiality purposes, the interview transcript and all files pertaining to your participation in this study will be stored in a locked cabinet for ten years and destroyed afterwards if no longer needed. All computer files will be kept on a secure server, which will be password protected. Excerpts from the interviews may be included in the final dissertation report or other later publications. However, if, at a subsequent date, biographical data were relevant to a publication, a separate release form would be sent to you.

This study is being conducted in part to fulfill requirements for my Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree at the College of Education and Health Services at Benedictine University in Lisle, Illinois. This study has been approved by the Benedictine University Institutional Review Board, chaired by Dr. Alandra Weller-Clarke who can be reached at aclarke@ben.edu; or at (630) 829-6295.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me at: (847-322-1218), or by email: Nicole.ruscheinski@gmail.com. You may also contact my dissertation director, Antonina Lukenchuk, at: alukenchuk@ben.edu; or antoninalukenchuk@gmail.com.

A signed copy of this consent form will be provided to you. To grant your consent, please complete the two sections below.

Thank you,

Nicole Ruscheinski Herion
Doctoral Candidate
Higher Education and Organizational Change
Benedictine University

☐ I have read the information presented in the consent form above and I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Name: ____________________________  Signature: _______________________
Date: ______________

☐ I have read the information presented in the consent form above and I voluntarily agree to have my interview audio and/or video-recorded.

Name: ____________________________  Signature: _______________________
Date: ______________
APPENDIX B

Individual Interview Guide

The Biographical
1. What was it like growing up in your family? (family make-up; traditions; etc.)
2. What values were instilled in you?
3. What role, if any, do your parents play in your educational pursuits?
4. What were the immigrant stories that you heard when growing up?
5. Have you learned any lessons from these stories? Is so, please share them with me.

Culture and Identity
7. How have you developed a sense of ethnic identity?
8. Do you believe that your identity changes overtime or remains the same? Please explain.
9. What does it mean to you to be part of German American culture? American culture?
10. Please tell me about cultural traditions in your family. Do you retain these traditions?
11. Do you feel fully integrated (assimilated) into American society/culture? Please explain. Follow up: To what extent, do you think you retain your German cultural roots?
12. Have you ever heard an expression “silent minority” in reference to German Americans? What do you think it means?
13. Are you proud to be German American? Please explain.
14. Have you ever felt ashamed of being affiliated with German culture?
15. As you know, the history of Germany has its dark side primarily because of WWII. As a consequence of this war, many German Americans have suffered humiliation and persecution in America. Have you or your relatives ever had any negative experiences in America? If so, what were they?

Student Experiences
16. What and/or who motivated you to pursue higher education? (follow-up: By pursuing your education, are you fulfilling your own dream or the dreams of your parents?)
17. What are your expectations regarding your education?
18. Thus far, how have been your educational experiences as a second generation German American student? Have these experiences been conducive to or preventing you from attaining your educational goals? Please explain.
20. Have you ever felt isolated in educational or other settings? If so, please share the instances of isolation.

21. When in college, do you socialize primarily with German Americans or with persons from other cultural backgrounds as well?

22. From an academic standpoint, do you think there are qualities that distinguish German American students from others? Please explain.

23. If there is any lesson learned or advice that you would like to share with a new generation of German Americans, what would it be?
APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE
APPENDIX C

Focus Group Interview Guide

1. Please elaborate on what it means to you to be German American.
2. Please share an episode where you felt most proud of your German ancestry.
3. Conversely, please share an episode when you felt most negative about your German ancestry.
4. When you get together, do you speak German among yourselves? If so, then why? If not, why not?
5. Do you believe that German Americans are “the silent minority”? Please explain.
6. Please comment additionally on your student experiences as German Americans on college campuses (probing questions on cultural and social integration, isolation, distance, stereotyping; and relationships with others).
7. Please comment additionally on your values and expectations regarding education.
8. What is unique of being a second generation German American college student?
9. Please comment additionally on advantages and barriers to your advancement in education as children of immigrant parents.
APPENDIX D

INITIAL CODING
### APPENDIX D: Initial Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Codes</th>
<th>What Codes Convey</th>
<th>Logic</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Main Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>Identity, Lifestyle</td>
<td>Unique ways of life, beliefs (Identity)</td>
<td>Self-Categorized Identity</td>
<td>Identity Recognition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Behavior, Coping</td>
<td>Positive and negative experiences (Assimilation)</td>
<td>Assimilation</td>
<td>Intercultural Mobility</td>
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<td>Habits</td>
<td>Traits</td>
<td>Common habits, traditions (Tradition)</td>
<td>Tradition</td>
<td>Values and Beliefs</td>
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<td>Parents/Family</td>
<td>Networks, Closeness</td>
<td>Supportive role, close knit, mannerisms (Closeness; Temperament)</td>
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<td>Value and Beliefs</td>
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<td>Belonging to Cultural Group, Exclusion from Other Groups</td>
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<td>Identity Recognition</td>
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<td>Organization</td>
<td>Commitment to Culture, Ethic, Responsibility</td>
<td>Receiving support, learning value (Support; Work Ethic)</td>
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<td>Educational Values</td>
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<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Hard Work, Skill</td>
<td>Obtaining goals, strong work ethic (Work Ethic)</td>
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<td>Values and Beliefs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Communication, Fitting in</td>
<td>Finding commonalities, socialization (Language; Tradition)</td>
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### Initial Coding Word Frequencies

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