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Acculturation Stress and the Coping Strategies of Nigerian Immigrant Women in the United States

Oluwatoyin Mofoluwaso Adewunmi
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Oluwatoyin Adewunmi

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Dr. Monica Gordon, Committee Member, Human Services Faculty
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Abstract

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M.Sc, University of Lagos, 1989

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Nigerian women who migrate to the United States are faced with complex social challenges as they acculturate to a new society. Stressful conditions and acculturation experiences may threaten the overall mental health of these immigrant women. The purpose of this study was to explore the acculturation experiences of Nigerian immigrant women living in the United States, identify stressors associated with the process, and highlight the coping strategies they employed. Stress and coping theory provided the theoretical framework for the study and phenomenological inquiry guided the research questions and method. Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews. Content analysis and coding were utilized to find relevant themes. Participants described their immigration experiences as being difficult although they reported their lives are ―much better now‖. The women adopted a positive, hard working attitude; relied on their faith in God; and sought mentors and a supportive community. Most participants reported being unaware of the resources available to them and more than half reported not having access to any resources. Participants reported receiving support from their friends, family members, and communities of faith. Research on the acculturative experiences of these women would be useful in developing gender specific programs that would support the integration process and reduce mental health issues that may arise as a result of acculturation stressors. In an advocacy effort towards social change, results from this study may inform service providers of Nigerian immigrant women‗s unique cultural needs as they acculturate to living in the United States.

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Dedication

I dedicate this to God Almighty who made it possible. You are my source and strength. I also dedicate this to my family, especially to the memory of my dearest mother, Chief (Mrs.) M. A. Okunuga, who was an awesome role model for me. This is for you Mummy.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

Nigerian women in the United States, like other immigrants, go through a process of acculturation to mainstream American society. They often encounter complex, stressful situations, such as economic uncertainties, racial/ethnic prejudice that include linguistic and other cultural barriers, loss of social support, and other difficulties as they acculturate to the new society (Amayo, 2009). Amayo stated that coping strategies differ across cultures, and new immigrants may utilize coping strategies that vary from those of the settled population. Nigerian immigrants face diverse stressors that can potentially, adversely affect their mental health while acculturating into a new society. In addition, they may also experience racial/ethnic prejudice, social isolation, and cultural values related to the individualistic orientation of the American culture versus the collectivist nature of the culture they come from. It is important to identify those stressors and coping strategies that are relevant to Nigerian immigrants that result from the various immigration challenges they experience.

According to Okonofua (2013), though considerable resources have been devoted to the study of immigrants, these studies have not included Nigerian women immigrants as a special category in the United States. There are studies on other immigrant categories such as Hispanics, Asians, and even other African nationalities; however, not much literature has focused on Nigerian immigrant women (Ezeobele, 2008). This study adds to the body of knowledge on acculturation of female immigrants, and in particular, expands knowledge on the experiences of a specific African immigrant group-- Nigerians. The

implication for social change is that the study can be used to develop gender and culturally-specific programs that would support the acculturation of African immigrant women and facilitate the integration process. This chapter includes the background of the topic, the need for the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the theoretical framework for the study.

Immigration involves some social and psychological challenges for the immigrant. Immigrants encounter complex, stressful situations as they acculturate to the dominant culture (Amayo, 2009). With regards to Nigerians, this is due more to the shift in their social status from being in the racial majority in Africa to being a stigmatized minority in the United States (Sellers, Ward, & Pate, 2006). This may result in acculturative stress (Beckerman & Corbett, 2008). There are studies on other immigrant categories such as Hispanics and Asians (Akresh, 2009; Baek & Thomas, 2009; Lu, Marks & Apavaloiae, 2012; Strunk, Townsend-Rocchiccioli, & Sanford, 2013; Xu & Chi, 2013; Yang, 2010). However, Africans and Nigerian immigrant women in particular, have been largely excluded in the literature on immigrants (Amayo, 2009; Ezeobele, 2008; Oyeyemi & Sedenu, 2007).

Cultural differences influence and shape individuals' coping strategies. Truong (2002) stated that coping is conceptualized as an individual's ability to manage a situation, which is dependent on employing some methods which take care of known and unexpected problems and their likely effects. The choice of the method is determined by the individual's social and cultural background, as these influence their perception and response to any challenge. The way individuals cope with their situations is related to

their appraisal of the situation, the coping resources available to the individuals, the resources provided by the culture, and the reactions of others (Truong, 2002).

Minority groups living in the United States are usually reluctant to use mental health services because they believe that discussing personal problems with others stigmatizes them culturally (Sue & Sue, 2008). They may also be unfamiliar with the concept of mental health and may not seek mental health services. Kamya (1997) noted that immigration involves a process of acculturation, and immigrants experience stress including stress associated with acculturation, such as cultural shock, cultural change, social isolation, and goal striving. Learning more about the culture and philosophy of Nigerians would enable practitioners to provide more culturally competent services (Kamya, 1997; Ting, 2010). In a study conducted by Ezeobele, Malecha, Landrum, and Symes (2010), the authors found that depression is one of the most serious health problems experienced by immigrant women. They argued that migration to a new environment generates stress and anxiety due to a loss of traditional support systems in a familiar environment. Ezeobele et al. suggested that spirituality and religion were identified as the main sources of treatment because Nigerians strongly believe in supernatural causes of mental illness. Emotional illness is perceived as a stigma in the Nigerian culture, and therefore, prevents them from using mental health services.

Although mental health problems are similarly manifested across cultures, the help-seeking strategies vary across cultures and are complex. How each individual copes with challenges tend to be culturally influenced. Nigerian culture is group oriented in that the group norm is the focus rather than the individual, and this is reflected in the choices,

actions, and decision-making processes of the individual. The extended family system in Nigeria has always provided needed support structures for the Nigerian people (Obayan, 1995). Elders are revered as custodians of wisdom and used as counselors and this cuts across practically all ethnic groups in Nigeria. The extended family provides group support and helps to meet the emotional, financial, physical, and social needs of the family members. However, the Nigerian family in the United States has dramatically changed to nuclear units, the result of migration that puts geographical distance between immigrants and their extended families back in Africa which had hitherto provided support for the family.

Ting (2010) observed that although African immigrants are a growing population in the United States; there is limited information on how immigrant Nigerian women cope with various kinds of acculturation stressors. Ting observed that African immigrants employed multiple coping strategies which include spirituality, a future orientation, and a sense of self efficacy. It is important to have an understanding of the experiences and coping strategies of this population in order for practitioners to intervene effectively with more culturally competent resources.

Statement of the Problem

The research on immigrants has largely excluded Africans, especially Nigerian immigrant women, from studies of the immigrant acculturation process. Nigerians, as the largest category of African immigrants in the United States, encounter difficulties navigating the complex social systems. Women, in particular must cope with changing gender roles and also deal with unfamiliar race-related issues, which, when combined together, create a unique set of risk factors for generating mental health issues among African immigrant women. Nigerian immigrant women's experiences may cause their overall mental health to be threatened in the absence of culturally sensitive services to facilitate their acculturation process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of Nigerian immigrant women as they acculturate to living in the United States, the kind and nature of stressors they experienced, and to identify the strategies they developed for coping with their immigrant status.

Nature of the Study

Nigerian women's acculturation experiences were investigated using a phenomenological approach as research methodology. Phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences and allows the researcher to explore the meaning participants give to their experiences (Giorgi, 1985; Groenewald, 2004). This allows the researcher to have a glimpse into the world of the persons studied through observations of their behaviors and obtaining detailed descriptions of events and experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). The key concept that I studied was the coping strategies of Nigerian immigrant women living in the United States. Data were collected from 10 Nigerian women in a Northern California city (Sacramento) through personal interviews and observations. The interview data were transcribed, open-coded, and then analyzed to identify similarities, differences, and recurring themes. I followed Creswell's (2007) advice that researchers must bracket out their own experiences in order to fully describe how participants view the phenomenon.

The categories of Nigerian women from whom participants were selected for this study included persons 18 years and older with various occupational statuses, who have lived in the United States for at least a year, and reside in Northern California. I used phenomenological inquiry to investigate the experiences of the participants through one-on-one interviews.

Conceptual Framework

Stressful events can be described as external or internal demands that tax or exceed the adaptive resources of the individual (Romero & Roberts, 2003). Lazarus and Folkman's (1984,1986) theory of stress and coping provides a conceptual framework context for identifying stressful situations and the coping strategies persons devise to manage stress. Theories that explain stress and coping posit that the perception of an event, available situational support and coping mechanisms are three factors that determine the state of balance of an individual. People rely on diverse coping resources in stressful life situations and are inclined to use the same coping strategy in response to different stressful situations. The subjective evaluation of an individual's cultural environment is considered one of the key processes in psychological models of stress and has been identified as a better determinant of mental health than the presence or absence of an event (Romero & Roberts, 2003).

Fitzgerald (2006), drawing on the perspectives of Portes and Zhou (1993) who advanced segmented assimilation theory, argued that the specific segment of society to which a person assimilates play a vital role in influencing their life changes. This perspective asserts that immigrants may assimilate into one of the many social sectors available in American society. This perspective also rests on the premise that immigrants who are positively welcomed by the communities in their host society and have access to necessary resources tend to integrate better into their new society than those without support. These theories may lend understanding to the integration process of Nigerian

immigrant women and what social supports exist for them. These and other theories are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

A qualitative phenomenological approach allows the researcher to investigate the participant's experiences of a phenomenon from their perspectives (Creswell, 2007; Giorgi, 1985; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Phenomenology also allows the researcher to generate rich description of the participants' experiences of the phenomenon that facilitates understanding and interpretation of the experiences.

Assumptions

All research studies are based on theoretical assumptions. One primary assumption in this study was that every immigrant goes through social and psychological challenges. The process of adjusting to a new social and cultural environment involves some difficulties, which may cause immigrants stress (Beckerman & Corbett, 2008; Kosic, 2004). Although all immigrants face challenges, there are variations in the kinds of stressor categories of immigrants' experience. Therefore, I assumed that differences in age, education, ethnicity, and socio-economic status shape individual's experiences and the interpretation of their acculturation process. A second assumption is that participants will be forthcoming and honestly answer the questions presented. Third, that my insider status will not bias the data collection process. Another assumption is that my familiarity with the Nigerian culture and shared African female immigrant identity with the participants was an asset to the study.

Research Questions

The research questions for the study were:

1. What are the experiences of Nigerian immigrant women living in the United States?

2. What strategies have Nigerian immigrant women developed to cope with living in the United States?

3. What knowledge of and access to needed services do Nigerian immigrant women have?

4. How do Nigerian immigrant women perceive the available services?

5. What support systems do Nigerian immigrant women have that are relevant to their social and cultural needs?

Definition of Terms

Acculturation: This refers to the changes that take place when individuals from a different culture come in contact with culturally dissimilar people, groups and cultures (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). It is also the process of learning and adapting to a new culture.

Acculturative stress: Complex, stressful situations experienced by immigrants as they attempt to integrate into a new society and culture (Amayo, 2009). Immigrants may experience some social and psychological challenges in the process of adjusting to a new culture which are referred to as acculturative stress (Beckerman & Corbett, 2008; Kosic, 2004).

Coping Strategies: Cognitive and behavioral efforts used by an individual to reduce the effects of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping is perceived as a process

that varies from situation to situation for any one individual (Barnyard & Graham-Berman, 1993).

Immigrants: In the context of this study, this term refers to individuals born outside the United States who relocated in order to reside in the United States. However, the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) broadly defines an immigrant as an alien, except an individual who is legally admitted under specific non-immigrant categories. Some immigrants without legal status are referred to as undocumented immigrants, while those with legal status are referred to as documented immigrants.

Migration: Movement of people into a new country in order to find better living conditions (Mabogunje, 1970).

Role strain: Role strain refers to stress associated with expected role obligations (Merali, 2008).

Stress: Stress is defined as a situation which an individual appraised as personally significant and coming with demands that exceed the person's resources for coping. Also, stress is contextual and changes over time (Folkman, 2010).

Scope and Delimitations

African women from other African countries were not within the scope of this study. This is because Africans are diverse in more ways than just language and culture. Nigerians were specifically selected for this study due to the fact that they are the largest African immigrant population in the United States. Although the results of this study were limited to Nigerian immigrant women, and cannot be generalized to all African

immigrants, some of the findings could serve as a guide for future research on other African immigrant populations.

Limitations

The study was focused exclusively on Nigerian immigrant women living in an urban city in Northern California. The unwillingness of some of the immigrant women to participate may have been due to the unwilling disclosing nature of Nigerians to disclose personal information, especially if they are undocumented immigrants. However, participation was voluntary and every participant was given the opportunity to refuse, so that only those who were genuinely willing to participate were involved. This ensured honesty.

Significance

The number of African immigrants in the United States, especially Nigerian women, has increased within the last few decades but little is known about their patterns of adaptation and acculturation experiences. The central focus of this study was Nigerian immigrant women's acculturative stress associated with their new social and cultural environment and the coping strategies they employ to deal with the process of adaptation.

Due to the paucity of data on Nigerian immigrant women, research on their acculturative experiences will add to the body of knowledge and may also be used to develop gender specific programs that support their integration process. Although languages, values, and migration patterns of African immigrants are different, the results of this study can be a baseline for comparing the results of subsequent work on other African nationals. According to Ting (2010), the United States 2000 census showed that

African immigrants have more than doubled between 1990 and 2000 to over 1,000,000

people. They are a small but growing minority, and it has become necessary to examine

African immigrants as an individual group (Ting, 2010). According to the 2000 United

States census (as cited in Ezeobele, Malecha, Landrum, & Symes, 2010), a large number

of Nigerian immigrants live in the United States (approximately 25% of all Africans). Of

these, 57,945 were reported to be Nigerian women (approximately 43% of all Nigerian

immigrants). According to the Migration Policy Institute (2011), in 2009 about 1.5

million African immigrants resided in the United States and Nigerians topped the list

with 209,908 immigrants. It is therefore important to recognize their diverse

psychological problems and indigenous coping strategies in order to develop culturally

relevant services for them.

There is little information regarding Nigerian women immigrants and an

awareness of the challenges encountered by this population may lead to the development

of culturally appropriate therapeutic interventions. Existing studies (Afolayan, 2011;

Amayo, 2011; Balogun, 2011; Kamya, 1997; Takyi, 2009) did not focus on the

experiences that have important effects on Nigerian immigrant women's mental health.

Therefore this study is important both for Nigerians and possibly African immigrants in

general, and also for the mental health professionals who work with them. Practitioners

need to be sensitive to the conditions that can enhance the well-being of immigrants. This

study also adds to the body of literature on coping strategies of immigrants and fill in the

gaps of knowledge related to immigrant Nigerian women in a diverse society. This will

ultimately help immigrants' integration processes and help them acculturate with less psychological problems.

Summary

The United States population is becoming more diverse with an influx of immigrants from different parts of the world coming to settle in America. In the process of adapting to the dominant culture, many of these immigrants experience acculturation challenges that often result in acculturation stress that places them at risk for poor mental health. Different people cope with stress in different ways. The focus of this study was to understand the immigration experiences of Nigerian immigrant women living in the United States. The potential implication of this for positive social change is that when this is understood and addressed, it could result in the provision of programs that would support the integration process and reduce mental health issues that may arise from acculturation stressors. Although there has been extensive literature on immigrants from other parts of the world, there is a paucity of data on immigrants from Africa. This chapter will be followed by a review of the relevant literature in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 focuses on my research methodology and will include a description of the study design, procedures, participants, and how the information gathered was assessed. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study. Chapter 5 provides the discussion of the results.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore the acculturative experiences of Nigerian immigrant women living in the United States and their coping strategies. Immigrants often feel compelled to or voluntarily decide to leave their countries of origin to seek a place that can offer them more opportunities for a better life. Various reasons, ranging from political and economic instability of their home countries, to better education and lives for their families, contribute to the quest for better life or opportunity (Kosic, 2004). Some of the factors that motivate individuals to leave their home countries for foreign ones include the quest for better education opportunities, the urge to escape poverty and persecution, and to embrace the promise of securing a much better life in the United States (Ette, 2011). Wars and political factors also force other individuals to leave their countries as refugees, while many others voluntarily seek better lives for their families.

The United States offers legal immigration opportunities to people from different parts of the world including the United States Immigrant Diversity lottery visa, which offers permanent residence to qualified individuals from selected countries. Other people leave their home countries on a visiting visa to the United States and stayed on illegally, becoming undocumented persons. This literature review will examine some of the push and pull factors that motivate individuals to leave their home countries for foreign ones, and analyze the theories that account for the phenomenon. It will also examine the research methods developed and used in the existing studies.

In the process of adjusting to a new culture immigrants may experience some social and psychological challenges, that may result in acculturative stress (Beckerman &

Corbett, 2008; Kosic, 2004). Although there has been research of immigrants in the

United States, there have been few studies focusing on African immigrants, especially

Nigerians (Okome, 2002; Ting, 2010). Past researchers have focused on the cultural

adjustment process among South Africans (Segel, 1996), Moroccans (Ourasse & Vijver,

2004), and Ethiopians (Kibour, 2001). Few researchers have concentrated on immigrants

from West Africa generally, and Nigerians in particular (Afolayan, 2011; Amayo, 2011;

Balogun, 2011; Berger, 2011; Ette, 2011; Kamya, 1997; Takyi, 2009). Research on

Nigerian immigrants is necessary, due to the fact that Nigerians are the largest number of

African immigrants in the United States as reported by the 2000 United States Census

Bureau. Creating social awareness of Nigerian immigrants and their acculturation

experiences and the significant stress immigration has on one's mental health and

wellbeing may help to promote culturally relevant interventions that would assist

Nigerian immigrants to acculturate better. I sought to understand the experiences of

Nigerian immigrant women living in the United States and their coping strategies. This

chapter includes an examination of acculturation and migration theories, and immigration

policies, especially those that facilitate or impede migration from Nigeria to the United

States. Also to be discussed are the circumstances of Nigerian migration and the

experiences of Nigerian immigrant women in the United States.

Literature Search Strategy

        This literature review was conducted using databases such as PsychINFO,

PsycArticles, Academic Search Complete, and SocIndex. General search terms such as

acculturation, stress, immigrants, coping strategies, were used as the root of all inquiries,

and *Nigerians* and *Africans* were used to narrow the search. A combination of terms such as *acculturation stress, coping* and *Nigerians* were also used. From the articles these search strategies yielded, a review of references used by authors was used in locating additional resources the general search did not reveal. The Walden online library provided most of the articles used in this review. Google Scholar was also used to locate additional resources on the topic, with terms like: *migration theories, role strain, pull factors and Nigerian immigrants*, *acculturative stress, African and Nigerian immigrants in the United States*. Due to the fact that there was limited current research on Nigerian immigrants in the United States, a broad approach on the current literature on general migration and experiences of immigrants was used. The search was begun with immigrants and immigration generally and further narrowed down to a search on Africans generally and Nigerian women in particular.

Theoretical Framework

Classical assimilation theory, which was first delineated in Warner and Scrole (1945), is the major foundation theory that provided a base for newer theoretical models relevant in understanding the various paths to social integration for immigrant populations in the United States. Lee (2009) explained additional theoretical perspectives of immigration, as outlined below.

Classical Theory

Classical theory is based on the assumption that for immigrants to successfully assimilate into the American society that they need to discard their cultural customs or native language and accent by learning English and acquire American customs (Lee,

2009). This theory appears unrealistic due to the fact that immigrant groups have diverse characteristics, and all groups cannot be restricted into adapting into one culture.

Segmented Assimilation

This theory, originally introduced by Portes and Zhou in 1993, asserts that the assimilation process varies for different groups and individuals, depending on individual level adaptation and behavior and how well they adapt into one of the many social sectors that are available in the American society. Immigrants may choose to adapt into one of the minority ethnic cultures within the American society. The specific segment of society to which people assimilate plays a vital role in influencing their life chances within that society (Fitzgerald, 2006). This theory also takes into consideration the influence of the larger social environment, such as government policies, American societal values and biases, and the characteristics of the already existing ethnic communities within the American society. For instance, political refugees and asylum seekers often have access to government programs and benefits which help them to integrate better than those without support, such as undocumented immigrants. Immigrants who are positively welcomed by the communities in their host society have been shown to fare better than those who were discriminated against (Lee, 2009). Other contextual factors such as societal values and biases, residential location, and the presence or absence for mobility are believed to influence successful assimilation for immigrant groups. Segmented assimilation theory has been used to explain the diverse experiences of assimilation among immigrants because of the interaction between macro-level conditions and individual-level assimilation experiences (Xie, 2011).

Spatial Assimilation

Spatial assimilation refers to the process whereby newly arrived immigrant groups often initially reside in lower socioeconomic areas or neighborhoods where ethnic members are spatially concentrated or overrepresented, and eventually move to more affluent suburban areas as they advance in socioeconomic status (Lee, 2009). Spatial assimilation is dependent on the context of the receiving environment. However, not all immigrant groups necessarily live in impoverished urban enclaves. Some immigrants with high socioeconomic status may move directly into suburban neighborhoods, thereby forming ethnic enclaves within such neighborhoods (Lee, 2009).

Social Capital and Networks

Social capital and networks refers to the pre-existing relationship among immigrant groups such as friendships, family relationships, and group memberships (Lee, 2009). A social network is crucial in sustaining migration (Yang, 2010). Immigrants rely on these relationships and networks for support, which enables newly arrived immigrants to enter the mainstream employment sector and also to secure the capital and credit needed for them to be self-employed.

Social Migration Theory

Social migration theory is valuable in understanding international migration (Yang, 2010). According to McMichael and Manderson (2004), a social network is pivotal in migratory movement because it links immigrants and communities in their new community. New immigrants take advantage of resources provided through established

networks and this informs where they choose to resettle and also addresses their immediate concerns for accommodation and employment.

Ethnic Boundaries and Communities

Ethnic boundaries and communities could be perceived as a valuable resource for the easy assimilation of immigrants (Lee, 2009). Lee noted that if the boundary is clear, an immigrant would be expected to jump borders to assimilate and become like the majority American culture while reducing or totally abandoning the use of their own cultural practices and language. Also, the host country may be unwelcoming or may be receptive to welcoming new cultural groups and practices.

Transnationalism

Transnationalism is a concept that refers to immigrants who retain their relationships and participation in activities in their home countries, facilitated through the use of technology, while they invest themselves in their host country (Lee, 2009). It is a process whereby immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992).

Stress and Coping Theory

Coping and acculturation are closely related. According to Donnelly (2002),individual views of coping depend mostly on the individual's personal and social resources. Due to the fact that everyday stressors vary, coping is therefore perceived as a dynamic process that changes according to the relationship between the individual and

the environment, the external environmental factors and the individual's capacity. The two major ways people cope with stressful events are problem-focused and emotion-focused (Yakhnich, 2008). The former predominates when the situation is viewed as controllable, while the latter prevails when the stressors are considered as out of control (Donnelly, 2002; Kosic, 2004). This theory served as the present study's framework. Each Nigerian immigrant woman's situation, specific contexts, and appraisal of the stressors may differ. I attempted to understand the different situational factors that influence different coping strategies among the immigrant women. This theory also helped me to understand the research questions that sought to understand the immigrant's perception and appraisal of their experiences, how they cope, and what help is available to them.

The implication of these theories are that they afford researchers a better understanding of the different paths to integration that immigrant groups may experience. A review of the United States immigration policies that facilitate or impede migration from Nigeria to the United States follows in the next section.

United States Immigration Policies

The United States had an open border policy and easy admission of immigrants in the nation's first century; however, that has since changed (Johnson, 2003). Modern United States immigration laws are based on border enforcement and discrimination against non citizens, especially with the September 11th attacks, causing the enforcement of immigration restrictions and laws (Johnson, 2003). The United States' open-door immigration policy prior to 1882 enabled several immigrants to cross to the United

States. This policy reflected the country's need for cheap labor necessary for economic development (Esbenshade, 2011). The naturalization bill in 1790 marked the beginning of racial discrimination in the United States immigration policy. The Asian Exclusion Acts of the late 1800s and early 1900s and the 1920s quota system limited ethnically Eastern and Southern Europe migrants. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act loosened restrictions on immigration of Blacks and also instituted policies that emphasized family reunification and professional qualifications. Another immigration law that also made it easier for foreigners to obtain study visas and reunite with family was The Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of October 20, 1976.

The 1965 amendments to the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952 provided for a category of immigrants to apply under the family reunification. Visas for immigrants who had family members already residing in the United States were given preferential application status. Family ties became the primary criterion for admission of new immigrants into the country (Konandu-Agyemang & Takyi, 2006). Seventy-five percent of African immigrants benefitted from the family reunification programs with Nigerians benefitting more than any other African nation (Esbenshade, 2011). The 1986 Refugees Act also made it easier for families experiencing political violence in their native countries to immigrate as refugees. The Immigration Act of 1990 favored a category of work-related criteria and increased the number of immigrants admitted on the basis of skills for United States jobs. Those individuals who had education in the sciences fields and those willing to invest in the United States economy were among that category. Also, in the 1990s, the United States began granting diversity visas to people from

countries that did not benefit significantly from other visa categories (Konandu-Agyemang, & Takyi, 2006). Many African countries were in this pool. This enabled many Nigerians to immigrate and reside in the United States (Kent, 2007; Takyi, 2002).

Today, United States universities offer student visas to foreign students and strive to keep them in the country after they graduate. Yearly, United States universities conduct a global talent search for intelligent minds to be admitted to their graduate programs (Hanson, 2012). The United States government also permits high-skilled immigrants permission to work in the United States through the H-1B visa, employer sponsored green cards, and the family sponsored green card. These highly skilled immigrants contribute immensely to the productivity growth of the United States (Hanson, 2012). These policies accounted for the increase in immigration from Africa between the 1980s and the 1990s (Kent, 2007), and also contributed to the size and diversity of the United States population. With the increase in the number of Africans, Nigerians in particular, comes the need to have an understanding of how this population adapts to life in the United States.

Reasons for Migration

Migration is governed by a push and pull process whereby push factors represent unfavorable conditions, while pull factors are favorable conditions which encourage an individual to emigrate (Kumpikaite & Zickute, 2012). People have different reasons for migrating from one place to another. The causes of migration can be understood from the micro-individual approach and the macro-structural approach (Piche, 2013). The latter tends to understand migration from a systems approach that identifies all the elements

likely to influence migration, such as the economic environment, technology, the social environment, and political factors. The former focuses on individual decision-making, whereby individuals weigh the costs and benefits of migrating in terms of financial and non-financial costs (Piche, 2013). Smith (1776) and Ravenstein (1889) in their economic migration theory stated that the main reason for migrating is the difference in wages (Kumpikaite & Zickute, 2012). These theorists posited that regions dominated by surplus of labor and less capital are characterized by low wages, while regions dominated by shortage of labor and higher capital are characterized by high wages. Therefore, workers emigrate from low wage regions to high wage regions (Kumpikaite & Zickute, 2012).

The prospect of making more money and living better is a determining factor in the decision of most immigrants to leave their home countries (Hatton & Williamson, 2003; Johnson, 2003; Oyeyemi, Oyeyemi, Maduagwu, Rufai, & Aliyu, 2012; Yang, 2010). Individuals tend to migrate from their place of origin whenever there exists a sufficiently powerful trigger situation, to another community where there is a sufficiently powerful incentive (Onwubu, 2007). These factors are referred to as ‒push and pull‖ factors (Yang, 2010). Several authors on migration agree that the primary pull factor in the decision of immigrants is the idea of expected economic gain (Chumil, 2009; Kumpikaite & Zickute, 2012; Oyeyemi et al. 2012; Yang, 2010).

Immigration enables workers to move from their home countries where they are less productive to countries where they are more productive (Hanson, 2012). Migration from a country like Mexico to the United States can be explained by the differences in labor demand and wages between the two countries. This is the same situation with

Nigeria. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act granted legal status to millions of unauthorized immigrants, and the immigrants who benefited from this invested more in their education and earned higher wages which translated into more tax revenue, thereby benefiting the United States economy (Hinojosa-Ojeda, 2012).

Severe economic problems such as endemic corruption, high unemployment rates, increase in poverty and crime, and lack of security has stifled development in most African countries, especially Nigeria (Tarlebbea, 2010). This has been responsible for the constant mass exodus of Nigerians, especially the highly skilled and professional individuals to the United States. Also, social networks contribute to migration because the United States immigration laws permits legal immigration through family reunification, whereby new immigrants are admitted on the basis of sponsorship by relatives, friends, or employers in the United States. New immigrants take advantage of resources provided through established networks and this informs where they choose to resettle and also addresses their immediate concerns for accommodation and employment. Migration also makes immigrants rely more on each other than they would have done in their country of origin (Brettell, 2000). Social networks are, therefore, crucial in sustaining migration.

Political conditions are equally important to international migration. Civil wars, lack of personal security and freedom, political instability and lack of democracy, and low wages are some of the push factors that makes Nigerians leave their homeland. Lack of opportunity, political, legal, religious oppression, personal dissatisfaction, natural disasters, and harsh economic conditions are some other push factors that make

individuals leave their home countries for foreign ones. Some pull factors include security, increased opportunity, family reunification, better living conditions, better careers, higher wages, and educational opportunities. The United States offers democracy, political stability, and individual freedom and this attracts immigrants, especially those who lack these in their homelands (Yang, 2010).

One factor that makes some African women migrate is that they perceive immigration as a viable way to obtain financial independence and security, and also a way of obtaining freedom from familial exploitation (Reynolds, 2006). In an ethnography conducted by Reynolds (2006), the study documented the cultural expectation that African women were expected to support their households financially. As such, traditionally, African women's culturally prescribed household roles prevent them from being able to have exclusive control over their incomes. Nigerian women in particular opt to leave their homeland in order to gain more control over their finances, and also to fulfill various familial obligations (Reynolds, 2006). The attraction for the majority of these immigrants are stability of work, better health care, and better opportunities for education for their children. Reynolds (2006) also noted that the pressure and demands of extended families on men particularly those who have large extended families tend to reduce the financial support that women receive from husbands. Coming to the United States helps these women gain custody rights over their children, obtain greater degrees of education, and secure retirement accounts, while also escaping from bad marriages in some cases.

The study however focused only on upper middle class educated women, and did not document the acculturative experiences of these immigrant women. Rather, the study placed emphasis on the cultural demands placed upon African professional women, especially Nigerian women and how they have to immigrate in order to fulfill such demands and maintain their elite class status. The author studied experiences of a particular tribe of Nigerian-Igbo working class women who emigrate alone, comprising 50-60 women sampled over time. No other tribe was sampled, although this is one of the few studies that explored the experiences of Nigerian immigrant women in the United States. The limited scope of this work makes it less transferable. Data, was collected from various previous studies conducted by the author, including results from post-dissertation interviews. Some of the limitations of the study included the fact that the reference list had only seven articles and the data analysis was not specifically stated. The author did not provide in-depth methodological description. The study was aimed at informing immigration and settlement policies in the United States and migration theories provided foundation for the study. The essential themes that were identified are women's financial independence and economic rights. The outcome of the study showed that in designing policies to reduce brain drain in African countries, women's rights to financial security is a key social issue to consider (Reynolds, 2006).

Push and Pull Factors

Economic, political, social and cultural factors can be considered push and pull factors. According to Okome (2006) some of the push factors that stimulate African immigrants to migrate from their home countries include joblessness, low wages,

insecurity of life and oppression. The possibility of earning better income and living more comfortably, while for some, joining family members who migrated earlier, are some of the pull factors (Okome, 2006). Nigeria's deteriorating economy and political instability has been a major reason for Nigerians desiring a better life abroad (Ette, 2011). Another push factor is educational opportunity. Among the industrialized nations, the United States has become a major recipient of foreign students, emerging as the major center of higher learning (Takyi, 2002). Although Africans constitute a small percentage of the overall number of immigrants who relocate to the United States annually, the largest numbers of African-born populations in the United States are from West Africa, and Nigerians make up the largest population (Osirim, 2008).

Historically, many Nigerian immigrants left their home country either because of Nigeria's worsening economic problems, to be reunited with spouses or family members, or to pursue education. Some of these immigrants were lawfully admitted through the United States Diversity Visa Program introduced in 1990 (Ezeobele, 2008). However, quite a number of Nigerian immigrants entered the United States as visitors and became illegal immigrants. In a study on the ―push‖ factors responsible for the increased migration of Africans to the United States, Osirim (2008) noted that the majority of Nigerian immigrant women legally entered the United States under provisions in immigration law for family reunification, or in the status of students, refugees, or asylum seekers. Another reason there was an increase in the migration of Africans was the favorable American laws, as well as political and socio-economic conditions in Africa. Some of these women also move to the United States in an attempt to escape bad

marriages and relationships. They are committed to improving life for their immediate and extended families, so the obligation to migrate for Nigerian women is mostly considered a social and economic duty (Osirim, 2008).

Osirim's ethnographic study explored the experiences of 15 African immigrant women under the framework of segmented assimilation and Transnationalism, it however focused only on women entrepreneurs. The study focused more on the women's achievements and connections to their home countries, rather than their acculturative experiences. Nigerian women were not the only ones sampled in this study, although they were more represented than the other participants. Snowball sampling of eight Nigerians and one participant each from the following African countries, Ethiopia, Cape Verde, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire was used. Emphasis was placed on the reasons for leaving their home countries and their relationship with their countries of origin and the United States. Race relations and discrimination as entrepreneurs was also addressed, because the study participants reported having few negative racial experiences with all groups in their communities. However the study did not address the acculturative coping strategies of the women. The focus was rather on their contributions to the maintenance of their communities both in Africa and the United States.

Acculturative Stressors

Gibson (2001) and Yakushko (2010) described acculturation as the process of cultural change and adaptation that occurs when individuals with different cultures come into contact. All immigrants to the United States though having different reasons for coming, must necessarily adapt to the culture of their host country and undergo the

process of acculturation, and the literature on acculturation states that the process of

transition and resettlement produces stress (Ette, 2011). Sam and Berry (2010) explained

acculturative stress as ‖a stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the

experience of acculturation‖ (p. 474). In the process of adjusting to a new culture,

immigrants may experience some difficulties which may cause them distress, commonly

referred to as acculturative stress (Amayo, 2009; Ankica, 2004). One challenge common

to all immigrant families as noted by Beckerman and Corbett (2008) is the task of

redefining many of their worldviews and patterns. Immigrants from collectivist societies

are used to societal and intergenerational family involvement. When they immigrate, they

are required to adapt to United States norms of individuation and separation. They also

have to find the emotional and functional balance between holding on to their language,

cultural, and religious practices, while adapting to the host country. These authors studied

immigrants generally and the stress and trauma they experience as they acculturate,

especially those that emigrate as families.

African culture tends to foster family interaction and support and Nigerian

immigrants come from a collectivist society where family members and the communities

play a very significant role on the individual and family (Obayan, 1995). They therefore

find the process of acculturation to the United States culture of individualism stressful

(Beckerman & Corbett, 2008). Although immigration provides hope for a new life, the

separation and loss of family and social support coupled with cultural shock can lead to

extreme adjustment problems for the immigrant (Dow, 2011). Acculturation stress occurs

when majority of these immigrants arrive with few marketable skills and little formal

education. Being non-Whites also places them at risk of racial discrimination and exclusion, which for some can be severe and have a major impact on them (Gibson, 2001).

Immigrants who are undocumented tend to face more difficulties in their adjustment process, they are more prone to exploitation by employers, discrimination, and they are more vulnerable to stress. Acculturation stress occurs when undocumented aliens take up the most menial of jobs, mostly, ‗under the table‗, and live under the fear of trying to evade the scrutiny of immigration authorities (Okome, 2002). They face restrictions in numerous spheres of activity, especially the freedom to go back to their countries to visit family and friends. They could easily be deported if discovered by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) because of their lack of legal right of residence. Such immigrants are usually unable to obtain state IDs and drivers‗ licenses, which hinder their ability to transport themselves, access medical services and open bank accounts in their names (Okome, 2002). Saechao, et al. (2012). identified six sources of stressors- economic, discrimination, acculturation, language differences, obtaining employment matching one‗s qualifications, and lack of insurance to cover medical bills. Inadequate language skills also constitute some stressors. Race also plays a key role in the everyday experiences of African immigrants as they encounter discrimination and racism at both individual and institutional levels (Osirim, 2008).

African immigrants face discrimination and lack of acceptance by some of their African American counterparts, who accuse them of, ‗stealing‗ jobs that belong to them, and also blame them for being responsible for their ancestors being sold into slavery

(Takougang, 2003). Status change poses another form of stress for immigrants. Nigerian immigrants not only have to adapt to the dominant culture, but also to minority cultures with which they might be identified in the United States. Wamwara-Mbugua and Cornwell (2010) in a study on Kenyans noted that immigrants are forced to assimilate as members of a different racial group due to racial stratification, and that the pressures faced by them vary. Sellers, Ward, and Pate (2006) stated that immigration may be stressful for Black African immigrants, considering the fact that they have to adjust to being a racial minority and the stigma of inferiority and discrimination that is associated with it.

A change in the social roles of these immigrants as well as their new minority status can result in stress (Ezeobele, 2008). For Nigerian immigrant women, the loss of traditional support system can cause them anxiety and depression, and those that are undocumented often have the problem of trying to hide and avoid detection and subsequent deportation. In their qualitative phenomenology study on Nigerian immigrant women and how the issues and stressors related to immigration contribute to depression, Ezeobele, Malecha, Landrum and Symes (2010) noted that the unique behavior and cultural values of Nigerian immigrant women have important effects on their mental health. Their study was borne out of the fact that existing studies had focused on other groups of immigrant women's mental health. Their study was one of the few studies that sought to explore the understanding of depression from the perspectives of Nigerian immigrant women. Their purposive snowball sample of 19 Nigerian-born women was quite varied among the different tribes of Nigeria, although not representative of other

Nigerian-born women because it was limited to well-educated women only. Husserl's phenomenology of perception provided the theoretical framework for the study, and Colaizzi's seven step method was used in data analysis. Their study was an attempt to study Nigerian immigrant women and their culture with the purpose of delivering meaningful care to them. However, only the aspect of depression as a mental illness was examined. The participants were not asked to share their acculturative experiences, only their perception of what depression was. Not every immigrant woman would suffer depression.

Many of the challenges and stressors experienced by these women include difficulties in communication, lack of personal skills, and although many of them are well educated with college degrees from Nigeria, they are often forced to take low paying menial jobs that were unrelated to their former training and education (Ezeobele, Malecha, Landrum, & Symes, 2010; Osirim, 2008). According to Dow (2011) immigrant women engage in low-paying, low-status jobs and receive lower salaries than one would expect given their educational attainment. They are also more willing than men to take up low-paying jobs and this tend to make them wage earners in their households. This can be considered a role reversal for many Nigerian women. The fact that they also hold foreign degrees from their nation of origin causes them to face discrimination in the labor market (Osirim, 2008).

All of these stressors and issues related to immigration contribute to depression in immigrant women (Ezeobele, Malecha, Landrum, & Symes, 2010). In their study, Venters and Gany (2011) noted that although African immigrant women had lower rates

of depression, they are nevertheless faced by some mental health problems. Although their study was not focused on Nigerian women in particular, the researchers reviewed existing data on the health status and needs of African immigrants in the United States, and noted the mental health problems encountered by African immigrants in their attempt to integrate into social, educational or employment settings. Their data analysis is still ongoing. African immigrants encounter barriers to care due to lack of access to health insurance and language difficulties (Venters & Gany, 2011). They also have a heavy burden of sending money back to their families in Africa, and the fear of acquiring debt that may threaten future immigration proceedings prevents undocumented immigrants from seeking medical care, thereby constituting risks for poor mental health (Kiang, Grzywacz, Marin, Arcury, & Quandt, 2010; Venters & Gany, 2011). These women often have to work more than one job in order to send remittances back to their relatives in their home country.

Chaumba (2011) conducted a quantitative study to examine the low use of health care resources by Ethiopian and Nigerian immigrants in particular and found that there are variations in the mental health of different African immigrant populations, their treatment strategies, and their health status. Both nationalities believe in traditional medicine and spiritualism as treatment strategies. The 362 person sample consisted of 198 Ethiopians and 164 Nigerians. The study compared both groups through the use of cross sectional survey design, and noted scarce literature on how African immigrants use health care resources. Limitation of the study was that it was descriptive and related to the use of self report. A qualitative method could explore factors that influence the use of

health care resources or treatment strategies of immigrants. According to Sam and Berry (2010) there are also differences in immigrants' psychological acculturation, even when they have the same cultural origin. This is due to the fact that the factors that are responsible for the outcome of psychological acculturation include the society of settlement and the policies of the society, the availability of resources to the immigrant, and the manner in which the immigrants chose to acculturate.

Sam and Berry (2010) pointed out that not all individuals have exactly similar experiences during their acculturation, and that older immigrants, females, and those lacking social support have been found to experience more acculturative stress. Kiang et al. (2010) had a contrary position on this. The authors also stated that acculturative stress is a particular liability for recent immigrants, because they experience challenges to their cultural values early in the post migration period and these subsequently wane as they adjust to their new environment. One undisputed fact is that stress impairs the mental and physical health of immigrants and facilitating access and use of health care resources is important for immigrants' integration process (Chaumba, 2011).

Coping Strategies

This section examined how immigrants generally have coped with acculturative stressors. Coping strategies according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) can be conceptualized as cognitive and behavioral efforts used by an individual to reduce the effects of stress. Coping responses consist of a wide range of behavioral and cognitive activities and the efficacy is determined by factors that include the nature of the stress, culture, social contexts and personal resources (Noh & Kasper, 2003). Coping also

depends on the degree of support provided by internal and external contexts (Dow, 2011). Individuals employ different strategies in coping with acculturative stress. Research has documented that coping and acculturation are closely related because the latter is basically coping with a new and unfamiliar culture, while the former can be viewed as specific strategies in cross-cultural adaptation (Kosic, 2004).

Kosic (2004) and Slavin, Rainer, McCreary, and Gowda (1991) identified three of such strategies. One of these strategies is problem-oriented strategies which are directed towards the management of the problem. In this case, in trying to solve their problems, individuals do something to alter their source of stress. Emotion-oriented strategies on the other hand, are focused at reducing the level of emotional distress associated with the stressful situation. This is done by focusing on the expression of tensions and frustrations. Avoidance-oriented strategies involve distraction and passivity. Kosic (2004) noted that problem-oriented strategies are related with positive adaptation and successful resolution of problematic situations, while the use of emotional and avoidance coping is perceived as dysfunctional in many circumstances.

People rely on diverse coping resources in stressful life situations, and are inclined to use the same coping strategy they have been used to in response to different stressful situations (Amayo, 2009; Romero & Roberts, 2003). The way an individual copes, is affected by the perception of the stress, available situational support, and the reactions of others (Romero & Roberts, 2003; Truong, 2012). According to Yakushko (2010) recent immigrants who experience acculturative stress seek to cope with the stressors by utilizing strategies that address the changes in their lives. Research found that

religion and spirituality have been used by immigrants from many cultures as coping strategies (Kamya, 1997), so also was involvement with ethnic communities through cultural activities, sending aid to their families back home, and getting further training. Some immigrants were found to isolate themselves not sharing their problems, while others struggled with seeking professional help because it was not culturally familiar (Yakushko, 2010). Chaumba (2011) stated that immigrants reported fewer visits to the doctor than natives, and attributed the low use of health care resources among immigrants to their cultural beliefs. Chaumba (2011) concluded that low use of health care resources may threaten immigrants' maintenance of good mental health the longer they reside in the United States.

Dow (2011) described four strategies used by minority groups in handling acculturative stress. These are integration, marginalization, separation, and assimilation. Integration refers to immigrants who maintain their cultural identity while at the same time maintaining a relationship within the host community. Immigrants who show little concern in either area are considered marginalized. Immigrants who maintain their ethnic culture and avoid interaction with the dominant culture are considered as using the separation strategy, while those who choose to assume the host culture's beliefs, attitudes, and cultural values over maintaining their own native culture are perceived to have an assimilated acculturation attitude. Berry (1997) found that individuals who used the marginalization and separation strategies were reported as having the most negative acculturation stress, while integrated and assimilated attitudes face less acculturation stress. This study while addressing the acculturative issues faced by immigrants, seeks to

understand the different levels of challenges faced by immigrant women, and the various methods and coping resources used.

Based on the literature reviewed so far, it appears that adapting to a new society requires coping with diverse difficulties, and that immigration and adaptation stressors are likely causes of psychological symptoms. Existing qualitative studies have attempted to study African and Nigerian immigrant women using relevant theoretical frameworks to understand their lives and ways of relating to their new society. Osirim's (2008) ethnographic study on African immigrant women, explored the experiences of African women entrepreneurs, their reasons for migrating and their relationship with their home countries. Reynolds (2002, 2006) in a qualitative study, addressed the cultural demands and expectations placed on African professional immigrant women, especially Nigerian immigrant women, and how they cope with such demands. Venters and Gany (2011), in their review of published data on the health status and needs of African immigrants in the United States, examined the mental health problems encountered by African immigrants in their attempt to integrate into their new social, educational or employment settings. Ezeobele, Malecha, Landrum, and Symes (2010), in their phenomenology study on Nigerian immigrant women, sought to explore depression as one of the acculturative stressors experienced by immigrant women. These authors used snowball sampling to select their participants, which is also relevant for this study in recruiting participants due to the fact that snowball sampling is effective in accessing respondents who are members of a specific group. What is not known however, is the immigration experiences of Nigerian women, how they cope with acculturative stressors, how they perceive the

resources available to them, and to what degree they utilize these resources. The beauty

of qualitative research is in its richness of diverse approaches. From the studies reviewed

so far, different authors drawing from different traditions, focus on different features

(Jacob, 1998).

Summary

The results of previous studies on Nigerian immigrant women focused on certain

ethnic tribes and mostly entrepreneur women (Osirim, 2008; Reynolds, 2006). Major

themes include voluntary migration, distress, anxiety, language acquisition, social

support, social isolation, and loss of social status. It is the intent of this study to explore

the Nigerian immigrant woman's immigration experiences and coping responses to

acculturative stressors using the stress and coping theory. This study would involve

having 10 participants from different tribes, age groups, and socio-economic status as

opposed to some of the studies that sampled only one tribe and participants with high

socio-economic status. Qualitative researchers are known to use a wide range of

interconnected interpretive practices to achieve a better and clearer understanding of the

topic under study. Creswell (2009) noted that a qualitative approach is useful especially

when a topic has never been addressed with a particular group of people. Phenomenology

is the research tradition adopted for this study. As noted by Fetterman (1998) the research

problem determines the research process, and a phenomenological tradition was chosen

for this study because it is the most appropriate method when the researcher seeks to

understand the phenomena from the perspective of those who experience them (Giorgi,

1985; Moustakas, 1994).

Data collection often used in phenomenology includes conducting in-depth face to face interviews which generates rich text of detailed accounts of the participants' perspectives. By using various forms of probing in, semi-structured interviews for this study, I can gain more understanding from the meanings of their responses. Giorgi (2009) noted that the linguistic ability of the participants and the researcher goes a long way in achieving as complete a description as possible of the lived experience of the participants. I will also record observations, and then analyze the data that will lead to a textural and structural description of the experiences. The next chapter provides information on how this study was conducted, how the participants were selected and interviewed, how the information was gathered, and how the data was organized and analyzed.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

This study investigated the experiences of Nigerian immigrant women in the United States as they adapted to the new culture, norms, and values of the society and the coping strategies they employed. The purpose of the study was to understand their acculturation experiences and how they coped with issues associated with integration into a new society. In this chapter, I describe the research design and method used to investigate the experiences and coping strategies employed by Nigerian women as they adapted to living in the United States. This chapter includes the sample, research method and design, methodology, instrumentation, procedures, sample, study location, rationale, the role of the researcher, and protection of research participants. The specific research questions that guided the study were:

1. What are the experiences of Nigerian immigrant women in the United States?

2. What strategies have Nigerian immigrant women employed to cope with living in the United States?

3. What knowledge of and access to needed services do Nigerian immigrant women have?

4. How do Nigerian immigrant women perceive the available services?

5. What support systems do Nigerian immigrant women have that are relevant to their social and cultural needs?

Research Design

For a study to be considered phenomenological, it should focus on obtaining direct descriptions of the phenomena as experienced by the participants. Phenomenology is useful in providing a detailed description of a lived experience through in-depth data collection to discover how individuals comprehend their lived experiences (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) described the hermeneutic phenomenological approach as an interpretive method that involves reading participants' interview transcripts with the intention of understanding the meaning as perceived by the participants.

Giorgi (1985) added that phenomenological research enables a researcher to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals through data obtained from open-ended questions. The present research design was anticipated to provide a better picture for understanding the acculturative experiences from the participants' perspectives. Aside from one-on-one interviews, phenomenology uses a broad array of research strategies that include observations, journals, music, art, and poetry (Creswell, 2007).

Phenomenology was appropriate for the present study because it allowed me to describe and interpret the social and cultural changes participants experienced during their acculturation process (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The research method focused on describing the events of participants' everyday life rather than explaining or generating theories about the cause of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology also is appropriate in situations where little is known about the

phenomenon being studied, as in the case of the acculturation experiences of adult Nigerian female immigrants to the United States.

Participants

The Immigration Policy Center (2012) reported that the largest numbers of African immigrants are found in California, New York, Texas, Maryland, and Virginia, and Nigerians have the largest presence among the African immigrant groups. Participants for the present study were drawn from Sacramento, an urban city in Northern California.

Purposive, snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on preconceived criteria that help assure quality data. Snowball sampling, which involves expanding the sample by asking selected participants to recommend others (Creswell, 2007; de Jong, & Van Ommeren, 2002), also was used to locate participants. Snowball sampling is considered the most frequently employed method of sampling in qualitative research and an effective tool for accessing and obtaining information from hard-to-reach groups (Noh, 2005) and small populations of people who are likely to know each other (de Jong & Van Ommeren, 2002).

Participants met the following criteria:

1.   Female.

2.   The participant was born in Nigeria.

3.   The participant immigrated to the United States as adult, age 18 and older.

4.   The participant has lived in the United States for at least 1 year, to meet acculturation experience requirement.

5. The participant immigrated independent of family or organization sponsorship (preferred, but not required).

6. The participant expressed interest in the study and was willing to discuss her acculturation experiences.

I located participants for this study by contacting members of the Nigerian community in Sacramento where I could access those who could connect me with the wider immigrant community and could identify membership organizations such as social clubs and churches located in the area. I then sought the assistance of the presidents of the social clubs and ministers of churches with significant Nigerian membership. As a member of the cultural group being studied, I had the advantage of a shared background with the participants. This was beneficial in making the initial contact, gaining access, and establishing rapport with persons contacted. Although I did not hold membership in any of these social clubs, I had been invited and attended many of their social events. This made me a familiar face rather than a total stranger, and aided the participant recruitment process.

A flyer to invite study participants (see Appendix A) was sent to club gatekeepers so interested participants could directly contact me. The women who were interested in the study were contacted and informed of the details of the study and consent forms (see Appendix B) were given to those interested in participating.

Ten women met inclusion criteria to participate in the study. This sample size allowed me to gather rich information from each participant and reach data saturation, wherein little new information or themes were being offered by participants (Creswell,

2007). Although a sample of size of 10 would be insufficient for studies intended to produce generalizable findings, depth of insight rather than representative findings was the aim of the present qualitative study.

Ethical Considerations

The guiding factor for all research is to protect and minimize risk to the participants (American Counseling Association, 2005). Any possible risks of participant were disclosed to the participants. I obtained IRB approval (01-09-15-0286475) before seeking access to the participants. A letter explaining my proposed study was sent to the social clubs and churches following approval of the study by the Walden University Institutional Review Board. The participants were fully informed that they were free to withdraw from the study any time they wished to discontinue their participation. They also were informed that they could refuse to answer any of the questions. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant and confidentiality was assured. The participants' identities were concealed by using pseudonyms (Fetterman, 1998; Wolcott, 1994). No incentives or monetary compensation were offered to the participants. If the participants became upset, I referred them to counseling (see Appendix C). I am the only one with access to the complete data. I will store the raw data in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years, after which time I will destroy it.

Instrumentation

Interviewing is an art of communication and its effectiveness depends on how skilled the researcher is in eliciting rich responses. Interviews help the interviewer to explore feelings and thoughts (Patton, 2002). Different kinds of questions are used to

elicit different responses. Janesick (2011) noted three types of interview questions: basic, descriptive, and big-picture questions. Phenomenological research involves asking participants two broad general questions about what they have experienced in terms of the phenomenon and how their experiences impact their lives (Moustakas, 1994).

Data were gathered for this study using one-on-one in-depth interviews. Before the interview began, I made sure there was an atmosphere of comfort for each interview, and ensured my recording equipment was ready. Prior to the interview, I reviewed the nature and purpose of the study, and addressed the participants' questions and concerns. After creating rapport with each participant, they signed the consent form. I informed them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and assured them of the confidentiality of the data before the interview began. Pseudonyms were used in analyzing and reporting the data to protect participants' identities (Fetterman, 1998).

Each participant was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D). I then gave participants a copy of interview questions to support the telling of their stories (see Appendix E). I used open-ended questions during the interview to gather their stories and used closed-ended questions toward the end of the interview to confirm my understanding and their responses. One question was asked at a time, and I used minimal probes such as ‒can you tell me more about this?‖ I monitored any nonverbal behaviors closely.

The interviews were audio-recorded. This unobtrusive means of collecting data allowed me to record their response verbatim and listen as much as needed to understand their meaning (Creswell, 2009; Janesick, 2011; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). I also kept

memos to help document my reactions and thoughts throughout the research process (Maxwell, 2005). Memos also helped the researcher to correlate and reflect on the data in order to maintain a balance between descriptive and reflective notes (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Each interview lasted roughly 45 minutes to 1 hour. The interviews were conducted in a location chosen by each participant to assure privacy and freedom from distractions. The interviews were conducted in English. At the end of each interview, I thanked the participants for taking part in the study and informed them they would be contacted via email or in person to verify the transcripts. I also invited them to contact me if they had any further inquiries.

Data collection occurred over a 2-week period, from January 10, 2015 to January 25, 2015. Due to the availability of the participants, it became necessary to schedule more than one interview in 1 day. Data were collected through the responses of the participants using the interview questions. The recorded interviews were sent to a transcription agency. Upon receipt of the transcripts from the transcriptionist, it was subsequently sent via email to the participants for clarification. Each participant was given an opportunity to review her transcript to confirm its accuracy, in a process called member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Analysis

Different data analysis approaches are used for different qualitative research traditions (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Data analysis for this study is described as an

ongoing process which involves constant reflection about the data, making

interpretations, and writing reports (Creswell, 2009).

The interview data for the present study were content analyzed using procedures

outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013). First, I prepared for analysis by

reading all the interview notes several times to develop an understanding of the nature,

breadth, and depth of the interviews and the data gathered. I made initial notes,

reflections, and memos upon reading each transcript. After this initial review, I reviewed

the literature review documented in Chapter 2 again to evaluate similarities between the

transcripts and past research as well as to heighten my awareness of subtleties in the

transcripts I might not have noticed earlier, consistent with guidelines by Boyatzis (1998)

and Charmaz (2000) regarding how to prepare for data analysis.

Next, the coding process began. Coding as a process identifies the content or

ideas present in the data (Charmaz, 2006). Other researchers have called codes the labels

that describe the data (Boyatzis, 1998; Richards & Morse, 2007). Codes also reveal links

between the data reported by participants and the ideas implied in the interviews

(Richards & Morse, 2007). Similar codes can be grouped in superordinate categories.

To begin the coding process, I reviewed the answers participants provided for

each question one at a time. An initial set of codes that seemed to represent the data was

identified for each question. Answers for each question and participant were sorted

according to the codes created for that question. Following the sorting, the list of codes

and the data associated with each theme were reviewed to evaluate the appropriateness of

each code and its wording. Codes were reworded, combined, or expanded as needed.

Upon completion of this process, the number of participants reporting each code was calculated when the analysis was complete.

Finally, a second coder reviewed the data analysis for all the interviews to determine whether the results appeared to be valid. The second coder was provided with the interview notes and asked to follow the various steps of this procedure. I compared my results with that of the second coder. Where discrepancies were found in the results, we discussed and agreed upon how the analysis was revised. Twelve discrepancies were discovered and resolved when we compared the results.

A record sheet was used to keep track of the themes identified in the data. On this sheet, I recorded each code, along with each participant reporting that code, and the part of the participant's response that reflected that code. When coding was complete, I counted the number of participants who reported each code. After completing the analysis, any hard copies of the data and the analysis were stored in a filing cabinet.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility was achieved through detailed, rich, thick description of the participants and their experiences (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Presenting thick descriptions and verbatim quotations would help the reader infer the values and worldviews of the participants, thereby establishing dependability (Fetterman, 1998).

Member checking was used to verify the accuracy of the data from the participants' feedback (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). They were asked to critically examine that the result was an accurate representation of their

accounts. Intensive interviews and descriptive note taking also was used to collect rich data (Maxwell, 2005). I also refrained from asking leading questions.

Being a Nigerian immigrant woman, confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was achieved through self-reflexivity. I constantly reflected on my behavior and how this influenced the data gathering and analysis process. I disclosed any researcher bias I may have from the onset. Maintaining a reflective journal was useful for documenting my thoughts and role as a researcher, and the meanings that I made of the data I collected (Janesick, 2011). This journal also served as my way to monitor research bias and became a powerful research technique for recording my experiences and feelings.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the key instrument of data collection in qualitative study (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). I created rapport with the participants to help them feel comfortable and to enrich our communication. No professional relationship existed between me and the participants in this study involving power over the participants. The potential bias that could arise from my having a shared background with the participants was controlled by audio taping verbatim and validating the findings by the participants through member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I dealt with any biases and assumptions that arose from my own experiences as a Nigerian immigrant woman, or my interactions with participants reflexively. This was done by keeping a self-reflexive journal from the beginning to completion of the investigation (Janesick, 2011). Wolcott (1994) stated that a researcher must report fully and be candid about revealing personal reactions and feelings if they seem relevant. I

strove to fairly represent my participants' realities by delving more deeply into the meanings of participants' stories and asking for clarification (Creswell, 2007). I also made my implicit assumptions and biases open to myself and others. Fox (2004) stated that when a researcher notices their over involvement, they must recognize it, and record it in their field notes and work to rectify it. Patton (2002) suggests that for a study to be credible, the researcher must maintain a neutral stance with respect to the phenomenon being studied. As a Nigerian immigrant woman, I bore all this in mind and carefully reflected on and dealt with any biases that arose on my part, while striving to maintain objectivity and neutrality at all times.

Summary

This methods chapter has attempted to describe the research plan adopted for this study, decisions about data collection and analysis, and the rationale for choosing it. The phenomenological tradition was chosen for the study because it is appropriate in gaining an understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of those who experience them. Phenomenology focuses on how individuals comprehend their lived experiences. Purposive sampling was used to recruit the sample for the study, consisting of 10 women recruited from social clubs and churches within an urban city in Northern California. Semi structured face-to-face interviews, memoing and observations are the data gathering methods. The researcher is the key instrument for the study, and researcher bias was fully managed, ensuring trustworthiness and credibility. Chapter 4 will present the results of the data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

I investigated the experiences of Nigerian immigrant women in the United States as they adapted to the new cultural norms and values of the society, and the coping strategies they employed. The purpose of the study was to explore their acculturation experiences to understand how they coped with integrating into a new society. This chapter presents the results of the study, including the sample characteristics, the research questions, findings for each research question, and a summary.

Research Questions

The research questions for the study were:

1.   What are the experiences of Nigerian immigrant women living in the United States?

2.   What strategies have Nigerian immigrant women developed to cope with living in the United States?

3.   What knowledge of and access to needed services do Nigerian immigrant women have?

4.   How do Nigerian immigrant women perceive the available services?

5.   What support systems do Nigerian immigrant women have that are relevant to their social and cultural needs?

Sample

The research sample consisted of 10 women, who emigrated to the United States from Nigeria as adults. Participants ranged in age from 43 to 64 years and have lived in the United States from 9 to 32 years. All participants lived in a Northern California city with a population of more than 400,000 residents. All the participants were employed and all had children. Seven of the women were college graduates, while three had high school diplomas before they relocated to the United States. Three participants were married, five were single, one was divorced, and one was widowed. The participants were from four different tribal groups in Nigeria: Yoruba ($n = 3$), Igbo ($n = 3$), Edo ($n = 3$), and Ibibio ($n = 1$). Table 1 presents the sample characteristics.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Year Born	Tribal Affiliation	Marital Status	No. of Children	Education	Occupation	Immigration Motivation	Year of U.S. Arrival
Fran	1960	Igbo	Divorced	5	Masters	Social Worker	Join Spouse	1986
Shay	1962	Yoruba	Single	3	Diploma	CNA	Greener Pasture	2006
Wumy	1971	Yoruba	Single	3	Diploma	CNA	Better Opportunities	1998
Etta	1962	Igbo	Married	3	College	CNA	Join Spouse	2000
Aria	1969	Edo	Single	3	MBA	Banker	Education	1998
Bubu	1972	Yoruba	Single	1	Diploma	CNA	Better Opportunities	2000
Helena	1968	Igbo	Single	1	Diploma	Nurse	Better Opportunities	1996
Carol	1957	Edo	Married	4	College	Nurse	Better Opportunities	1982
Flo	1970	Edo	Married	3	College	CNA	Visa Lottery	2002
Emmy	1951	Ibibio	Widow	3	College	Nurse	Greener Pasture	2002

Note. CNA = Clinical Nursing Assistant

Findings

Research Question 1: Experiences of Nigerian Immigrant Women Living in the United States

To answer Research Question 1, participants were asked to relate their experiences and the challenges they faced when they immigrated to the United States (see Table 2). All 10 participants described their experience as difficult. The nature of

difficulty for them included homesickness, adjusting to the weather and cuisine, and accommodation problems. According to Fran:

> It is lonely, isolated, I thought about my parents all the time…you don't have friends and I'm from a large family. My grandmother had 18 children. She had lots of grandchildren flocking around her and I miss them so much.

One participant Shay, explained that at the time she left Nigeria, she was experiencing challenges in her marriage, only for her to get to the United States and find out that her sister who was her host was also going through a divorce, which made it financially difficult for her to cater for her and her children. She commented, ―It was like—I did not even plan for this. It was so hard, so difficult. That was my first experience.‖ Another participant, Bubu shared:

> It's not easy as a foreigner being in the United States, . . . I will just say it's not been easy. . . . You know it's not easy. I'll say it's still a struggle. . . . It's a lot of challenge to settle down in this country. I don't even know which challenge I want to talk about. Do I talk about getting married? Being divorced? Being out alone with no family, with nobody, thinking of how will I do it? From where do I start. It's very challenging in America. But day by day, the struggle continues and it's a challenge.

This participant came into the United States without residency papers, got married, had a child, and recently divorced. She reported being lonely, and had to struggle to cope financially as a single mother.

Table 2

Participants' General Experiences

Recurrent Patterns	*N*
Challenging situations (economic, social, financial and cultural hardship)	10
Disappointment	6
Communication barriers	5
Cultural Extremes	4
Loneliness	3
Difficulty adjusting to the cuisine	2
Fear of deportation	1
Experienced racism	1

Six participants described the misconceptions, disappointment, and unfulfilled expectations they experienced as they settled in the United States. One participant voiced, ―When you come to America, you have a dream of, ‗Oh, America is all full of good. It's easy - you make money easily.' But on getting to America, you realize that it's far from the truth.‖ These participants found out that money was not easy to come by and they had to work menial jobs in order to survive. Their desired jobs were also not easy to come by. Another participant stated:

> When I got here, it wasn't as expected, because there were a lot of situations that I
>
> had to deal with that . . . were not very obvious when I was still back home, until I

got here. . . . It was totally different from what I was made to understand while I

was back home before immigrating here.

This participant had expected to be able to work as a student to survive, and pay her bills. While she was in Nigeria, she had being led to believe she could work as many hours as she wanted, in addition to being in school. She also found out that her tuition as a foreign student was triple what residents were paying. This was completely different from her expectations. She wasn't able to meet the many requirements of an international student, did not have papers to work, and ran out of funds by the end of her first semester in school. She eventually had to drop out of school.

Five participants reported experiencing communication barriers. One participant explained, ―It was difficult communicating. The communication was really difficult. I was not understood, and I didn't understand the people I was talking with. That was a major barrier when I came.‖ Another participant elaborated:

You cannot say things and say one time without somebody saying, ―Huh?‖ so you have to repeat yourself and repeat yourself. . . . I [also] didn't understand clearly what they say. So it's either I agree with what they say or I ask them, ―What did you say?‖ And sometimes, I felt embarrassed to ask them so I just say, ―Well … okay.‖ So because of that, now when I say something you don't understand, I can immediately pick it up because of the way you will agree with me.

Another area of difficulty the participants identified was their experiences in reestablishing careers (see Table 3). Eight of the 10 women reported facing career setbacks. Typically, these setbacks involved education credentials that were not

transferable and they had to start over to revalidate their education and their career credentials. Several of the women were not aware they would face this challenge. One participant elaborated:

People would tell me: "You have to start from the scratch. You have to start from somewhere." So, no matter the certificates you brought from other country, when you get to America, you have to start from somewhere else. So that was what people were saying.

Another participant conveyed her experience:

It's not easy as a foreigner being in the United States, with . . . your struggle to get your papers at working in the United States and all that. . . . trying to learn a new trade forgetting what you learned back at home in your own country. You have to start all over. Coming to America is starting all over. You just have to go do some kind of jobs that you don't know, learn another kind of career and all that.

Two participants reported facing no career setbacks. One of these women was a homemaker and her husband was a student; therefore, neither of them experienced career issues upon their arrival. The other woman shared, ―I think for me, it wasn't difficult for me to get a job, because I remember we came here February by March, I started working. It wasn't bad at all.‖ For Wumy, she came to the United States with a high school diploma, and was willing to accept entry level jobs that were commensurate with her qualification. This made her different from the other participants who had college degrees, and could not get the deserving jobs they were expecting.

Table 3

Participants' Career Experiences

Theme	N
Faced career setbacks	8
No career setbacks	2

Nine of the participants indicated that they faced financial difficulties when they arrived. They had to adjust to the United States custom of having to pay monthly bills, which they found stressful. Additionally, some women described having insufficient (too small) accommodations and struggling to make ends meet. One participant expressed the despair she felt:

> [My husband and I] were in a small apartment, one bedroom apartment. . . . He was the only person working, so we were just trying to manage. If we pay the rent, we'll just manage for the other ones. And in my heart, I was going, ―Oh, my God. I can't handle this.‖ I didn't know that's how small you make. I didn't say it out. But that's what I was like. How can somebody … because in Nigeria, I don't think I have had a problem where I had monetary issues and it wasn't resolved. In Nigeria, if I wanted to buy a dress, money would not be an issue for me. So now coming to United States, I have to adjust. I remember seeing Sizzler on TV and I thought . . . I [could] go [to the] grocery store and buy those shrimps and everything. And then when I told my husband at the store, I said, ―I want to buy Sizzler.‖ ―Don't you know you can't buy Sizzlers? You know how much it costs?‖

Another participant, who came to the United States to attend college, ended up having to drop out of school due to her financial stress:

I wasn't able to work because I came in here as a student, so I was . . . not able to afford money for my accommodation. . . . As a foreign student, my tuition fee was really high compared to what residents here were paying. . . . With so much stress . . . getting your money together to pay your tuition fee, your accommodation, then you are not so focused on what you actually came in here for—your education, which was the reason why you came here in the first place. . . . I had to drop out of school. I just could not cope. I could not. It was too much, because I ran out of finances like the . . . end of the first semester . . . and I started doing many jobs just to make ends meet.

Participants' Financial Experiences.

All 10 participants reported feeling more positive about living in the United States now compared to when they first arrived. Six of these participants reported feeling happy to be in the United States. These women generally described feeling pleased and satisfied because, despite having experienced substantial challenges at first, they now work and are able to provide for their families. One participant explained:

I'm able to put food on my table. I'm able to take care of my immediate financial needs. But like if it were to be back home, I know it would have been a different case, but you know you cannot regret coming here . . . I can't regret coming here because God had really blessed me. I like living in this country because here you

have … the roads is good, the light is good, you don't have power failure like we experience back home. . . . My family is together here. I'm happy I live with my family and my kids.

Another participant shared

Living in US today, . . . I smile, because I've come a long way. I can work wherever I want to, I can be able to do whatever I want to do for myself today, unlike those days where I can't do anything. Presently I will say, living in the US today, I'm happy. It's not been an easy road, but with the help of God, I'm here and I thank God.

Four participants, although they refrained from describing themselves as happy, commented that their lives have improved since they first arrived. One participant shared:

It's much better than when I first came. It's much better. It's improving, but there's need for improvements. It's really better than that time, when I first came here; because now, I have a job now, I can provide for my needs, provide for the needs of my children, and meet my own needs too.

Another expressed:

Well I say that it's better compared to when I came in. I will say it's better. Right now I'm working full time, I have a medical insurance, I am able to put food on my table. But I still work two jobs sometimes to be able to meet with the things I have to.

Research Question 2: Strategies Developed by Nigerian Immigrant Women to Cope with Living in the United States

To answer Research Question 2, participants were asked what strategies they developed to cope with living in the United States (see Table 4). Participants described five strategies, although none of the strategies were cited by a majority of participants. Four participants described adopting a positive, hard working attitude. One participant stated, ‒As long as you are not a lazy person, you are out there trying to work yourself up to a level that you want [you will make it.] . . . I decided to be hardworking.‖ Another participant shared:

> The strategies I hope I use in my own case is I try to take it one day at a time. I don't try to worry about what savings do I have for tomorrow. I don't worry … I try not to worry myself for problems I can't solve immediately. So the strategy I use is taking issues one day at a time. That's how I'm coping with it.

Table 4

Participants' Coping Strategies

Theme	*N*
Adopted a positive, hard working attitude	4
Actively tried to adjust to new life	3
Filled their lives with school, friends, work, and activities	3
Relied on their faith in God	3
Sought mentors and supportive community	2

Three participants expressed that they actively tried to adjust to new life. One participant simply shared, ‒You have to do what you got to do to adjust to the situation. . . . I cried a lot. I really, really cried a lot.‖ Another outlined a range of adjustments she and her husband made to adapt to life in the United States, from how they dressed to how they ate, to their family planning:

> [Regarding] the weather, what I did was I tried to dress very warm. . . . , stay indoors and . . . just eating warm food. . . . When it's hot, try to open the windows and take a walk. In the area of food, I was trying to avoid eating food that had a lot of fats. . . . Before I and my husband came to America, . . . he was thinking, ‒Okay, we're going to have a lot of children. We going to have more children, a lot of children. . . . [But] when we came here, the way things were going now made him change his mind, . . . ‒Okay, we cannot have too many kids here in this country because there's not much help.

Three participants described filling their lives with school, friends, work, and activities to combat loneliness and other challenges. One participant relayed:

> The way I coped was I started going to school. I decided I will not be at home. . . . I took some classes [at the junior college] just for fun and checked it out. . . . Then reached out to . . . other women in the community that are Hispanics, Chinese, and then I became friends. . . . I started reaching out maybe through church, families. . . . [Another] one of the ways I got into the fabric of America is because of my work and the school. When my kids started going to school, you meet other parents, you see what they are doing. You go to church, you get involved.

Three additional participants reported relying on their faith in God. One participant shared:

Well faith is one thing that I believe in. You know when you have faith, when you believe in God, you believe that tomorrow will be okay, you believe that this challenge is just for you, why? So my faith had really helped me a lot. . . . So I will say that my faith, my belief has really helped me to face the challenges so far. My faith is number one thing that helped me to face all these challenges.

Research Question 3: Nigerian Immigrant Women's Knowledge of and Access to Needed Services

To answer Research Question 3, the participants were asked about the services and supports they used as new immigrants. The intent of these questions was to ascertain their knowledge of and access to needed services. Seven of the 10 participants described not knowing about the resources available to them (see Table 5). One participant expressed, ‒[No one] would direct us to the right path. It's like, whatever we become now, it's by our own effort.‖ Another participant, who came as a student, elaborated:

Just knowing where to get the resources was the most challenging. The admission, the Office of the Councilors, kept saying their assistants are available to me as an immigrant; however, even though they were available to me as an immigrant, but there were so much requirements that I had to meet as an immigrant, that it merits almost impossible for me to even meet any of those requirements. . . . There isn't really anybody available to give you directions on where to go and who to talk to. Based on the information I have now, I would have settled more, I would have

long been settled on being here in this position, like 3-4 years -- like the

challenges I faced coming here as an immigrant kind of hold me back 3-4 years,

so I would've been in this position 3-4 years back if I didn't have to go through all

the struggles. . . . [Once] I got used to this system, followed how the system

works here, then it started getting better. . . . [But early on,] the picture was not

clear. . . . I really didn't know what was available to me, so they were not giving

us those options. I was not given enough information as to where to go; the exact

office; the exact people to talk to, to give me direction as to where these resources

are. These resources, they've always been available, however, we didn't have

enough information to get what we're qualified for as immigrant students.

Six participants reported that they had no access to resources. One participant

discovered she was not eligible for assistance because she was earning money ‒As a

taxpayer from the little job I was doing, I went to the Medicare to get some help because

I heard that you can get food stamp. But being a taxpayer, they denied me.‖ Another

participant concluded she had no available resources because she did not want the

resources being extended to her. She shared:

They don't have resources…Human assistance [agencies]…want [me] to be on

welfare, I don't want to be on welfare. So telling me that I have to use a paper,

food stamp to go buy food. That was like there's something they use… what is

that? So there was nothing for me.

Table 5

Participants' Knowledge of and Access to Needed Services

Theme	*N*
Lacked knowledge of available resources	7
No access to resources	6
Aware of services, but did not want	1
Aware of services, but was denied	1

Research Question 4: Nigerian Immigrant Women's Perception of the Available Services

To answer Research Question 4, the participants' responses were analyzed to assess their views and perceptions about available services (see Table 6). Very little data were gathered to examine this research question. Two participants expressed that they did not want to be on welfare, although one of these women ultimately did end up having to accept this assistance to make ends meet. Two participants stated that they appreciated the government assistance programs. One elaborated:

> I really, really like here how they structure their education, whereby they encourage people to go to school, . . . [and] give you assistance . . .. I [also] would like to say it's a very, very good thing that the American government set up . . . access for people all over the world to . . . come to the United States if you win [the green card lottery].

Table 6

Participants' Perceptions of Available Services

Theme	*N*
Did not want to be on welfare	2
Appreciate government assistance	2
Unjustly denied assistance due to racism	1

Research Question 5: Nigerian Immigrant Women's Support Systems

To help answer Research Question 5, participants were asked to describe the types and sources of support they received as new immigrants. Participants described receiving various kinds of support from their friends, family members, and communities (see Table 7). Five participants described having received financial assistance. One participant shared:

I used to call people I knew. They said they'll send me help. Some of them send me money, some of them send me clothing, materials and so on. That was how I survived. The people that helps me, they fed me.

Another participant shared:

We worship in the Catholic Church. They have various programs in the Catholic Church for immigrants that come in. Every Sunday, they will have a separate meeting. It's just basically handling giving out not money per say but bags of foods every Sunday. You know, you pick up stuff, so clothing and that's basically it.

Five participants also stated that others' friendship and moral support helped them a great deal through their challenges. One participant shared:

My church helped me when I didn't have friends or anything. My church is kind

of like my family, because when I had my kids, they were there to support me, . . .

helped me visiting. They made me feel at home, the way the support I had. . . .

Those are the supports I had.

Table 7

Support Received from Participants' Friends and Family Member

Theme	*N*
Financial assistance	5
Friendship and moral support	5
Childcare	4
Accommodation	3
Finding government support and resources	2
Did not receive needed information or help	2
Received various types of help	1
Work assistance	1

Another participant expressed:

When I call people at home, my family, they would give me encouragement to

stay, because at times, I tell them, ‒I'm coming,‖ and they said, ‒No, mom. Mom,

please don't come. You need to be okay.‖ They keep on encouraging me. My

children encouraged me. My family encourage me to persevere that is to be okay.

. . . When I come to the church, I have that spiritual companionship and, through

the members, in physical companionship . . . . Members have come to visit me. I

communicate more with people and try to socialize and I feel a lot more better.

. . . In terms of support, the church has given me a lot of spiritual support and

encouragement.

Additionally, many participants noted the support they received through their

faith or communities of faith (see Table 8). Eight participants specifically noted they had

received help from their faith community. One noted that her ―Church family was a big . .

. cushion for me.‖ Another similarly expressed, ―My church family helped me out a lot.‖

Another elaborated:

I have a lot of people that belong to the same . . . church, [we] believe in God

together, we worship together. They were very helpful because without them, I

don‘t know what I would do. I keep saying that without good friends, without

good faith, without good people around me, maybe I won‘t be here. . . . I‘ve had a

lot of help from people that belong to the same faith. They pray with me. They

come visit. They help me anytime I need help. They‘ve been very helpful.

Seven participants voiced their thanks to God for the help they received. One

expressed, ―It‘s not been an easy road but with the help of God, I‘m here and I thank

God.‖ Another stated, ―I mean we can look back and say to God be the Glory.‖ Yet

another elaborated,

All my hope and trust was that God will make a way for me eventually. I used to pray, I

used fast, long fasting. . . . We will always feel to continue to pray that God will

open a way for you.

Table 8

Support Received through Participants' Faith or Community of Faith

Theme	*N*
Received help from faith community	8
Grateful for God's help	7
Did not receive help from church family	2

Summary

Data were gathered through one-on-one interviews from a sample of 10 Nigerian immigrant women. Data were gathered related to five research questions concerning their experiences, coping strategies, knowledge of and access to resources, perceptions of those resources, and support systems.

The participants recalled their experiences as immigrants as disappointing, given their misconceptions about the society, and unrealistic (or uninformed) expectations about what life would be like in the United States, communication barriers, painful emotions, and other difficulties. Career setbacks and intense financial difficulties also were common to the women. Nevertheless, all participants reported their lives were much better now and more than half even reported feeling happy about their lives in the United States.

In terms of their coping strategies, the women reported adopting a positive attitude as they actively tried to adjust to their new life situations: school, friends, work, and other activities; relying on their faith in God; and seeking mentors and supportive community.

Most participants reported being unaware of the resources available to them and more than half reported not having access to any resources. Nevertheless, three reported receiving tuition assistance from the United States government and two reported receiving welfare. Limited data were gathered about participants' perceptions of the services. However, two reported not wanting to be on welfare, another two reported appreciating the government assistance programs, and one reported being unjustly denied for benefits due to racism.

Participants reported receiving many types of support from their friends, family members, and communities of faith. These supports included financial assistance; friendship and moral support; help with childcare, accommodation, work, and finding government support and resources. Two participants reported not receiving needed information and help. Eight of the 10 participant reported receiving help from their faith communities and seven noted their thankfulness to God. The next chapter provides a discussion of these findings.

Chapter 5: Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusion

This study investigated the experiences of Nigerian immigrant women in the United States as they adapted to the new cultural norms and values of the society, and the coping strategies they employed. The purpose of the study was to understand their acculturation experiences, and how they coped with issues associated with integration into a new society. This chapter provides a discussion of the results, including interpretations of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and a final conclusion.

Interpretations of the Findings

The participants revealed that they experienced difficulties as immigrants. These difficulties were partly due to their misconceptions about life in the United States that led to unfulfilled expectations. They experienced culture shock associated with barriers in communication; painful emotions such as loneliness, disappointment, and fear of deportation; and other difficulties. Career setbacks and intense financial difficulties also were common to the women. Nevertheless, all participants reported their lives were much better now and more than half even reported feeling happy about their lives in the United States. These findings are consistent with past studies that found that immigrants face difficulties in communication, career setbacks (Dow, 2011; Ezeobele, Malecha, Landrum & Symes, 2010; Osirim, 2008), racism, and a range of financial and economic stresses (Saechao et al., 2012). Additionally, as predicted, the study participants were drawn to the United States through the pull factor of anticipated economic gains (Chumil, 2009; Kumpikaite & Zickute, 2012; Oyeyemi et al., 2012; Reynolds, 2006; Yang, 2010).

In terms of their coping strategies, the women reported adopting a positive attitude, worked hard, and actively tried to adjust to their new lives. They reorganized their lives with school, friends, work; relied on their faith in God, and sought mentors and supportive community. Similarly, coping strategies documented in the literature include problem-oriented strategies directed towards the management of the problem and emotion-oriented strategies that focus on reducing the level of emotional distress associated with the stressful situation (Kosic, 2004; Slavin, Rainer, McCreary, & Gowda, 1991).

Participants in the present study did not appear to use avoidance-oriented strategies that include distraction and passivity. Rather, they used problem-oriented strategies, doing something to alter their source of stress, and successfully resolving their problematic situation. For instance, all the women learned new skills and acquired some training here in the United States that enabled them to get jobs that, although different from their qualifications in Nigeria, provided income to pay their bills and live comfortably. Importantly, Kosic (2004) noted that problem-oriented strategies are related with positive adaptation. Seeking social support through membership of Nigerian churches and clubs was another way they used emotion-oriented strategies to reduce their emotional distress.

Most participants reported being unaware of the resources available to them and more than half reported not having access to any resources. Nevertheless, three reported receiving tuition assistance from the U.S. government by applying for subsidized student loans to attend college or other training programs, and two reported receiving welfare in

the form of food stamps, electronic benefit transfer cards, and housing assistance.

Limited data were gathered about participants' perceptions of the services. However, two

reported not wanting to be on welfare, another two reported appreciating the government

assistance programs, and one reported being unjustly denied for benefits due to racism.

This participant reported that she was denied benefits once the official processing the

applications learned of her national origin. These findings represent a unique contribution

of the present study, although additional research needs to be conducted to more fully

understand Nigerian women immigrants' access to and views of the services and supports

available to them.

Participants reported receiving many types of support from their friends, family

members, and communities of faith. These supports included financial assistance;

friendship and moral support; and help with childcare, accommodation, work, and finding

government support and resources. Two participants reported not receiving needed

information and help. Eight of the 10 participants reported receiving help from their faith

communities and seven noted their thankfulness to God. These findings are similar to

past studies that found that immigrants rely upon friendships, family relationships, and

group memberships to navigate the acculturation process (Yang, 2010). Specific details

about immigrants' use of faith and self-development as a means for coping with stressors

were not found in past literature and represent a unique contribution of the present study.

Limitations of the Study

The study was focused exclusively on Nigerian immigrant women living in a city

in Northern California. Some immigrant women who qualified to participate may have

not volunteered due to concerns about their immigration status and disclosing personal

information, especially if they were undocumented immigrants. African women from

other African countries were not within the scope of this study because Africans are

diverse in more ways than just language and culture. Nigerians were specifically selected

for this study due to the fact that they are the largest African immigrant population in the

United States. Although the results of this study were limited to Nigerian immigrant

women, and could not be generalized to all African immigrants, some of the findings

could serve as a guide for future research on other African immigrant populations.

Nigerian immigrant women in this study used spirituality and faith in God as one of their

coping strategies, and this was reported as a common help-seeking behavior of African,

Caribbean, and other immigrant women (Ezeobele, 2008; Kamya, 1997).

Recommendations

The study findings indicated that women faced internal obstacles to their

acculturation due to having misconceptions about life in the United States. This finding

indicates that immigrant women need more complete and accurate information about the

realities of life in the United States before and throughout their immigration process. This

would eliminate misunderstandings about what life would be like, what career

opportunities they would and would not have in the United States, and what financial

realities they may face. The lack of accurate information led to years of struggle,

disappointment, and hardship for many of the women examined in this study. These

women‘s experiences emphasize the need for information that could be provided by their

friends and families as well as support organizations for women preparing for or embarking on immigration.

Participants related experiencing a painful adjustment process marked by culture shock as they attempted to negotiate the differences between Nigerian and United States culture. They struggled to learn how to navigate life in the United States and unwelcome physical changes as they adapted to American cuisine. To overcome these and other challenges, it would be helpful for the women to be able to rely upon support networks where they would be able to vent frustrations and challenging experiences, gain needed information about resources and support available to them from community and government organizations, and even receive targeted help such as help finding healthy food options.

Participants also described several interpersonal obstacles they faced during the acculturation process, such as lacking support in the United States, having difficulties communicating with Americans, and experiencing what they believed was victimization and discrimination at the hands of others. These challenges underscore the need for immigrant women to have additional options for support networks and community and government sources for support.

Future phenomenological studies of the acculturation experience could be conducted with a greater sample size or within or across immigrants from other home countries. It is important to note, however, that sample size is not associated with validity in phenomenology. Future studies might want to analyze possible differences between

men and women, across ethnicities, and across immigrants at different ages or in different

life stages or industries.

Implications

There is substantial potential for positive social change called for as a result of

this study. The first need is for increased social tolerance and generalized support for

immigrants like those examined in this study. Participants described facing substantial

communication difficulties and even ridicule due to differences in dialect and accent.

This was a source of frustration for many of the women and even led to profound self-

doubt, regret, and emotional pain.

Participants reported feeling victimized by a range of individuals involved in their

process of immigration, from agents who were facilitating their immigration to family

members who were hosting them and government officials involved in allowing access to

support. Although victimization by family members cannot be anticipated or thoroughly

monitored, systemic discrimination by agents facilitating the immigration process and by

government officials must be identified and eradicated. Nonprofit and community

support organizations play a critical role in helping to identify and help ameliorate

instances of victimization and discrimination where, when, and how it occurs.

Support from school and work friends, community members, churches,

government programs, and family members and spouses were noted as being vital to their

acculturation process. These support individuals can help by providing information and

access to key resources, offering emotional support, or serving participants' practical

needs. Participants also reported finding strength and hope in their faith in God;

therefore, receiving support from church group may be particularly effective for these immigrants.

Support organizations also may strive to help participants develop self-reliance, as participants explained that developing self-reliance and self-confidence greatly aided their process of acculturation and enhanced their sense of satisfaction and success regarding their lives in the United States. Immigrants' self-reliance can be built by providing the information they need as they need it to support their immigration process.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study of the experience of Nigerian women immigrating to the United States and acculturating into U.S. society provides insights to better understand participants' lived experiences. For the participants in this study, the experience of immigration and acculturation began with internal obstacles stemming from their misconceptions about life in United States, followed by a process of painful adjustment marked by such things as having to learn how to navigate life in their new home. Participants also experienced substantial interpersonal obstacles during acculturation, including a profound lack of support, communication difficulties, and deliberate victimization and discrimination from others. Participants had to navigate and overcome difficult life conditions associated with immigration, including career setbacks and severe financial shortages. Ultimately, the participants reported succeeding in acculturating to the United States by locating and receiving support, relying on their faith in God, and developing self-reliance.

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Appendix A: Study Flyer

Invitation to participate in research study conducted for a Walden Ph.D. dissertation.

a. Are you a Nigerian woman?

b. Were you born in Nigeria?

c. Are you at least 18 years of age?

d. Did you arrive in the United States as an adult?

e. Have you lived in the United States for a minimum of 1 year?

f. Are you willing to share your immigration experience in a study?

g. If you answered yes to these questions, please contact Toyin at 916-000-0000.

Thank you!

Appendix B: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study of Nigerian immigrant women's experiences living in the United States. The researcher is inviting Nigerian women aged at least 18 years old, who came into the United States as adults, and have lived in the United States for a minimum of one year to be in the study. This form is part of a process called –informed consent‖ to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Oluwatoyin Adewunmi, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand Nigerian immigrant women's adjustment experiences and how they cope with the situations they encounter while settling down in the United States.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to: Complete a demographic questionnaire, and partake in a face-to- face interview lasting 45 minutes to 1 hour in a location of your choice without distractions, and your privacy will be maintained. The interview will be audio recorded, and observations about your responses will also be noted. You will be given a copy of the interview results to verify for accuracy.

Here are some sample questions:

How long have you lived in the United States?

What challenges did you have when you came to this country?

How have you been able to cope with these challenges?

Voluntary Nature of the Study

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as unpleasant memories. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. However, a referral list for counseling will be made available to you in case you experience stress, even after the interview has ended. The potential benefits of this study is that the results of the study would be useful in developing gender specific programs that would support the integration process, and reduce mental health issues that may arise as a result of acculturation stressors.

Payment

There is no financial compensation for participation.

Privacy

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. As a mandated reporter of child abuse and neglect, the researcher will comply with the mandated reported laws during the course of the study. Data will be kept secure by password protected computers, and locked cabinets. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via ██████████ and toyina@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is (612)-312-1210.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Printed Name of Participant
Date of Consent   _____

Participant's Signature   _____

Researcher's Signature   _____

                                                              _____

Appendix C: Resources and Referrals

Sacramento County Mental Health Services – www.namisacramento.org/resources/

locallinks-saccounty.html

Sacramento County Access – www.dhhs.saccounty.net

Family Resource Centers – www.dhhs.saccounty.net

Terra Nova Counseling - terranovacounseling.org

Appendix D: Demographic Questionnaire

a. Year of Birth

b. Place of Birth

c. Marital Status

d. Number of Children

e. Highest degree obtained

f. Years of Education

g. Occupation/ Employment Status

h. Reason for Immigration

i. Year of arrival in the United States

j. How long have you resided in the United States?

k. Which best describes your tribal affiliation?

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Location: _____

Name of Interviewer: _____

Name of Interviewee: _____

Interview Number: One

    a.   Please tell me about your coming to the United States?

         - How long have you lived in the United States?

    b.   How would you describe your experiences since you arrived in the United

       States?

         - What is the nature of these experiences?

    c.   How would you describe any challenges you faced in settling down?

         - Were there any resources that helped you to overcome the challenges?

    d.   How did you cope with those challenges?

         - What strategies did you use in coping with the challenges?

    e.   What type of support did you have settling down in the United States? -

       Family, Community, Church?

    f.   How would you describe your present status living in the United States?