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Lived Experiences of African Students With Microaggressions in U.S.-Based Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The prevalence of microaggressions in higher education institutions in the United States is a major issue for individuals of color and international background. Microaggressions can interfere with international students' smooth transition into their new academic system and social environment. The purpose of this qualitative study with a transcendental phenomenological approach was to explore the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan international graduate students who have experienced microaggressions in a higher education institution in the United States. The racial microaggression theory and the theory of neo-racism served as a guiding conceptual framework for this study. The research question was to examine the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international students with microaggressions in U.S.-based higher education institutions. Semistructured interview data were collected from 8 participants who are from Sub-Saharan African countries and have completed their graduate studies in a U.S.-based university within the last 5 years. They were between 25 and 40 years of age and recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling strategies. A qualitative analysis was conducted using Creswell and Poth's method of phenomenological analysis and representation. The findings revealed that the participants experienced marginalization in the forms of exclusion, ignoring, belittlement, and unequal opportunity. They had a sense of resignation and used persistence, focus, hard work, avoidance, and distancing to overcome and survive microaggressions. The results of this study may be used to raise public awareness of the issue of microaggressions that African students face in the United States and support advocacy for policy and practice changes for positive social change.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my mother, Manavi, who did not live to see me start college.

“Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter” (Chinua Achebe).

Acknowledgments

I thank the faculty who contributed to the completion of my dissertation. Principally, I am thankful to Dr. Phillips and Dr. Harris for their mentorship, support, tips, and resourcefulness throughout the process of this dissertation. I thank Dr. Wilkinson for her leadership and Dr. Hershberger for the review of my work. I also thank my academic advisor, Jacqueline Cook-Jones, for her support. I am grateful to my husband, Ezi, and my children, Mike and Brenda, for their patience, endurance, cooperation, help, and unlimited support throughout this long journey. Their sacrifice and love have kept me going. I am grateful to my father, sisters, friends, co-workers, and supervisors whose constant checking on my progress encouraged me to complete the program. I thank the participants of my study for their input and their time, and I appreciate the contribution of the persons who helped me recruit them. I also appreciate the cooperation of the mental health and counseling organizations to which I was permitted to refer my research participants.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

International students encounter many challenges in their host higher education institutions (Cheung, 2013; Gareis, 2012; Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Newsome & Cooper, 2016). One of the major challenges that international students deal with is microaggressions (Houshmand, Spanierman, & Tafarodi, 2014; Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). Microaggressions are contemporary covert and subtle forms of discrimination that are persistent in the everyday lives of members of marginalized groups (Hackett, 2014; Huber & Solorzano, 2014; Nier & Gaertner, 2012; Sue et al., 2007). The United States is one of the preferred countries for international students to pursue higher education (The Guardian, 2014; Institute of International Education, 2017a). The prevalence of microaggressions is a major issue for individuals of color and of international background in U.S.-based postsecondary education institutions (Gomez, Urzua, & Glass, 2011; Joshi, McCutcheon, & Sweet, 2015). Microaggressions can interfere with the students' adaptations to the different aspects of their host society and host campus, and negatively impact the students' academic achievement (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Glass & Westmont, 2014).

Researchers from the Institute of International Education (2017c) revealed that international students are not a homogeneous group and, therefore, do not experience the same phenomenon the same way. Researchers have also shown that Black African students studying in the United States are subject to more discrimination than other groups of international students (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Lee & Opio, 2011; Manguvo,

2012). Therefore, it is important to examine how Sub-Saharan African international students perceive and experience microaggressions in U.S.-based universities and colleges.

In the next sections of this chapter, I will summarize the literature that served as a background for this study, state the research problem, the purpose of this study, and the research question. I will also identify and briefly define the conceptual framework within which I conducted the study. This chapter will also include a brief description of the methodology that I used to design this research and the rationale for the selection of this methodology. I will discuss the operational definitions and key concepts and terms that I used in the study, the assumptions about the study, and the scope and delimitations of this research. The chapter will end with a discussion of the potential contribution of this research to the discipline and practice of human services and implications for positive social change.

Background

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was intended to ensure legal protection for racial, social, and other minorities and to protect such groups from discrimination (Chew, 2010; Lukes, & Bangs, 2014; Nier & Gaertner, 2012). Four to five decades after the enactment of the Civil Rights bill, a review of the literature revealed that subtle forms of discrimination not covered by the legislation still prevail in the modern world (Brewster & Cocroft 2014; Lukes, & Bangs, 2014; Nier & Gaertner, 2012). Those subtle forms of discrimination, called microaggressions, are covert and persistent in the everyday lives of racial or ethnic minority groups (Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Nier & Gaertner, 2012).

Microaggressions manifest in various settings, including public places, workplaces, and educational institutions (Brewster, Lynn, & Cocroft, 2014; Miller, 2015; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Several researchers have indicated that microaggressions are shared experiences among various groups of international students in multiple countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and the United States (e.g., Hackett, 2014; Houshmand et al., 2014; Menzies & Baron, 2014; Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Zhang, 2016a). Common acts of microaggressions against international students in educational settings include negative stereotypes, ascriptions of intelligence, exclusion from discussions, avoidance, ridicule, treatment of inferiority, and negative comments about culture, religion, and race (Houshmand et al., 2014; Joshi, McCutcheon, & Sweet, 2015; Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Zhang, 2016a).

The experiences of international students in their host countries and universities vary depending on where the students come from, and microaggressions tend to be racially motivated (Lee, 2015; Lee & Opio, 2011; Newsome & Cooper 2016). In U.S.-based universities and colleges, the prevalence of microaggressions is a major issue for individuals of color and international background (Gomez et al., 2011; Joshi et al., 2015). For instance, after interviewing 24 students from 15 countries, Lee (2015) found that students from Asian, African, Latin American, and Middle Eastern countries reported having experienced some forms of microaggressions. At the same time, students from European countries, Canada, or Australia did not report any instances or experiences with microaggressions in U.S.-based educational institutions (Lee, 2015). Language, culture,

race, and national origin are key factors that influence international students' experiences in their host institutions (Lee, 2015). For instance, while the foreign accent of a student from an Asian country may be ridiculed, the foreign accent of a student from a European country may be more accepted and appreciated (Lee, 2015).

Authors of the literature surrounding international students have shown that microaggressions from peer students and faculty in host universities can interfere with students' smooth transition into their new academic system and social environment (e.g., Hackett, 2014; Houshmand et al., 2014). Also, perceived discrimination was positively associated with symptoms of depression, anxiety, and health problems (Chia-Chen Chen, Szalacha, & Menon, 2014; Yoshihama et al., 2012). There is a gap in the literature regarding Sub-Saharan international students' experiences with microaggressions in U.S.-based higher education institutions. The exploration of the experiences of Sub-Saharan graduate international students with microaggressions in U.S.-based higher educational institutions may contribute to a better understanding of the issue of microaggressions and their effects on the victims. It may also contribute to addressing the problem of microaggressions.

Problem Statement

International students in higher education face many social, cultural, and academic challenges (Hackett, 2014; Houshmand et al., 2014; Menzies & Baron, 2014; Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Zhang, 2016a). In addition to those challenges, international students are subject to abusive behaviors from their peer domestic students and faculty of their host institutions (Houshmand et al., 2014; Zhang, 2016a). Hackett (2014) identified

aggressive abuse as one of the forms of abusive behavior experienced by international students. Aggressive abuse may be overt or covert (Hackett, 2014). The most covert and common type of aggressive abuse is microaggressions (Houshmand et al., 2014). Though microaggressions can often appear to be nondiscriminatory, they are degrading, invalidating, and traumatizing for the victims (Houshmand et al., 2014; Joshi, McCutcheon, & Sweet, 2015; Nier & Gaertner, 2012; Sue et al., 2007). According to Nier and Gaertner (2012), subjecting a human being to racial microaggressions is a deprivation of the person's civil rights.

Researchers have shown a relationship between racial prejudice and the lack of academic success among international students in higher education (e.g., Glass & Westmont, 2014; Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015). Microaggressions can also have a detrimental effect on how well international students adjust to the culture of their host universities (Glass & Westmont, 2014; Houshmand et al., 2014). As a result, microaggressions can be a significant obstruction to the academic progress and social integration of international students (Hackett, 2014; Nier & Gaertner, 2012). In the academic year 2016-2017, the total population of international students in the United States was approximately 1,078,822, and 37,735 of the international students were of Sub-Saharan African origin (Institute of International Education, 2017b, c). Although a growing number of researchers have focused on the experiences of international students with various forms of discrimination, after a review of the existing literature, I have been unable to find research that examined the unique experiences of microaggressions among Sub-Saharan international students in higher education institutions in the United States.

Given such, further research is warranted that would examine the issue of microaggressions against students from Sub-Saharan African countries in higher education institutions in the United States.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study with a transcendental phenomenological approach was to explore the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan international graduate students who have experienced microaggressions in a higher education institution in the United States. The present study was a modified replication of Houshmand et al.'s (2014) study, which examined how East and South Asian international students experienced racial microaggressions at a Canadian university. The current study focused on Sub-Saharan graduate students' experiences with microaggressions in U.S.-based traditional (on-campus) universities.

Research Question

What are Sub-Saharan African international students' lived experiences with microaggression while studying in U.S.-based higher education institutions?

Conceptual Framework

The racial microaggression theory (Sue et al., 2007) and the theory of neo-racism (Lee & Opio, 2011) framed this research. The racial microaggression theory is a means for discussing the subtle forms of racism that occur in daily interactions among individuals (Fleras, 2016; Huber & Solorzano 2014). Introduced in 1970 by the African American scholar and psychiatrist, Dr. Chester Pierce, the term microaggression was used to refer to persistent, offensive, and subtle forms of racism experienced by African

Americans (Huber & Solorzano, 2014; Pierce, 1970). Pierce developed the theory of racial microaggression over 40 years to understand how African Americans experience this form of racism. Over time, the concept of microaggressions has been expanded to cover subtle and everyday discrimination against racial minority groups and other marginalized groups (Ballinas, 2017; Owen, Tao, Imel, Wampold, & Rodolfa, 2014; Torres-Harding & Turner, 2015). Those forms of discrimination include slights, insults, racial stereotypes, discriminatory statements like derogatory comments about nationality, values, culture, names, or language (Ballinas, 2017; Feagin 2014; Feagin & Cobas, 2014; Owen et al., 2014). Because of their constant presence in everyday life, microaggressions are difficult to identify, report, and address as acts or behaviors of discrimination (Joshi et al., 2015). Yet, their cumulative effects are damaging to the victims (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Hunt, 2013; Li, Wang, & Xiao, 2014).

Étienne Balibar, a French philosopher, used the term neo-racism to designate a new form of racism centered on national order and culture (Balibar, 1991; Lee, Jon, & Byun, 2016). Neo-racism is a "racism without races" that surfaced in the post-Cold War period, an era that coincided with the multiculturalization of European metropolitan areas (Balibar, 1991). Balibar applied his discourse about neo-racism to immigrants. Further, Lee & Opio (2011) and Lee et al. (2016) applied the concept of neo-racism to prejudice against international students in the United States. A dedicated section of the literature review of Chapter 2 provides more information about the theories of microaggressions and neo-racism.

The theory of neo-racism paired well with the racial microaggression theory in the study because neo-racism is a form of discrimination based not only on race but also on nationality and culture (Lee & Opio, 2011). The theory of neo-racism served to explain the experiences of students from African countries in the United States. It helped differentiate Black Sub-Saharan African students' experiences of discrimination from those of African American students in U.S.-based higher education institutions.

Nature of the Study

The nature of the study was a qualitative design with a transcendental phenomenological approach (Bernet, 2015). Qualitative research is used to attempt to shed light on or interpret a phenomenon, in reference to what the phenomenon means to people (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). A transcendental phenomenology is a philosophical approach to qualitative research methodology used to seek an understanding of human experience (Sheehan, 2014). Because phenomenology is the science of expressing how a person perceives and senses an experience, it seemed to align with the purpose of the study (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). According to Shehan (2014), the underlying condition of transcendental phenomenology is to set aside preconceived ideas, to have an unbiased view of a phenomenon. That objective vision lets the actual meaning of the phenomenon genuinely emerge (Sheehan, 2014). Therefore, I have adopted the methodology of transcendental phenomenology to develop descriptions of participants' experiences with microaggressions without the interference of my biases and assumptions (Buser et al., 2016).

Phenomenology is the science of expressing how a person perceives and senses an experience (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). Researchers use phenomenological studies to get to the essence of the lived experiences of individuals with the phenomenon that is under scrutiny (Cilesiz, 2010; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). Phenomenology served in this study to explain, describe, and reach the essence of the lived experiences of African students with microaggressions while they were studying outside of their native country, in a U.S.-based university. Because the essence of microaggressions is how individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (of microaggression) perceived their experience, the transcendental approach of phenomenology contributed to letting the research participants provide through their narratives, what microaggressions meant to them (Fleras 2016). To explore the experiences of Sub-Saharan African international students with microaggressions in their host university in the United States, I conducted a qualitative analysis of interview data that I collected from eight individuals who are from Sub-Saharan African countries and have completed their graduate studies in a U.S.-based university within the last five years. The participants were between 25 and 40 years of age and recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling strategies.

Definitions

Domestic students: Deductively from Gomez et al.'s (2011) definition of international students, domestic students referred to students who were born and raised in the country where they are pursuing their academic studies.

Host institutions: I used the terms host institutions and host campuses interchangeably to designate the higher educational institutions that international students attend outside their native countries (Hackett, 2014; Lee, 2015).

International students: The term international students had a broad connotation in the study. It referred to students who are pursuing their academic studies in a country other than the country of their national origin where they were born and raised (Gomez et al., 2011).

Sub-Saharan Africa: Countries of the African continent that are situated south of the Sahara Desert (Mebuin, 2017; Nyuyfoni, 2015). Also referred to as Black Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa excludes Northern African countries and includes countries of the Eastern, Central, Western, and Southern Africa (Mebuin, 2017).

Sub-Saharan Africans and *Black Africans*: I used the terms Sub-Saharan Africans, Africans, and Black Africans interchangeably to refer to individuals whose country of origin is situated in Sub-Saharan Africa (Mebuin, 2017; Nyuyfoni, 2015). In this study, the term *Sub-Saharan Africans* was used to mention Black individuals who were born and raised in a Sub-Saharan African country.

Assumptions

My goal with this research was to use a phenomenological approach to explore the information that I would collect from individuals from Sub-Saharan African countries about their experiences with microaggressions in U.S.-based universities. Because the target population was individuals from Sub-Saharan African countries, my primary assumption regarding this study was that as a researcher, I would have access to

participants who would be willing to share their authentic experiences about the identified phenomenon of microaggression. That assumption was particularly necessary in the case of the research project because those potential participants were crucial to the purpose of the study.

My other assumption was that the Sub-Saharan African individuals I recruited to participate in the study would be truthful and honest in their disclosures and descriptions of their lived experience with microaggression in U.S.-based universities. Honesty and truthfulness were key components in providing a complete picture of the identified issue and safeguarding the quality of the study (Creswell, 2013). I intended to use qualitative telephone interviews to collect the data. I assumed that telephone interviews were the most suitable data collection method for this study for a number of reasons: (a) telephone interviewing has the potential of increasing the chances of participation because of its less intrusive nature; (b) research participants tend to have more inclination for telephone interviews when the topic is sensitive, and they are concerned about confidentiality and/or anonymity; (c) the use of telephone interviews increases the chances of obtaining unbiased responses from participants because the interviewee cannot be distracted by the appearance or behavior of the interviewer during the interview session; and (e) telephone interviews are cost-effective, less time-consuming, and convenient to fit into busy lives (Edwards & Holland, 2013; Farooq & de Villiers, 2017).

Scope and Delimitations

The focus of this study was limited to Sub-Saharan international students' experiences with microaggressions in their host institutions. Accordingly, the study did

not include the students' experiences with microaggressions outside of their educational institutions. The study focused on Black Africans. White individuals from South Africa were not included in the targeted population of the research because findings in the literature have revealed that White South African students do not experience the same level of discrimination as their Black counterparts (Lee & Opio, 2011). Students from Northern African countries were excluded from the targeted population because their countries are outside the delimited zone for the study. Similar studies in different settings with other groups of international students from different geographic areas of Africa may complement this study.

Limitations

One of the limitations of phenomenological designs is the likelihood of the influence of researcher bias on data collection and interpretation, according to Creswell (2013). I used bracketing throughout the research process to manage my biases. Detailed information of steps I took to minimize bias is available in Chapter 3. The use of telephone interview technique to collect data constituted another limitation of this research. Unlike face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews do not allow the interviewer to observe the interviewees' visual cues such as body language and facial expressions that may convey contextual information and increase understanding during the communication (Farooq & de Villiers, 2017). Effective listening and clear articulation of the message being transmitted during the interview served as solutions to this limitation of telephone interviewing (Farooq & de Villiers, 2017; Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Also, the small sample size and the restriction of the primary sampling location to the Washington, DC area (in the United States) could limit the transferability of the findings. However, because the participants have completed their graduate degree or certificate within the past five years, the postsecondary education institutions they attended might be located outside of the sampling area where they were living at the time of this study. Furthermore, because I was not able to recruit enough participants in the targeted area, I had to recruit participants who were living in other regions of the United States. Another limitation of this study was that the findings might not be transferable to all Sub-Saharan students in the United States, because of the cultural and linguistic diversity within Sub-Saharan populations, and the variation in the composition of the population of each U.S.-based higher education institution (Hyams-Ssekasi, 2012; William, 2014). Also, this study might not be transferable to other groups of international students because of the limited transferability of qualitative studies (Zhang, 2016a). The replication of this study with different groups of international students in various settings could complement this study. Detailed information on the steps I took to enhance the potential transferability of results from this study are available in Chapter 3.

Significance

Investigating how Sub-Saharan international students experience microaggression directed against them in their host higher education institutions will provide evidence-based research on international students' experiences while studying in a foreign country. The findings of the study may contribute to the information and knowledge of the experiences of Sub-Saharan students with microaggressions in their host universities in

the United States. The results can potentially serve as empirical evidence of the experiences of the students. Individuals who advocate the need for cultural sensitivity and awareness seminars for students and faculty can also use the findings of the study to support their advocacy. The study contributes to the existing body of literature on the topic of microaggressions in U.S.-based higher education institutions. The literature may serve as the basis for program, policy or practice changes to improve Sub-Saharan African students' academic and sociocultural experiences on American campuses, through the establishment of mechanisms to address microaggressions and mitigate their effects.

Summary

Microaggressions constitute a significant obstacle that international students have to overcome in higher education institutions in the United States. The problem of microaggressions is more severe for Black African students, yet literature about the experiences of Sub-Saharan international students with microaggressions in U.S.-based universities is scarce (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Lee & Opio, 2011). In an attempt to explore the lived experience of Black African students with microaggressions in U.S.-based universities, I interviewed eight individuals from Sub-Saharan African countries who have completed their graduate studies in a U.S.-based university in the last five years. Those individuals experienced microaggression in universities located in the United States. In Chapter 2, I will provide an overview of the difficulties international students encounter in their host institutions, including the issue of microaggressions and the

effects of microaggressions on the students. I will also describe the theories of racial microaggressions and neo-racism in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The number of international students in the United States has increased in the past decades (Zhang, 2016b). In the academic year of 2015-2016, the total population of international students in the United States was approximately 1,043,839 (Institute of International Education, 2016a). Among them, 35,364 students (3.4%) were of Sub-Saharan African origin (Institute of International Education, 2016b). According to the National Association for Foreign Student Affairs (NAFSA), the population of international students in U.S. colleges and universities rose to 1,078,82 during the 2016-2017 academic year (Association of International Educators, 2018). The new number includes 37,735 students of Sub-Saharan African origin (Institute of International Education, 2016b). International students contributed $32.8 billion to the U.S. economy during the 2015-2016 academic year and $36.9 billion during the academic year 2016-2017, according to the Association of International Educators (2017, 2018).

Researchers have shown that international students in higher education are often subjected to racial microaggressions from their domestic peers and the faculty of their host institutions (e.g., Hackett, 2014; Houshmand et al., 2014; Zhang, 2016a). Findings from various studies have indicated relationships between variables such as racial prejudice, academic outcomes, social outcomes, and cultural adjustment of international students in higher education (e.g., Glass & Westmont, 2014; Forrest-Bank & Jenson 2015; Hackett, 2014; Houshmand et al., 2014; Nier & Gaertner, 2012). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan international

graduate students who have experienced microaggressions in a higher education institution in the United States.

This chapter includes the strategies that I used to retrieve seminal work and current literature relevant to this study. It also consists of the conceptual framework that guided the study. The chapter also provides a review of the literature related to (a) the adjustment challenges that international students face, (b) definitions of the concepts of microaggressions and international students, (c) an overview of the motives behind international students' decision to study abroad, (d) effects of microaggressions on the victims, and (e) international students' coping mechanisms. Because of the scarcity of related literature about microaggressions directed against international students in higher education institutions in the United States, I reviewed research conducted in other countries.

Literature Search Strategies

I searched peer-reviewed journals and publications to locate scholarly articles for this study, with a focus on academic journals on the website of Walden University Library. I started my search with multidisciplinary databases, mainly Academic Search Complete and the multidatabase search tool, Thoreau. Then I accessed articles in other databases of various disciplines from those interdisciplinary databases. I used one or a combination of the following keywords in the searches: *international students, micro-aggression, micro-aggressions, microaggressions, racial harassment, microaggression theory, higher education, university, universities, college, US, United States, USA, discrimination, racism, racial, racial microaggressions, phenomenology, Sub-Saharan*

African students, Sub-Saharan students, African, Sub-Sahara, Black Africa, Black African, African international students, foreign students, African Students. The other databases that I accessed were ProQuest Central, Sage Premier, ERIC, PsycINFO, Education Source, SocINDEX with Full Text, Education Research Complete, Taylor and Francis Online, and CINAHL Plus with Full Text. Also, I located articles from reference lists of the journal articles that I retrieved. I searched a local library's online databases, went to a local library to seek the assistance of a librarian, and used Walden Library Service for help with retrieving related articles. Due to the significant gap in the literature about international students' experience with microaggressions in higher education institutions in the United States, I extended the search to studies conducted in other countries, including doctoral dissertations, in the last 10 years.

Conceptual Framework

Two theories guided this study. They were racial microaggression and neo-racism theories. Their definitions and how they applied to this study are provided in the next sections.

Racial Microaggression Theory

Racial microaggression theory (Sue et al., 2007) was one of the theories that I used to frame this study. Chester Pierce, an African American professor of psychiatry and education, introduced the term *microaggression* in 1970 to refer to frequent and subtle forms of degrading treatment given to African Americans (Huber, & Solorzano, 2014; Pierce, 1970). He observed that the repetitiveness and regularity of microaggressive acts or behaviors aggravate their damaging effects on the victims.

According to Pierce, a high level of understanding of the principles of racism by Black people mitigates the adverse effects of racism on them (Pierce, 1970, 1988). For Fleras (2016), microaggressions, also called *racism 3:0*, are people's lived experiences with contemporary racism, viewed through the lenses of the victims. As such, microaggressions are conceptualized through their impact on the victims, not through the intention of the perpetrators (Fleras, 2016). Under the umbrella of microaggressions, racism has become an interactive process, grounded in the context in which it occurred, its criteria, or its consequences (Fleras, 2016; Gomez et al., 2011; Wang et al. 2011). Huber and Solorzano (2014) discussed the concept of racial microaggressions as an effective structure for research on race, racism, and daily experiences of People of Color.

The concept of microaggressions has been expanded to explore everyday life circumstances of underrepresented and marginalized groups such as women, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, Latinos or Latinas, Native Americans, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender), persons living in poverty, religious minorities, persons with disabilities, and international students, to name but a few (Choi et al., 2013; Espitia, 2016; Gomez, Urzua & Glass, 2014; Husain & Howard, 2017; Jones & Galliher, 2014; Lewis et al., 2013; Mccabe, Dragowski, & Rubinson, 2013; Miller, 2015; Robertson, 2015; Smith, Mao, & Deshpande, 2016). In an expansion and promotion of the concept of microaggressions, Sue, an Asian American psychologist elaborated on the concept of microaggressions in these terms: "Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or

unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273).

In a taxonomic study of microaggression, Sue et al. (2007) distinguished three categories of microaggression, namely, microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. While microassaults are the most overt of the three because they are intentionally hurtful and abusive, microinsults and microinvalidations are more covert. Microinsults are embedded in communications that tactfully express rudeness and insensitivity towards a racial or social group. Microinvalidations include communications that subtly nullify or question the targeted individual's opinions, feelings, identity, and realities or experiences (Houshmand et al., 2014; Joshi et al., 2015; Sue et al., 2007). Microinvalidations were identified in Gomez et al.'s (2011) life history interview research and Joshi et al.'s (2015) focus group inquiry of narrative storytelling as a major issue for graduate faculty and students of color and of international background in predominantly White department or universities in the United States. Those graduate faculty and students of color and international background's qualifications, authority, experiences, or expertise were constantly questioned and challenged actively or passively through behaviors, questions, feedback, confrontations, silence, ignoring, and attitudes of avoidance. Using interview data, Houshmand et al. (2014) observed in their qualitative study that microaggressions do not always come from dominant group members. Sometimes, they come from an ethnic minority group member to another ethnic minority group member, a local-born minority group member to a foreign-born minority group member, for instance. Such type of microaggressions was theorized through internalized

racial oppression (Bailey et al., 2011; Brown, Rosnick, & Segrist, 2017; Houshmand et al., 2014) and lateral violence (Roberts, 2015; Sanner-Stiehr & Ward-Smith, 2017).

Lukes and Bangs (2014) deplored the inadequacy of legislative provisions in enforcing the law against microaggressions and advocated for awareness and acknowledgment of the persisting presence of microaggressions in higher education settings. In fact, due to their subtle nature, microaggressions, also called "contemporary forms of racism," may not appear to be discriminatory (Nier & Gaertner, 2012, p. 208). Left with the burden of demonstrating that they were subject to discrimination, victims of microaggressions are often reduced to silence and end up second-guessing themselves (Joshi et al. 2015). In a mapping sentence resulting from a taxonomy of international students' experiences, Hackett (2014) listed name, race, culture, language, accent, ethnicity, gender, physical features, and immigration status as bases for discrimination against the students.

Neo-Racism Theory

The theory of neo-racism was another theory that underpinned this study. Lee and Opio (2011) used the theory of neo-racism or new racism to distinguish possible discrimination against African Americans students from discrimination against international students in the United States. They defined neo-racism as "discrimination based on culture and national order" (p. 632-633). For Lee and Opio (2011),

> Neo-racism does not replace biological racism but rather masks it by encouraging exclusion based on the cultural attributes or national origin of the oppressed. In other words, this form of discrimination appears justified through the lens of

> nationalities than solely by physical characteristics. Underlying neo-racism are notions of cultural or national superiority and an increasing rationale for marginalizing or assimilating groups in a globalizing world. (p. 633)

The theory of neo-racism has been used as a conceptual framework for research on discrimination against international students (Cantwell & Lee, 2010; Jon & Jang, 2012; Lee & Opio, 2011; Lee et al., 2016). The theory served as a tool to explain discrimination against international students based on the perception of cultural order and phenotype (Lee et al., 2016).

Yoshihama et al. (2012) found that race or ethnicity, skin color, not being born in the United States, and English language skills are the major basis for discrimination in the United States. The concept of neo-racism applied to this study because Sub-Saharan international students are not just Black students in the United States; they are also foreigners and specifically, individuals from African countries. Researchers such as Boafo-Arthur (2014) and Lee and Opio(2011) suggested that Sub-Saharan students (or Black African students) face more prejudice and discrimination in the United States than their fellow international students who came from other parts of the world. The race of Sub-Saharan students, their cultures, and negative stereotypes about their countries of origin are some of the sources of discrimination against them (Lee & Opio 2011). While Sub-Sahara Africans are identified as Black, it is important to note that not all individuals from the African continent are Black (Boafo-Arthur, 2014).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

In this section, I will review the literature associated with concepts significant to the study. In the review, I will explore the challenges international students face in their host environment. After that, I will define the concept of international students and provide an overview of the motives behind international students' decision to study abroad. Then I will review the definitions of the concept of microaggression and place it in the context of this study. I will end the section with an overview of the literature related to microaggressions in educational settings, their impacts on the victims, and the coping mechanisms of international students.

Challenges for International Students

The description of the difficulties that international students have in adapting to their host environments may help understand the effects of microaggressions on the adjustment of the students to their new academic environments. Several researchers have documented the challenges that international students face in their host country (e.g., Glass & Westmont, 2014; Gomez et al., 2014; Hackett, 2014; Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Wang et al., 2011). Like any adult or young adult who has grown up in a different sociocultural setting, international students have to go through a set of challenging experiences to adjust to the new culture, economy, and educational system of their host country (Newsome & Cooper, 2016). They face academic, social, and linguistic challenges as they attempt to adjust to their host country.

Academic challenges for international students. Adjusting to a new educational system is a common challenge for international students (Mesidor & Sly,

2016). For example, Zhang (2016a) conducted a qualitative analysis of the experiences of international Chinese doctoral students in a U.S. higher education institution and found that the international students faced the challenge of transitioning from a teaching style where the instructor was the principal actor in the classroom to a structure where students' participation in the classroom affected their grades. Rienties et al. (2012) found that academic performance negatively correlates with social adjustment. In a quantitative study, Yang, Salzman, and Yang (2015) administered a survey to international graduate students attending a Hawaiian university to record the most common challenges they faced to study and live in Hawaii. The most common challenges found were difficulty of course content, limited choices of courses, financial issues, interactions with instructors, language, problems of communication, decent accommodation, and "relationship with people" (p. 219).

Social challenges for international students. Chavajay (2013) reported international students' perception of a lack of social support from local individuals in the United States. He conducted a quantitative study on a group of international students' perceptions of social support in a U.S. northern university. Among the participants, 61.6% came from Asia, 16.2% came from Central America, South America, and Canada, 19.2% came from Europe, and 3% were from Africa. The researcher found that international students perceived more socioemotional support from non-American individuals than from Americans. They also found that younger and undergraduate students had a perception of more socioemotional support from non-Americans and from Americans than older and graduate students had. In the findings of the study, Chavajay

(2013) noted that the amount of support the participants received from their international peers was substantial, while the amount of support they received from the host students, instructors, and advisors was minimal. He attributed the situation to the isolation of the international students and interpersonal discrimination from individuals of the host population. However, the students perceived more instrumental or informational support and some forms of logistic supports (housing, transportation) from Americans (Chavajay, 2013).

Linguistic challenges for international students. Language is a central challenge in international students' adjustment to their new learning and social environments (Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Yang et al., 2015). Those who do not have the language of formal education in their host country as their first language or the official language of their home country, have a more difficult adjustment process (Kuo, 2011; Mesidor & Sly, 2016). According to Zhang (2016a), linguistic challenges keep international students from participating in classroom discussions and presentations because they need more time to organize their thoughts in their new language before they express themselves. Results from a study by Kuo (2011) revealed that Americans do not facilitate international students' acquisition of oral proficiency in the English language because they do not have the patience to listen to or engage in a verbal exchange with students who have limited proficiency in speaking English.

In a review of the language challenges that international graduate students in a U.S.-based university faced, Kuo (2011) found that international students experienced two major linguistic challenges; English listening comprehension and oral proficiency.

He attributed the listening comprehension challenge to the speed of speech of the persons they attempted to listen to or to communicate with, and the unfamiliarity of their accent. Factors that impaired the students' oral proficiency in English were problems of terminology in their area of expertise, word choice, local contextual references, and cultural gap (Kuo, 2011).

Cultural challenges for international students. Cultural distance is a factor not to lose sight of while examining international students' experience in their host country. The cultural transition is particularly difficult for students from a collectivist culture who are studying in an individualistic culture such as the United States (Gareis, 2012; Hofstede, 2001; Newsome & Cooper, 2016). Those students deal with isolation, cultural misunderstandings, and conflict of cultures (Newsome & Cooper, 2016). While an encounter with a new culture can be an edifying and positive experience that creates an opportunity for self-awareness and valuing of another culture, it can also be a challenging experience that represents a threat to people's sense of identity or well-being (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008; Gareis, 2012; Newsome & Cooper, 2016). Such confrontation is called culture shock (Lombard, 2014; Slonim-Nevo & Regev, 2016).

Newsome and Cooper (2016) conducted a case study in a British higher education institution about the degree to which a higher education institution meets international students' cultural needs. Using data collected from 18 international students, a majority of whom were postgraduates from Asian countries (India, Pakistan, Taiwan, China, Japan, and South Korea), the researchers identified three stages in higher education international students' experience in their host country. They were (a) high initial

expectations, (b) culture shock, and (c) eventual patterns of accommodation (Newsome & Cooper, 2016).

The stage of high initial expectation was marked by the students' enthusiasm and idealistic vision of the host society. The term culture shock is used to refer to the initial experiences of immersion in an unfamiliar culture (Lombard, 2014). Jingzhou (2016) suggested to view it as a transition shock. Newsome and Cooper (2016) portrayed culture shock as a passive psychological reaction such as distress, confusion, alienation, inadequacy, in response to a new and unfamiliar environment, especially a cultural environment. The aspects of the new culture included local lifestyles, customary behaviors, class system, gender roles, gender relations, and other social customs and norms. For instance, the students of the study were confused by the rules governing social politeness in the host culture that requires expressing kindness or respect. They found the practice to be insincere. The eventual patterns of accommodation consist of either a successful adjustment to the host environment and systems or a failure to adjust. In the study of Newsome and Cooper, the students who did not adjust ultimately dropped out of school and returned to their home countries (Newsome & Cooper, 2016).

Financial challenges for international students. Yang et al. (2015) identified financial problems as some of the most common challenges international graduate students living in the United States face. Most international students have to adjust to a new economy that may cause them a financial hardship (Cheung, 2013; Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Rienties et al., 2012). They have to confront a higher cost of living (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2010). They also have to deal with higher

tuition and limited funding sources like scholarships for international students (Cheung, 2013; Edwards-Joseph & Baker, 2014; Houshmand et al., 2014; Hyams-Ssekasi, 2012). A job on the campus may contribute to solving their financial problems. However, the complex process of obtaining a work permit makes finding a job on the campus difficult for international students (Houshmand et al., 2014). Per Hyams-Ssekasi et al. (2014), students who have the proper documentation to work in the host country generally end up with unskilled and minimum wage jobs, regardless of their professional background and experience. Employers in the host country do not recognize the international students' credentials and experience from their home countries (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014). Despite the financial difficulties, many international students view their educational expenses as a major investment that will pay off later (Edwards-Joseph & Baker, 2014; Urban & Palmer, 2014). In addition to the social, cultural, linguistic, economic, and academic challenges, international students have to deal with other issues such as discrimination and prejudice in the form of microaggressions (Boafo-Arthur, 2014).

International Students, Their Motives, and Microaggressions

In this section, I will specify which group of students I referred to as international students in this study. To help understand what makes individuals decide to pursue post-secondary education outside of their home country despite the difficulties they may encounter in their host environment, I will provide an overview of the motives to study abroad. I will also present a definition of microaggression based on the literature, in this section, before I explore the types of microaggressions that occur in educational settings.

International students. There are many definitions of international students in

the literature. According to Li, Wang, & Xiao (2014), international students are students "who have crossed a national border for education, and now are enrolled outside their country of origin" (p. 302). Gomez et al. (2011) attributed a broader sense to the term *international students*. They defined international students as students who identify themselves as having a national origin and citizenship other than that of the country where they study (Gomez et al., 2011). The latter definition is the one that I adopted for this study. Based on data from the Institute of International Education (2017b), international students are not a homogeneous group.

Motives behind the decision to study abroad. The factors that influence students' decision to study outside of their country of origin vary (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Hyams-Ssekasi, 2012; Palmer, 2014; Urban, 2012). According to Hyams-Ssekasi (2012), the prestige of obtaining a degree from another country, parental influence, the dream of a better life, or helping their own families in their home countries motivate some international students' decision to study aboard. The leading motives for many international students to choose the United States' higher education institutions to continue their education include getting a quality education, a wide selection of educational institutions and programs, scholarship opportunities, mastering their field of study, and acquiring practical skill sets (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Urban, 2012). For many of the international students, their education and experience in the United States can increase their likelihood of getting better career opportunities (Urban & Palmer, 2014). In brief, the majority of international students view the United States as a great place to study (Boafo-Arthur, 2014).

Definition of microaggressions. Microaggressions are brief, slightly derogatory racial slurs that can be either verbal, nonverbal, intentional, or unintentional (Hackett, 2014; Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Nier & Gaertner, 2012; Sue et al., 2007). They are contemporary forms of subtle and disguised discrimination that are more difficult to detect than the overt forms of discrimination such as the Jim Crow-type of racism against Black Americans in late 19th and early 20th centuries that involved lynching, cross-burning, or racial assaults (Brewster & Cocroft, 2014; Gomez et al., 2011; Nadal, 2011; Nier & Gaertner, 2012; Robinson -Wood et al., 2015; Sue et al., 2007). As stated by Sue et al. (2007), microaggressions are enhancement from the primary overt and public forms of racism, such as the racial segregation of education, housing, and public facilities. They are a covert and ambiguous everyday form of racism directed by a dominant group against a nondominant group (Huber & Solorzano, 2014; Sue et al., 2007).

Microaggressions in educational settings. An increasing number of scholars have developed an interest in microaggressions in educational settings (e.g., Houshmand et al., 2014; Lee & Opio, 2011; Nadal, 2011; Nadal et al., 2014). Nadal (2011) used an exploratory principal-components analysis and a confirmatory factor analysis to develop and validate the Racial and Ethnic Microaggression Scale (REMS). He presented REMS as an instrument intended to measure and evaluate racial microaggressions incidents in the everyday lives of people of color. His research consisted of two studies. Data were collected from college and Internet-based samples totaling 661 in size and composed of racially and ethnically diverse individuals who were living in the United States. The exploratory principal-components analysis of data collected from a sample of 443

participants resulted in the identification of 45 microaggression incidents. The incidents were grouped into six major subscales, namely "(a) assumptions of inferiority, (b), second-class citizen and assumption of criminality, (c) microinvalidations, (d) exoticization/assumptions of similarity, (e) environmental microaggressions, and (f) workplace and school microaggressions" (Nadal; 2011, p. 477). The researcher validated the 6-factor model through the confirmatory factor analysis of the responses of 218 participants. Common acts or behaviors of microaggression in educational settings found included being ignored because of one's race and being overlooked in a group discussion (Nadal, 2011).

Later on, in a quantitative study, Nadal et al. (2014) administered REMS to a sample of 225 undergraduate students from some U.S. higher education institutions and found that Black, Latina/o, and Multiracial participants experience considerably more microaggressions than White participants do. Those three groups reported a higher incidence of treatment of inferiority. Zhang (2016a) noted in the results of his qualitative study about international Chinese doctoral students' experiences in a U.S. higher education institution, that instructors and domestic students intentionally treated Chinese international students as invisible in the class by failing to answer their questions, excluding them from class discussions, or not listening to them. He also found that they treated the Chinese students as if they were less qualified than American students. Glass & Westmont (2014) performed a quantitative analysis of data collected from 415 international and 816 domestic undergraduate students, from eight research universities

in the United States. They found that international students have a higher incidence of feeling threatened or insulted based on their race than domestic students.

Lee and Opio (2011), in a qualitative research study, interviewed 16 African student-athletes who came from seven different African countries. The participants were students of five predominantly White higher education institutions in the United States. The purpose of their study was to investigate the students' challenges, including the possible presence of neo-racism, in their host institutions and societies (Lee & Opio, 2011). The researchers reported that the African students experienced neo-racism from their fellow students, faculty, administrators, and individuals outside their institutions. The forms of instances of neo-racism reported were negative stereotypes, ascription of intelligence, discrimination, negative and uninformed assumptions about the students' culture, religion, and race. The media was held responsible for the negative stereotypes such as starvation, male dominance, and domestic violence (Lee & Opio, 2011). However, White South-Africans international students were not subject to discrimination like Black peers. They reported having blended in effortlessly and not been subject to discrimination based on their accent (Lee & Opio, 2011). The authors related the White African students' different treatment to the color of their skin.

Microaggressions in higher education institutions are not limited to the United States. In a qualitative study, Houshmand et al. (2014) interviewed 12 East and South Asian international students attending a Canadian university to explore their experiences with racial microaggressions. The international students reported that domestic students and faculty members of the university deliberately excluded and avoided them, ridiculed

them for their accent or limited English language skills, made them feel invisible, passively ignored their international values and needs, and associated their intellectual capacity with racial and cultural stereotypes (Houshmand et al., 2014). In Newsome and Cooper's (2016) study mentioned above about Asian and Far Eastern international students of a British higher education institution, the students said they endured covert forms of racial discrimination, neo-racism, and hostility. For instance, a participant claimed that a domestic student ignored and minimized his input during a classroom group discussion. Another participant complained about domestic students' unwillingness to talk with international students (Newsome & Cooper, 2016).

Impact of Microaggressions on the Victims

The effects of microaggressions on the victims vary. Researchers revealed that microaggressions have adverse effects on the mental health of the victims. They interfere with the academic achievement and fulfillment of the victims. Microaggressions are also detrimental to the social and cultural adjustment of the victims.

Impact of microaggressions on mental health. Microaggressions are demeaning, degrading, and invalidating; they can have traumatizing and damaging effects on the victims (Houshmand et al., 2014; Joshi, McCutcheon, & Sweet, 2015; Nier & Gaertner, 2012; Sue et al., 2007). As day-to-day discriminations, microaggressions affect the health outcomes of the victims (Houshmand et al., 2014; Lee & Ferraro, 2009; Nadal et al., 2014; Williams & Mohammed, 2009; Yoshihama et al., 2012). In an attempt to examine the association between day-to-day discrimination and health, Yoshihama et al. (2012) collected data from 423 Gujarati men and women residing in Metropolitan

Detroit. They found a relation between day-to-day discrimination and negative emotional well-being for both men and women. The authors also found a relationship between everyday discrimination and health status for men.

In a quantitative study, Nadal et al. (2014) used REMS and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES) to examine how racial microaggressions are related to self-esteem. They found that racial microaggressions are predictors of lower self-esteem, especially if the individuals are treated like second-class citizens or are subject to microaggressions in a workplace or school settings concurrently. Nadal et al. (2014) noted that microaggressions that take place in work and educational environments have a remarkably detrimental effect on self-esteem. Cumulative experiences of microaggressions can generate psychological responses such as avoidance, arousal, hyper-vigilance, anger, heightened feelings of vulnerability, frustration, sadness, feelings of powerlessness, distancing, isolation, self-doubt, hopelessness, fear, and PTSD among the victims (Gomez et al., 2011; Helms, Nicolas, & Green, 2012; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015).

Impact of microaggressions on social and cultural adjustments. Duru and Poyrazli (2011) administered a survey to 229 Turkish international students who were studying in the United States. The majority of the students were graduate and postgraduate students. The researchers found through regression analysis that social connectedness and perceived discrimination significantly predicted adjustment difficulties. They also found a positive correlation between the level of adjustment of the students and their level of perceived discrimination.

Menzies and Baron (2014) noted that international students become "separated from their social and cultural comfort zone" as they join a campus outside of their home country (p. 84). The authors expect student societies to fill the social gap (Menzies & Baron, 2014). Using social support theory, Menzies and Baron explored 48 international post-graduate student experiences in transitioning to their Australian host university. Their findings indicated that the students had a negative transition experience in the beginning, but they adjusted over time. Also, the success of the transition heavily depended on the social support that the students received from the friends that they made, according to the findings (Menzies & Baron, 2014). The transition became tough for international students when students, instructors, and faculty subjected them to microaggressions (Menzies & Baron, 2014). Due to microaggressions, some international students would rather socialize with their international peer students (Chavajay, 2013; Houshmand et al., 2014). Such a strategy might not make their acculturation process easier (Glass & Westmont, 2014).

Effects of microaggressions on academic achievement and fulfillment. Using a sample of 264 Chinese international students from three public U.S.-based universities in a quantitative study, Lowinger, He, Lin, and Chang (2014) found a positive correlation between discrimination and academic procrastination for male Chinese students. Many international students become silent in the classroom by fear of being ignored, rejected, embarrassed, or teased for their limited English proficiency, their cultural differences, or their accent (Zhang, 2016a). Such silence in the classroom jeopardizes their participation grade. According to the findings of Newsome and Cooper (2016), the experiences of

students on and off the campus positively or negatively impact their adjustment to their new social and educational environments and their academic fulfillment. International students who do not successfully adjust to the realities of their host country may end up dropping out of school, according to Newsome and Cooper. The feeling of loneliness and isolation are common factors among the students who drop out (Newsome and Cooper, 2016).

Coping Mechanisms of International Students

Various studies reported some coping mechanisms and factors that help international students manage, adapt to, or overcome their challenges, aggravated by microaggression (e.g., Houshmand et al., 2014; Lowinger et al., 2014; Menzies & Baron, 2014; Newsome & Cooper, 2016). In the findings of Houshmand et al. (2014), coping responses of international students who experience microaggressions in their host higher education institutions, were "(a) engaging with own racial and cultural groups, (b) withdrawing from academic spheres, and (c) seeking comfort in the surrounding multicultural milieu" (p. 377). Based on the results of the study, the international students who were subject to microaggressions tended to engage with individuals of their race and cultural groups, in response to the feeling of being excluded and avoided by the dominant group of students. The presence of their fellows of the same race and cultural groups at the university gave them a sense of belongingness. The racial diversity of the campus provided international students with the comfort they needed. The students also tended to avoid certain academic activities where they had been subject to microaggressions, such as being ridiculed or disregarded (Houshmand et al., 2014). By

reporting that international students who experienced microaggressions distanced themselves from domestic students, or clustered in their circle of international students, Houshmand et al. (2014) supported the results from the study of (Gareis 2012) on intercultural friendship.

Friendly support from fellow students helps international students cope with academic and social challenges (Menzies & Baron, 2014). In their investigation of student-centered solutions for transition, Menzies and Baron (2014) found that international students who made new friends on the campus used their informational support to learn how to complete assignments according to academic standards. They also benefited from their friends' emotional support (Menzies & Baron, 2014). The authors considered new friendships likely to be the most crucial support system that might help international students cope with separation from their family and friends back home. They believed that such bonds could substitute traditional counseling, which is not necessarily effective in supporting international students. Student support societies (students' social associations on the campus) could facilitate these types of friendships and supports (Menzies and Baron, 2014).

Academic self-efficacy is also a mechanism that helps international students overcome their academic challenges, based on Edwards-Joseph and Baker's (2014) findings. In their study, Edwards-Joseph and Baker noted that confidence in one's intellectual abilities and the pursuit of greatness, faith in God, together with a strict and rich educational background, enhanced international students' academic self-efficacy. Age and maturity due to previous professional responsibilities and family responsibilities

as breadwinner also contributed to their academic self-efficacy, according to the authors. Some students had their inspiration from their prior success, the success of other individuals, and the desire to be a role model for their younger siblings and cousins (Edwards-Joseph & Baker, 2014). For Edwards-Joseph and Baker, those who had their parents as the primary funding source of their education strove to be academically successful for the pride of their parents and themselves. Their parents' encouragements were also a source of motivation for them (Edwards-Joseph & Baker, 2014).

Despite the growing interest of scholars in the experiences of international students with various forms of microaggressions and discrimination (e.g., Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Cheung, 2013; Gallagher, 2013; Hackett, 2014; Menzies & Baron, 2014; Mesidor & Sly, 2016), I have been unable to locate recent literature that investigated the experiences of Black African or Sub-Saharan graduate students with microaggressions in their host higher education institutions in the United States. It is evident through the literature that microaggressions have adverse effects on the adjustment of international students to their host country and institutions' social life and culture (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Menzies & Baron, 2014). They impede the academic success of the students (Lowinger, He, Lin, & Chang, 2014; Newsome & Cooper, 2016). Microaggressions also represent a threat to their health (Nadal et al., 2014; Yoshihama et al., 2012).

Summary

The above review of the literature showed that adjusting to the new social, cultural, economic, and academic realities of the host country and campus is a challenging experience for international students of higher education (Hackett, 2014;

Houshmand et al., 2014). Diverse forms of microaggressions from their domestic peer students and faculty members make their adjustment more difficult (Houshmand et al., 2014; Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). The background of students (national, cultural, linguistic, racial) plays an essential role in their experience on the campus (Lee & Opio, 2011). Similarly, the areas Sub-Saharan African international students come from make their transition distinct from that of other international students (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Lee, 2015; Lee & Opio, 2011). According to Manguvo (2012), African international students are subject to more discrimination because of misconceptions about the countries from which they come. However, the participants in most of the studies that I found about the experience of international students in their host higher education institutions were either all or in majority from Asian countries (e.g., Houshmand et al., 2014; Li et al., 2014; Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Yang et al., 2015; Zhang, 2016a). Also, an important number of those studies were not conducted in the United States. While those studies yielded a wealth of information on Asian international students' adjustment into their host universities and societies, their experiences may not necessarily apply to international students who are from other parts of the world (Edwards-Joseph & Baker, 2014).

Conclusion

After a thorough review of the literature, I was unable to find a recent study that provides evidence-based information regarding the experience of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students with microaggressions in U.S.-based higher education institutions. In Lee and Opio's (2011) research, because the participants were international students and student-athletes from Africa at the same time, it was difficult to determine if all their experiences with microaggression were solely related to the fact that they were students from Africa or if some of the microaggressions were due to their status of athletes. Although the participants in Boafo-Arthurs's (2014) research were Black African international students, the study was not conducted in the United States. It was conducted in a university in the United Kingdom.

In consideration of the findings and limitations of the above-reviewed literature, the current study explored the experience of graduate students from Sub-Saharan Africa with microaggressions in U.S.-based higher education institutions. This study has the potential of contributing to the improvement of the social integration of students from African countries, their academic outcomes, and their mental health (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Nadal et al., 2014; Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Westmont, 2014; Yang et al., 2015; Yoshihama et al., 2012; Zhang, 2016a). It can also inform the development of models for working with diverse populations, especially populations from Sub-Saharan African countries. Transcendental phenomenology was the approach I used to carry out this study. I will provide a detailed plan of the research in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study with a transcendental (or descriptive) phenomenological approach was to explore the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan international graduate students who have experienced microaggressions in a higher education institution in the United States. Administrators of higher education institutions can use the findings of this study to promote, implement, and enforce policies that support a campus environment free of discrimination or bias. A positive campus environment should be favorable to the academic, social, and psychological fulfillment of Sub-Saharan international students. I will start the chapter with a description of the research design, the rationale for the chosen tradition, and the role of the researcher. After that, I will describe the research interview questions, the setting, and the participants' selection process. Then, I will describe the data collection process, the proposed data analysis, and issues of trustworthiness. Finally, I will present the ethical procedures, followed by the data handling and tracking process.

Research Design and Rationale

The question of this research was: What are Sub-Saharan African international students' lived experiences with microaggression while studying in U.S.-based higher education institutions? The nature of this study was a qualitative design with a transcendental phenomenological methodology (Bernet, 2015). Howson (2010) observed that qualitative research is used for inquiries about people's experiences, and phenomenological research is used to gain a deep understanding of people's behaviors,

attitudes, or concerns. The qualitative approach is appropriate for collecting comprehensive and quality information about a specific issue from a small number of participants who have experienced the issue (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In this study, I used the qualitative approach to gather detailed information from Sub-Saharan individuals who experienced microaggressions in a university in the United States. This approach allowed those individuals to share their experiences with microaggressions and how the experiences made them feel.

The phenomenological approach to research focuses on "the activities of consciousness and the objects that present themselves to consciousness" (Giorgi, 2012, p. 9). In this philosophical perspective, phenomenology is used to express humans' perception of their experiences (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). Phenomenology was adequate for this study because the concept of microaggressions is grounded in the view of the person who has experienced the act or behavior of microaggression in question (Fleras, 2016).

Phenomenology is an approach used to describe what the lived experiences of a phenomenon or concept mean to several individuals who have experienced it, with a focus on what the individuals have in common during their experiences (Creswell, 2013). In transcendental phenomenology, the researcher takes participants' account of their experiences with a phenomenon, describes what they experienced and how they experienced the phenomenon, to communicate the universal essence of their experiences (Creswell, 2013). Findings from this study will document Sub-Saharan African international students' descriptions of their experiences with what they perceived as

microaggressions directed against them while they were studying outside of their native country in a U.S.-based higher education institution.

A hermeneutic or interpretative approach would not be appropriate for this research because the purpose of this study was not to interpret the lived experiences of the student, but rather to describe the experiences. Also, the interpretative approach involves both the participant and the researcher's perspectives on the phenomenon of the study (Sorsa, Kiikkala, & Åstedt-Kurki, 2015). The descriptive approach minimizes the researcher's perspective by restricting the researcher to a descriptive role rather than the interpretive role used in hermeneutical phenomenology.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in qualitative studies is dynamic and complex at the same time (Patton, 2014; Chenail, 2011; Raheim et al., 2016). The researcher is the primary data collection instrument in qualitative studies (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2016; Chenail, 2011). The other roles of the researcher are multiple. According to Creswell (2013), they include designing or choosing the data collection tool, obtaining access to the research site and participants from a gatekeeper, obtaining the proper authorization to conduct the study through the Institutional Review Board, and protecting the welfare of the research participants. The researcher's roles also include locating and selecting participants, collecting data through interviewing, transcribing the interview data, coding the data to find emerging themes, analyzing the data collected, interpreting the data, and reporting the findings of the research (Creswell, 2013). All the roles of the researcher

converged towards the achievement of the reliability, credibility, and validity of the research findings.

I was the sole investigator and interviewer in the study. During the interview sessions, I was a listener of Sub-Saharan international students. I served as the recruiter, the data transcriber, data analyst for the collected data, and reporter of the findings. As the designer of research questions in most qualitative studies, the researcher is viewed as the instrument used to collect data (Chenail, 2011). According to Chenail (2011), the role of the data collection instrument makes bias management and instrumentation rigor challenging for the researcher. Creswell (2009) suggested that qualitative researchers identify their own biases, values, and personal background, as a strategy to address potential bias to the research process.

I was born and raised in a Sub-Saharan African country. I have been a student in traditional and online classroom settings in the United States and have experienced microaggressions in various settings, including educational, in the United States. My affiliation with the population of interest for this study through my background and my experiences made it possible for the intrusion of my personal bias into the study. In an attempt to minimize my own bias in this study, I maintained an open mind and neutrality in my approach to microaggressions. Also, I used bracketing throughout the research process to control my bias. Originated in phenomenological research, bracketing is a tool that researchers use to increase awareness of their values, beliefs, or feelings, in order to deliberately set aside their assumptions and prior knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation, for an objective inquiry (Chan et al., 2013; Giorgi 2012; Hamill &

Sinclair, 2010; Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). As such, my practice of bracketing translated into my efforts to disclose my past and make informed and objective decisions about the methodology, the research questions, the interview questions, and the interview protocol (Sorsa, Kiikkala, & Åstedt-Kurki, 2015). The awareness of my background and personal experiences with microaggression helped me manage bias throughout the research.

Because bracketing helps the researcher look at things as they are, I used bracketing to fully focus on the participants' viewpoints during the interview, the analysis of data, and the interpretation of data (Chan et al., 2013; Giorgi, 2012). Curiosity and reflexivity served as my pathways to bracketing. Curiosity is a bracketing strategy that helps researchers transcend common assumptions and keep a fresh mind during an inquiry (Sorsa et al., 2015). To achieve bracketing, I formulated the research question in a manner to satisfy my curiosity about the experiences of the target population with microaggression, regardless of what I already knew or assumed about the target population's experiences. In the same perspective, during the literature review, I maintained a curiosity that helped me develop a deep understanding and knowledge of the phenomenon of microaggressions, while objectively seeking answers to the research question.

Still, with a curious mind, I used semistructured telephone interviews to collect information from the participants about their experiences with microaggressions, asking for clarification when necessary, to gain a better knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon (Chan et al., 2013). During the semistructured interviews, I did not attempt

to impose my assumptions on the interviewees. Researchers use bracketing in descriptive phenomenology to focus on participants' perspectives (Sorsa et al., 2015).

Reflexivity consists of acknowledging the potential biases that the researcher brings into the inquiry (Howson, 2010). The use of reflexivity throughout the research helped me approach microaggressions in a controlled and methodical manner and avoid generalization and jumping to conclusions (Berger, 2015). I used a reflective diary to record my thoughts, impressions, and feelings, as I was evolving through the research process, either in data collection, data analysis, or data interpretation, to facilitate the decision I made in the process of the study. As a self-assessment tool, keeping a reflective diary between the interviews sessions and during data transcription, analysis, or interpretations, were a means to identify and suspend any bias and prior knowledge about participants' experiences with microaggressions in their U.S. host higher education institutions (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

To meet the selection criteria for this study, the research participants had to (a) self-identify as having a national origin of a Sub-Saharan African country, (b) be born and raised outside the United States, (c) have completed a graduate degree or certificate in a U.S.-based higher education institution within the last five years, (d) have experienced microaggressions in their host higher education institutions, (e) be living in the United States, (f) be 18 years of age or older, and (g) be fluent (able to communicate)

in English. I planned to recruit participants initially in the Washington, DC area, through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling strategies.

The purposive sampling strategy was suitable for intentionally recruiting only individuals who fit the inclusion criteria for a study (Emerson, 2015; Robinson, 2014). As such, the use of a purposive sampling strategy was appropriate for the recruitment of participants that shared the experience of the phenomenon under investigation in phenomenological research (Ritchie et al., 2014). My rationale for using a purposive sampling strategy was to make sure that I recruit individuals who experienced microaggressions and met all the criteria for participating in the study. Snowball sampling is appropriate for studies that involve the examination of commonalities and similarities, according to Palinkas et al. (2015). Also, snowball sampling is suitable for research on underrepresented or hard-to-reach populations (TenHouten, 2017). Therefore, I intended to use snowball sampling as a means of reaching potential participants that I could not directly locate or identify.

The overall anticipated sample size was 12 to 18. One of the methods used by researchers to justify the sample size of a study is the reference to sample sizes used in previous, similar studies (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Samples sizes ranging from 12 to 18 have been used in prior qualitative studies about microaggression against international students (e.g., Houshmand et al. 2014; Lee & Opio, 2011; Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). However, I planned to conclude the sampling by ending the collection of data after I felt the data reached saturation. I

expected data saturation to occur when the redundancy of themes starts to emerge from the narratives of the participants (Francis et al., 2010; Gomez et al., 2011).

Instrumentation

The data collection instruments that I used included a guiding interview questions' list that I have designed (Appendix D), a demographic questionnaire, and two digital voice recorders, one serving as backup. Semistructured telephone interviews were my primary source of data collection. The interview questions were open-ended to allow the participants to describe their experiences of microaggressions in detail. Qualitative interviews are effective for the collection of data from members of marginalized groups about their everyday lived experiences (Edwards & Holland, 2013). I extracted most of the interview questions from previous qualitative research questions and interview or focus group questions about microaggressions against underrepresented groups such as international students, LGBT, ethnic or racial minorities, religious minorities, and women of color (e.g., Houshmand et al., 2014; Nadal et al., 2015; Robinson -Wood et al., 2015). With the intent of collecting data that will help answer the research question, I modified some of the questions to adapt them to the context of this study. Also, I formulated and added new questions based on the literature and the purpose of the study.

The initial interview questions were as follow:

- Could you please describe your experience with microaggressions when you were studying in a U.S.-based higher education institution?
- What role did the person(s) serve in the higher education institution?

- How did the situation make you feel?
- How did you respond to the situation?
- How have you coped?
- How did the situation affect your interactions with the individual(s) involved?
- What else would you like to share about your experience that would be significant for this research?

The questions were subject to the review of the dissertation committee members. Their feedback contributed to achieving practicability, clarity, and content validity of the interview questions. I followed the recommendations of the committee members to refine the interview questions.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Data collection, according to Creswell and Poth (2017), is a set of interdependent activities that lead to gathering adequate information to answer research questions. The process of data collection involves finding a research site and potential participants, gaining access to participants, and establishing contact with participants. Data collection also consists of determining the appropriate sampling strategy, selecting an adequate data collection process, and deciding a storage approach for interview data and participants' information (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Procedures for Recruitment. I planned to use purposive and snowball sampling strategies to reach out to individuals who fall within the selection criteria. To implement the purposive sampling, I obtained permission from the management of a residential

buildings' complex, located in the Washington, DC area, to recruit participants among the residents of their rental properties. I intended to post an invitation to participate in the research on the online residents' bulletin board of the residential properties, once I have obtained the approval of Walden's IRB to reach out to potential participants. The residents were supposed to receive the invitation in their emails. Interested individuals could reach me by email by replying to the invitation post through the bulletin board or calling me on the number I would provide in the invitation. I also intended to post the same invitation in hard copy format as flyers (Appendix A) on or in the buildings. Interested individuals could reach me on the number provided. For snowball sampling, I planned to ask willing participants to pass the invitation flyers to their friends and family members who were living in the Washington, DC area at the time of data collection and might qualify for and be interested in participating in the study. I also planned to ask that interested individuals reach me on the telephone number provided on the flyers.

My contingency plan was to recruit participants who were living outside of Washington, DC area in the United States, in case I was unable to recruit the anticipated number of participants that I needed for the research on the proposed research site and area. To proceed, I shared the invitation flyers with individuals who were willing to pass them to their connections who were living in the United States but not necessarily in Washington, DC area and might qualify for and be interested in participating in the study. Those individuals received the flyers via electronic mail and WhatsApp, or in hard copy format in person from me, depending on their preferences or the option that is most practical for both them and me. All the individuals who passed on the invitation were

aware that they had no obligation to share the information, and their decision to share the information would not affect my relationship with them and any treatment they might receive from Walden University's staff. None of them received incentives or compensation for sharing the information. I requested that interested individuals reach me directly on the telephone number provided in the invitation.

Participation. Participation in the study was voluntary. As recommended by Farooq and de Villiers (2017), I had a pre-interview telephone conversation with individuals who manifested interest in participating in the study. The goal of the conversation was to inform the prospective participants of the purpose of the study, the estimated duration of the interview, an overview of the questions, data confidentiality, and participants' confidentiality. During the conversation, I informed the prospective participants of the voluntariness of participation in the study and the right to withdraw from the study anytime without fearing any adverse consequences. I explained the use of the consent form and the demographic questionnaire to the prospective participants to prepare them and make them comfortable with the research process. Also, I discussed their availability for the interview session with them. I recommended that they be in a location that assured their safety and privacy during the interview.

The pre-interview conversation was also an opportunity to build rapport with the prospective participants to create an environment of comfort that could facilitate the collection of rich, in-depth data. During the conversation, in the context of building rapport, I specified my African origin to the prospective participants to establish commonality with them. After the pre-interview discussion with the potential

participants, I emailed the informed consent form and the demographic questionnaire to them. The consent form contained information about the purpose of the study, the benefits, and the risks inherent in participating in the research. It also included information about the duration of the interview, procedures for protecting the participants' personally identifiable information, and the possibility of conducting follow-up interviews or contacts. I informed the participants that they would receive the interview transcripts and research findings by email. I also provided the contact information of some counseling agencies in the consent form so that the participants can use their services if they become distressed after recalling an experience of microaggression.

In the email that I sent to the prospective participants, I instructed them to read and sign the consent form digitally if they agree to participate. To facilitate the digital signature, I requested that the participants enter “Signed” followed by their initials in the space reserved for the signature and email the consent form back to me. The prospective participants were also asked to complete the demographic questionnaire and send it along with the consent form back to me in reply to the email. I used the information provided on the demographic questionnaire to determine the prospective participants' eligibility to participate in the study. The information could serve for categorization during data analysis and the reporting of findings while protecting the identity of the participants.

Data Collection. I conducted semistructured telephone interviews in English at a date and time that were most convenient for each participant and to some extent, for me. I called from a location that assured the safety and privacy of the participants'

information so that no other individuals could overhear my conversation with a participant. The participants had the option to reschedule the interview if they were not comfortable or ready to proceed with it. Before I started each interview, I asked the participant if she/he was in a location that provided reasonable assurance of safety and privacy or if he/she would like to reschedule.

With the participants' approval, I digitally recorded the interviews. Semistructured telephone interviews in the study of Farooq and de Villiers (2017) lasted 45-60 minutes. Therefore, I anticipated conducting one to four interviews of 45 to 60 minutes per day within two to four weeks, depending on the availability of the participants and my availability. I adhered to the approach of qualitative telephone interviewing of Farooq and de Villiers by (a) conversationally conducting the interview in a friendly, courteous, yet professional, and objective atmosphere; (b) being flexible in the use of the interview guide; (c) being as clear as possible in my questions or statements; (d) using active listening strategy, involving providing feedback, probing, and rephrasing; (e) being a naïve listener; and (f) showing compassion and empathy.

According to Patton (2014) and Janesick (2011), participants should have the opportunity to provide comments regarding a study in which they participated. Therefore, at the end of each interview, I allowed the participants to express anything they would like to add that would be significant for the study. I thanked them for contributing to the study and reminded them that I would email the interview transcript to them. The participants had the option to either validate the accuracy of the transcription

or edit it for an accurate reflection of their responses after they review it. They also had the opportunity to amend their responses or add new information.

Data Analysis Plan

Choo and Lee (2014) defined data analysis as a way of classifying oral or written materials into recognized sets of comparable meanings; these classifications represent inferred or explicit communication. Qualitative data analysis is based on real-life inquiry, which involves identifying patterns and themes derived from rigorous coding (Poortman & Schildkamp, 2012). Data analysis must be systematic to adequately answer the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I planned to proceed with a manual data analysis due to the small size of the sample. I used Creswell and Poth's (2017) method of phenomenological analysis and representation to analyze data collected from the semistructured interviews. I chose Creswell and Poth's approach because the authors considered it to be a simplified version of Moustakas' (1994) method, which is focused on transcendental phenomenology. Creswell and Poth conceived qualitative analysis as having two layers. The first layer, relatively generic and common to the five main qualitative approaches (narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, study, ethnography, and case study), represents the first two steps in the data analysis method as described by Creswell and Poth. The second layer of the analysis process is specific to the qualitative approach in use.

Consequently, Creswell and Poth's (2017) method of phenomenological analysis and representation consisted of (a) managing and organizing the data, (b) reading interview transcripts and memoing the ideas that emerge from the data, (c) describing

personal experiences with the phenomenon under investigation through epoché, (d) developing a list of significant statements through data horizontalization, (e) gathering the statements into larger units of information or themes, (f) developing a textural description of what the participants experienced, (g) writing a structural description of how the participants experienced the phenomenon, and (h) completing a synthesis of the textural description and the structural description to communicate the essence of the experiences.

Data management and organization. Creswell and Poth (2017) visualized data analysis as a spiral that the researcher enters with data and exits with a report. To manage and organize the data, I transferred audio-recorded interviews and handwritten data, such as interview notes and research activities log or journal, into my personal computer. I fully transcribed verbatim the recorded interviews. I paid attention to verbal cues such as changes in tone, pauses, silence, expedited answers, and variation of the decibel level of the participant's voice because they might be an exhibition of hesitation, confusion, sadness, anger, or frustration. Those auditory cues could play pertinent roles in the interpretation of the interview data. I adopted a digital and nondigital filing system that made data identification and retrieval easy for me. More information about data management is available in the section of ethical procedures.

Reading and memoing. In an attempt to familiarize myself with the interview data, I read and reread each transcript to get a general idea of the participant's responses. I wrote notes or memos in the margins of the transcripts or in (electronic) comments during the readings to record the thoughts that occurred to me as I was engaging in the

initial analysis of the data. The memos, for instance, were about concepts and themes that emerged from the responses of the participants or the thought of a book or a scholarly journal article that I read.

Description of personal experiences through epoché. Epoché, in Edmund Husserl's context of philosophical phenomenology, involves a deliberate suspension of personal assumptions and tendencies that can interfere with an objective interpretation of the experiences and perceptions of other individuals (Butler, 2016). The process of epoché helps researchers bracket away their empirical knowledge of the phenomenon that they are studying in order not to influence the participants' perception of the phenomenon under investigation (Butler, 2016; Chan et al., 2013). The term *bracketing* is a metaphorical representation of epoché (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010). Butler (2016) acknowledged after Husserl (1983) that researchers' own experiences with the phenomenon under study represent a barrier to their objectivity in the research. Subsequently, Butler noted the importance of the review of the researchers' own experiences with the phenomenon under study, because it allows the researchers to put themselves in question (Butler, 2016). Husserl's process of epoché involves the Cartesian doubt, likely to free the researcher from his or her assumptions. To maintain objectivity in the analysis, I had described my personal experiences with microaggressions in a reflective journal between the interviews and during the transcriptions, the readings, or the analysis of the data. Doing so helped me develop an awareness of my position(s) vis-à-vis of the phenomenon of microaggressions, to set aside my assumptions during data collection and data analysis and representation.

Textural description of experiences. I developed a textural description of what the participants experienced. It consisted of a portrayal of the act of microaggressions that the participants experienced. I used the significant statements that I identified in the interview transcripts as direct quotes to support the descriptions.

Structural description of experiences. I wrote a structural description of how the participants experienced microaggressions. The description took into account the context or settings of the incidents of microaggressions. I followed up on conflicting statements with participants or kept the context of their occurrence and the circumstances of the participants in mind during the analysis and while writing the report of the findings.

Composite description. I completed a synthesis of the textural and structural descriptions to communicate the essence of the experiences with microaggressions. The focus of the composite description was what the participants' experiences had in common. However, I also reported significant unique experiences. Those unique cases were an addition to the literature or the theory of microaggressions.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Evidence of trustworthiness is what builds the confidence of readers and evaluators in research findings (Bowen, 2008). Therefore, researchers should seek to satisfy these criteria throughout their research to make their research trustworthy. The most common criteria used in the assessment of the trustworthiness of qualitative studies are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Anney, 2014; Cope, 2014).

Credibility

The term credibility is used to refer to the genuineness of research findings (Anney, 2014). When addressing credibility, researchers attempt to demonstrate that they presented a true picture of the phenomenon about which they inquired. According to Conrad and Becker (2011), the credibility of a study depends on the accurate reporting of the findings, without unconscious bias or deliberate manipulation. Bracketing, member checking, and transparency were the means I used to achieve the credibility of the study.

Chan et al. (2013) noted the usefulness of bracketing for enhancing the credibility of a study. As a means for researchers to increase awareness of their own bias, to set their assumptions aside, and to look at the central phenomenon of their inquiry with an open mind, bracketing is suitable for maintaining the integrity and rigor of research (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Tufford & Newman, 2010). I used bracketing to minimize the influence of my preconceptions on the course of the research. The awareness of my own bias helped me listen to the participants and respect their worldview, without attempting to impose my viewpoint on them. During data analysis, I maintained an open mind to let the participants' perspectives and experiences of the microaggressions emerge from the data and protect the data from being distorted by my assumptions.

Member checking was another method for me to achieve accurate and credible results. Member checking involves returning the interview transcript to the participants for review (Birt et al., 2019; Gringeri, Barusch, & Cambron, 2013). I emailed the interview transcripts to the participants to solicit their review and feedback on accuracy. I also sought credibility through the practice of transparency. Transparency involves a

clear and open reporting of data collection and data analysis (Tuval-Mashiach, 2017). Transparency consisted of using a rich and thick description of the research design, data collection, and data analysis process when reporting the findings of the research. The information provided in the final report can serve as a basis for the readers to assess the thoroughness of the research design, my conscientiousness as a researcher, my sensitivity, and my bias. As such, transparency requires maintaining an audit trail (Tuval-Mashiach, 2017). An audit trail consists of documenting the end-to-end process by which researchers got to the results of their inquiry (Houghton et al., 2013). In other words, it is the researchers' account for their research decisions and activities (Anney, 2014) Therefore, to achieve transparency, I kept track of events, activities in the various stages of the dissertation, especially data collection and data analysis, and provided an account of decisions made in an audit trail. The audit trail also included a reflective journal where I recorded my observations, impressions, thoughts, and remarks at various stages of the study.

Transferability

Transferability pertains to the ability to apply research findings to other settings, groups, or samples (Houghton et al., 2013; Creswell, 2009; Anney, 2014). Gringeri, Barusch, and Cambron (2013) perceived the use of thick description as an approach for enhancing the transferability of a study. They defined the term *thick description* as the representation of the research data and findings in a detailed manner (Gringeri et al., 2013). A thick description provides the readers with sufficient details to assess the applicability of the findings of a specific study to other times, people, or settings,

according to Gringer et al. (2013). The detailed description can also help readers determine whether results from a study apply to their research (Cope, 2014). I provided a rich and thick description of the research data and findings. A thick description may help some Sub-Saharan international students who are studying in the United States relate to the students in this research through their experiences. It may also provide the readers with enough information to decide if they can apply the findings of the study to other groups of international students, in other geographic settings, and at another time.

Dependability

Polit and Beck (2012) described research dependability as the consistency of data across similar situations. Triangulation and audit trail served to enhance the dependability of the results. Triangulation consisted of checking the telephone interview data, the demographic information contained in the demographic questionnaires, the interview notes, and prior scholastic literature about microaggressions in educational settings against one another to seek consistency and address inconsistencies. I sought consistency in the responses of the participants and consistency across the findings of similar research to ensure dependability. In that perspective, I followed up with participants on inconsistent responses and acknowledged and discussed the findings of the study that diverted from prior research findings.

Houghton et al. (2013) suggested an audit trail as a strategy to assess research dependability. Through an audit trail, researchers provide a detailed and clear record of the steps and decisions they made in the process of their study. I used an audit trail to account for the research activities and decisions, including clear documentation of the

choice of theory, methodology, and data analysis approach. It involved keeping a log of activities, developing memos, and maintaining a reflective journal and a research journal, as described in the section of credibility. The information provided in the audit trail can serve as a guideline for future research in the replication of the study.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to how researchers show that they accurately reported the responses of the participants and not their own biases or outlooks (Cope, 2014). The practice of member checking, as described earlier, can also boost the confirmability of the findings. By taking the interview transcripts back to the participants for confirmation or revision, I ensured the confirmability of the study. To demonstrate that I derived the results and interpretations from the data, I used direct quotes from the responses of the participants to support the themes found in the data (Cope, 2014). I also backed the themes with the existing literature about the issue.

Reflexivity was the other step I took to make sure that the findings derived from the worldviews of the participants rather than mine. It helps ensure the reliability and authenticity of the data (Patton, 2014). Reflexivity is a means to report and manage researchers' subjectivity while conducting a study (Gringer et al., 2013). I maintained a reflective journal during the data collection, data transcription, and data analysis. After each interview, I wrote notes to record pertinent details about the interview, namely the reactions of the participant, circumstances, interpretation of events and information collected, and my thoughts about the overall interview process, while the memory was still fresh in my mind.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical considerations are crucial in social research (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012). To ensure compliance with ethical research standards, I applied for a research ethics review with the proposal and supporting documentation to Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) and received approval before recruiting participants for the study. I obtained the permission of the management of the site where I initially planned to invite residents to participate in the study after I received IRB approval 08-02-18-0265043. Before the interviews, I obtained the informed consent of the participants. In the consent form that I had the participants sign, I provided information about the participants' right to withdraw from the research any time they wish. I informed the participants of the benefits and risks inherent with the participation in the study. I also provided the names and contact information of two nonprofit mental health or counseling organizations, for support or mental health assistance, in case the participants experience distress as a result of recalling or narrating any microaggression incident. Before the referral, I obtained permission to refer the research participants to the organizations from their management or gatekeepers (Appendixes B and C). Moreover, I assured the participants of the protection of their identity.

To protect the identity of the participants, I coded their names after I had received their signed consent forms and their completed demographic questionnaires. I used the letter *P,* followed by a number (P1, P2, P3…) to code the names. To address the privacy and confidentiality of the collected data, I (a) replaced the names of the participants with the codes that I had assigned to them before the interviews; (b) protected the identity of

the participants during the interviews by not calling them by their name during the recording of the interviews; (c) advised the participants to exclude their names and other parties' names from their responses during the interviews; (d) protected the identity of the participants throughout data analysis and the reporting of the findings by using the assigned codes and removing any information that could lead to identification of the participants from the data and the report; and (e) did not share the participants' personal information with unauthorized individuals.

I practiced proper data management. It involved uploading the audio recordings of the interviews on my personal password-protected computer within three days of each interview. The data management also included typing up handwritten records, such as the journals and the interview notes, and saving them in a dedicated folder on the computer. I organized the interview transcripts, interview notes, the consent forms, the demographic questionnaires, and the log of research activities in the folder. The folder had at least a backup copy on the computer and another password-protected personal computer. As a preventive measure against data loss, I created two backup copies of the data folder on two external drives. I assigned security passwords to computerized records and stored hard copies of the interview transcripts, signed consent forms, demographic questionnaires, audit trail, and interview notes in a locked file cabinet, along with the backup external drives. Besides me, only Walden IRB and my dissertation's committee can have access to the study's data in case of need. I organized the email communications in a dedicated folder in my email account and in an offline folder on my personal computer to make them easily accessible for review during the stages of analysis

and write up. The offline folders were also saved on the external drives. I performed due diligence by controlling the access to my email account on all the devices where I access it through the use of a password or other forms of authentication. I will permanently delete data in electronic format from all the devices and shred hard copies of data after 5 years of secure storage. However, I deleted the original audio recordings from the cell phone after I completed the study.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented a preview of the procedures that I followed in conducting this transcendental phenomenological research about the lived experiences of African students with microaggressions in U.S.-based higher education institutions. I presented the design of the study and the rationale behind the choice of the research tradition and accounted for the participants' recruitment and the sampling strategies that I adopted. I also accounted for criteria for participants' selection, data collection protocols, and the responsibility and roles of the researcher. In the chapter, I provided an overview of data analysis procedures and steps that I took to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. I also presented the research instrument and the steps I took to ensure instrumentation credibility and dependability. I will provide the results of the study in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study with a transcendental phenomenological approach was to explore the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan international graduate students who have experienced microaggressions in a higher education institution in the United States. The research question that guided this study was: What are Sub-Saharan African students' lived experiences with microaggressions while studying in U.S.-based higher education institutions? In this chapter, I will describe the setting of the study, the demographics and characteristics of the participants that are relevant to the study, and the data collection procedures. After that, I will present the analysis of the data, a description of the main themes that emerged from the analysis to answer the main research question, and evidence of the trustworthiness of the study. I will conclude the chapter with a summary of the major findings related to the research question.

Setting

I collected the data for this study from eight participants that I recruited through purposive and snowball sampling strategies. The data collection took place over the telephone at dates and times that were convenient for the participants and me. Because I conducted the interviews by phone, I was not able to observe the body language of the participants. Therefore, contextual information that could have enriched the data was not available. However, I paid attention to changes in tone, pauses, silence, expedited answers, and variations of the decibel level of the participants' voices to detect signs of

possible hesitation, confusion, sadness, anger, or frustration. Overall, the atmosphere of the interviews was calm and relaxed.

Despite the absence of visual cues, the telephone interview strategy was helpful because the participants were busy professionals who were living in different states at the time of data collection. The busy schedule of the participants did not keep them from being interviewed, except for one person. One recruited participant was nonresponsive to my attempts to reach him after he provided his signed informed consent and completed the demographic questionnaire. Therefore, I was not able to interview him. I excluded him from the study. Because of her busy schedule, another participant chose to be interviewed while she was driving. The interview session lasted no more than 10 minutes because she was brief in her answers. I covered the initial interview questions without realizing that I inadvertently skipped one of them. Also, the questions I asked the participant during the session were not in-depth enough. I conducted a 26 minutes follow-up in-depth interview with her in June 2019 to compensate for the limitations of the first interview.

All of the participants assured me that they were in a location where their safety and privacy were not at risk. They freely shared their experiences with microaggressions throughout the interviews. Two participants, in school at the time of data collection, expressed a fear of retaliation for participating in the study. However, after I assured them of the confidentiality of their identity, they were willing to share their experiences. No other participant expressed a fear of retaliation from anyone in her or his former educational institution.

Demographics

All participants were born and raised outside of the United States, were over 18 years old, and were living in the United States. They self-identified as having a national origin of a Sub-Saharan African country and reported to have experienced microaggressions in a higher education institution in the United States. The participants were fluent in English and completed a graduate degree or graduate certificate in a U.S.-based higher education institution within the last 5 years.

The study consisted of four males and four females between the ages of 25 and 40. They are from the following West African countries: Niger, Nigeria, and Togo. They were living in different states in the United States at the time of the data collection. Six participants completed their degree between 2013 and 2018. Two doctoral students had not yet completed all their degree requirements. Table 1 shows details of the participants' demographics pertinent to the study.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant number	Gender	Age	Country of Origin	State of Residency	Degree	Year degree was confirmed
1	Female	36	Togo	Texas	Master of Science	2016
2	Female	36	Niger	Maryland	Master of Science	2017
3	Male	25	Nigeria	District of Columbia	Master of Public Administration	2018
4	Male	35	Nigeria	Georgia	Doctor of Medicine	2017
5	Female	27	Togo	Maryland	Master of Science	2018
6	Male	30	Togo	Maryland	Philosophy Doctor	NA
7	Female	40	Togo	Virginia	Master of Arts	2013
8	Male	33	Togo	Maryland	Philosophy Doctor	NA

- P1 is a female, originally from Togo, who was 36 years old when I interviewed her. For her graduate studies, she attended a predominantly Black university where she experienced more exclusion from Black American students than she experienced from White American students.

- P2 is a female from Niger and was 36 years when I first interviewed her. I had two interview sessions with her because she was driving during the first interview, and it was not in-depth enough. Her focus was on discrimination from African American instructors and administrators.
- P3 is a male from Nigeria who was 25 years of age when I interviewed him. He shared his experience with microaggressions in graduate and undergraduate schools and reported having not experienced a lot of microaggressions in graduate school.
- P4 is a Nigerian male who was 35 years old at the time of the interview. He reported the bias of a White instructor who discriminated against him and other African students during his undergraduate studies in a predominantly White educational institution.
- P5 is a female from Togo who was 27 years old at the time of the interview. She shared how she experienced microaggressions from an Asian student at her university in the United States.
- P6 was 30 years old at the time of the interview. He is a male from Togo who was a victim of microaggressions from students and instructors.
- P7 is a female from Togo who was 40 years of age when I interviewed her. She experienced microaggressions both in the face-to-face and online settings of her graduate program.

- P8 is a male from Togo who was 33 years old when I interviewed him. He experienced microaggressions in his graduate program, where the students were from diverse backgrounds, and the faculty was predominantly White.

Data Collection

I interviewed eight participants via telephone between August 2018 and June 2019, after I received IRB approval (IRB approval # 08-02-18-0265043). I conducted the initial interviews with all the eight participants between August and November 2018, and a follow-up interview with one participant in June 2019. I followed the interview protocol outlined in Chapter 3. Each interview lasted no more than 40 minutes. The participants were asked the seven initial interview questions with some follow up questions, when necessary, to expand upon or clarify their answers. I recorded the interviews with two digital voice recorders; one was integrated into my cell phone, and the other was integrated into my computer. The use of two voice recorders proved to be useful as backup due to technical issues. For instance, one of the recorders failed to start at the beginning of an interview. I ended up having one recording for that interview. Having two original recordings was helpful during the transcription phase as well, because they complemented each other in terms of clarity and quality of sound. Sometimes, words, phrases, or statements that were inaudible in one recording were more perceptible in the other recording.

While I strove to fully adhere to the plan presented in Chapter 3 for data collection, circumstances beyond my control created a variation from the initial plan.

The deviations were in the duration of the overall data collection time and the duration of each interview. I anticipated conducting one to four interviews of 45 to 60 minutes per day within two to four weeks. However, the participants answered the initial interview questions and the subsequent follow-up questions in a shorter timeframe than I anticipated. In addition, the data collection took longer than the 2 to 4 anticipated weeks because of the difficulty in recruiting participants. Most of the individuals whom I reached out to did not qualify. They had either completed their graduate degrees in the United States over 5 years ago or obtained their graduate degrees or certificates from an online-only institution. Other individuals did not qualify because they did not complete a graduate degree or graduate certificate in a U.S.-based university. Data collection ended up stretching over 11 months.

The difficulty in recruiting participants for the study resulted in a variation from the original data collection plan. Initially, as a purposive sampling strategy, I planned to recruit participants among the residents of an apartment complex. Although I received written permission from the management of the properties to recruit participants on the targeted site, by the time I obtained the approval of IRB, the site was under new management. The new administration denied my access to potential participants on the site because of the racial nature of the topic. Therefore, after I received IRB's approval for changes in procedures on September 13, 2018, I attempted to recruit participants from Walden Participant Pool's website. However, no member of the Participant Pool showed interest in the study. Finally, I directly reached out to potential participants by talking to individuals who might qualify for the research and forwarding the invitation to them. I

recruited six participants through the purposive sampling strategy, as described in Chapter 3, and two participants through snowball sampling. I anticipated interviewing 12 to 18 participants. However, I ended the sampling after I completed eight interviews when I felt I reached saturation, meaning that no new themes emerged from the participants' responses.

Data Analysis

To prepare and organize the data for analysis, I downloaded the interview recordings into an audio-to-text converter. Before the uploads, I made sure that the recorded information was free from the names of the participants and the names of the universities where they experienced microaggressions. I transcribed the recordings using Temi's online audio-to-text converting service at www.temi.org. The use of the converter was more for organizational and formatting purposes. It allowed me to have the draft of a preformatted transcript and the audio in the same window. It also allowed me to play, playback, and control the speed in the same window. Because of the low accuracy of most of the initial transcripts obtained from the converter, I had to manually finalize the transcription by adding recorded words or statements that were skipped during the automated transcription, and by correcting erroneous transcriptions. Despite the low accuracy of most of the initial transcripts generated from the converter, the use of the audio-to-text converter was helpful and convenient for data organization.

I completed data analysis, moving inductively from small units of analysis in the data to bigger units. I constantly compared new data to the data I already collected, which enabled me to identify the emerging themes. I utilized bracketing and memoing,

as described in Chapter 3, between the interviews and during the transcription and the analysis. In each interview transcript, I identified significant statements about how the participants experienced microaggressions. I labeled each statement with a word or phrase to represent the concepts or small units of meaning that were important to the research problem. After that, I developed a list of significant statements, making sure that they were not repetitive and did not overlap with one another. Then I organized the statements by category and assigned a theme or larger unit of meaning to each category. The themes summarized the small units of meaning grouped into the categories. I wrote a description of what the participants experienced in terms of microaggressions in their higher education institutions, and I illustrated the descriptions with direct quotations from the transcripts. I also wrote a description of how the participants experienced the phenomenon of microaggressions. Finally, I synthesized the descriptions of what the participants experienced as microaggressions and how they experienced them, focusing on their perception and feelings to communicate the essence of their experiences.

Discrepancies occurred when a concept appeared to be inconsistent with the other concepts identified in the transcripts. To address discrepancies among concepts, I re-read the related segments of the transcripts to make sure that I did not misunderstand or misinterpret the responses of the participants. I also analyzed and compared the contexts or circumstances surrounding the discrepant concepts with the contexts of the concepts they were not consistent with to rationalize the discrepancies. I presented discrepant cases pertinent to the study, along with the details in the data that could contribute to the

resolution of the discrepancy. Discrepant cases can be an addition to the literature and theory of microaggressions or be a topic for further research.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Evidence of trustworthiness is important for the integrity and usefulness of the findings of a study (Cope, 2014). I addressed trustworthiness by ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Assurance of credibility involved the use of bracketing, member checking, and transparency. Transferability was achieved through the use of thick description. I used triangulation, prolonged engagement with data, and audit trail to address dependability. Paraphrasing during the interview, collaboration with participants, accurate transcription of the interview audio recordings, triangulation, and direct quotes accounted for confirmability of the study.

Credibility

I achieved credibility through bracketing, member checking, and transparency. In the practice of bracketing, I developed an awareness of my own bias by setting aside my assumptions and experiences with the phenomenon throughout the study, mostly during the collection of data, the analysis of data, and the reporting of results. I sent the interview transcripts to the participants by email to solicit their review and feedback on the accuracy of the transcription, in observance of member checking. I received no response suggesting a change in the transcript. Transparency involved maintaining an audit trail. The audit trail consisted in developing a log of research activities and writing a reflective journal of my observations, feelings, thoughts, and remarks during data collection, data analysis, and report writing. It also consisted of thorough documentation

of data collection and data analysis procedures. As part of the audit trail, I secured and organized the interview recordings and transcripts, the signed consent forms, and the completed demographic questionnaires. I also organized and stored relevant communications with participants and other individuals involved in the study, letters of cooperation, interview notes, and other documents related to the study.

Transferability

Achieving transferability required the use of thick description. I clearly portrayed data collection and data analysis in the report of the research, using a rich and thick description. The descrption involved the presentation of the data and findings of the study in a detailed manner to provide readers with sufficient information. The information I provided in the description may allow readers to assess the applicability of the research findings to other times, populations, or settings.

Dependability

I addressed dependability with triangulation, an audit trail, and prolonged engagement with data. In terms of triangulation, I checked the interview data, the demographic information contained in the pre-screening questionnaires, the interview notes, and the literature about microaggressions in educational settings against one another to ensure consistency and to well conceptualize the participants' description of their experiences with the phenomenon. An audit trail in the context of dependability consisted of accounting for research activities and decisions, which I addressed throughout the report. Being the interviewer, the transcriber, the analyst, and the report writer allowed me to have prolonged engagement with the data.

Confirmability

I achieved confirmability through paraphrasing during the interviews and collaboration with participants. Accurate transcription of the interview audio recordings, triangulation, and direct quotes were also my efforts to achieve confirmability. I used member checking as described earlier and direct quotes from the participants' responses to support the themes found in the data.

As a validation strategy, I collaborated with the participants during and after the interviews to gain a good understanding of their responses. Such collaboration helped ensure the accuracy of the transcription and minimize the chances of distortion during the analysis. I paraphrased most of the key statements of the participants to get their confirmation or their correction during the interviews. I also asked follow-up questions for clarification during the interviews. After the interviews, I collaborated with the participants by asking them follow-up questions that could help me clarify some ambiguities, to get a better understanding and produce an accurate analysis.

For instance, to get a better understanding of P8's account of inequality of opportunity given to African students to pass a comprehensive exam, I contacted the participant for further explanation and information about his school policies. Subsequently, I visited the website of the school through the link he sent me to read information about the comprehensive exam in his program.

Results

The participants gave general descriptions of the micro-aggressive treatments they received or provided specific examples of incidents or situations of microaggressions that they experienced in their higher education institutions in the United States. They also shared their perspectives on the issue by disclosing how the acts or behaviors of microaggressions made them feel. Through the analysis of the descriptions and examples the participants gave, I identified three major themes, as listed in Table 2. They were (a) feelings of marginalization, (b) sense of resignation, and (c) survival.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes of Microaggressions

Themes	Sub-themes
Feelings of marginalization	• Ignored and not included • Sense of belittlement • Unequal opportunity
Sense of resignation	• Awareness • Nothing to do about it • Acceptance • Moving on
Survival	• Persistence and focus • Rising above the situation • Keep moving • Avoidance and distancing

Theme 1: Feelings of Marginalization

The theme of marginalization emerged from all the participants' accounts of their experiences. The participants indicated that students, instructors, school administrators,

and office staff, marginalized them in various ways. They revealed that they were subjected to marginalization inside and outside their classrooms. The dominant concepts that characterized marginalization in their experiences were (a) ignored and not included, (b) sense of belittlement, and (c) unequal opportunity.

Ignored and not included. Five participants stated that instructors and students ignored them and were not inclusive towards them. The participants said instructors and classmates were not willing to work with them. For instance, P1 noted that domestic students in her class were accepting international students in their group only if the group was missing a person to meet the required size of the team. P7 described an incident where a White domestic student told her to go and join another team, which had the only other African student of the class in it. P8 said many instructors turned him down when he asked them to be his mentor for his dissertation. He used the word reluctant to describe the attitudes of his classmates and instructors towards working with him. P4 stated:

> If a student is found to be struggling in a class, normally, a professor would try to sit down with the students and find out what aspect of the class is challenging to them. I, myself, did not have such experience in this class. So, even though I was struggling, that I was affected by my score, the professor never actually cared to sit down with me anywhere . . . [However], that was happening with my colleagues that were not in the minority group.

The participants stated that students ignored them and did not integrate them into social and academic activities, including interactions in the classroom and recreational areas. P7 said,

> In the recreational areas, it is also hard . . . to be . . . part of conversations, because when . . . people talk, and then the minute you try to . . . take your turn into the conversation; it's just like a dead . . . silence.

The participants also mentioned having been ignored, not welcomed, and not integrated when they described their experiences inside their project groups. P7 noted, "I just felt like my comments were being ignored." P1 stated, "Working in that group, you will not feel integrated. You will not feel welcome. You will not feel like you are part of that group or the project. Anything is just among them. They … kind of ignore you." The participants used terms such as, *not belonging*, *not from here*, *I am different*, *feeling different*, and *being treated differently*, to describe how they felt about their situations. For instance, P7 said, "I just felt . . . more attached to online classes . . . because of that constant feeling of not belonging." Speaking of her experience, P1 said, "It reminds me all the time that hey, I am not from here. It reminds me all the time that I am different."

Sense of belittlement. Seven participants reported behaviors of students, administrators, instructors, and other faculty members that made them feel minimized. They stated those individuals treated them as least important and inferior in terms of their place in society, their intellectual aptitude, their accent, and their linguistic skills. Some of the participants also reported that some individuals made comments about their accent

or how they spoke. They also indicated that some individuals asked them unpleasant questions about their countries of origin. For instance, P7 stated:

> In the classroom, . . . when I'm trying to speak in public, . . . people tend not to pay attention. Others actually, openly commented on my accent or tried to repeat the words the way I poke them . . . I mean, they will just make comments that . . . relate to the way I speak and my origin in a way not because they want to get information. They're more like to make me feel unwelcome.

P5 also said an Asian student asked many questions that made her feel uncomfortable. The questions included how she came to the United States, if the French language spoken in her country was the same as the one spoken in France and if she could write French like people from France.

The participants indicated they were the objects of those treatments because of their accents, their limited proficiency in English, or their African origin. P6, who used the word *diminished* to describe how he felt, observed, "They think that you are inferior, sometimes because you don't speak, for example, their language to express yourself very well." P8 said, "If we are in class, they give like more importance to Asian students than African students." P3 described the dismissive behavior of a dean in response to his aspiration to get an internship abroad in these terms:

> There was a very . . . condescending tone that this person had throughout the conversation . . . that kind of stood out to me . . . I think the general impression was that okay, . . . because you are from Africa, you should be limited to a particular line of work.

Four participants indicated that their classmates interrupted them when they were speaking and dismissed, rejected, or ignored their inputs in group discussions. Some of them stated that through negative body language or questions such as "What did you say?" or "Can you repeat your question?" their classmates and instructors claimed not to understand what they said. The participants said some individuals did not give any importance to what they said and made some noise in the background whenever they were speaking. For instance, when speaking of the student who told her to join another group, P7 noted, "She was pretty much like leading the conversation. So, that made it hard for me to really express myself, just because she kept shutting me down, or talking over me, or ignoring that I'm trying to speak." P6 portrayed the reactions of his classmates when he spoke in some classes as follows:

> You can hear a background noise of people doing uh uh uh like for them you are wasting their time, . . . or they think that you are trying to make up stuff. . . . They would make you feel that . . . either they cannot understand what you're saying, or [be] acting like they don't understand what you are saying, or just rudely interrupt you while you are talking, just to make their point.

The participants said some individuals questioned their qualifications for their academic program or did not take them seriously. P3 indicated that "People's body language or subtle comments are kind of suggesting the fact that they think that . . . you're not a serious person or that you are not going to do your own work in a group project." He continued by saying, "It is this certain . . . body language or something about the whole interaction that gives you the sense that these people don't trust you to do

what, you know, you are there to do". P8's perception was, "They think like . . . because we came from African countries, . . . we are not good enough". Also, when giving her impression on the comment "Speak American English" that an instructor left on her paper for using British spelling instead of American spelling to write a word, P7 said, "She questioned my ability to be in the class."

Some participants stated that people measured their intellectual capacity by how they spoke English. They reported having been treated as if they were expected not to be intelligent or cultivated. In that context, P3 noted, "When I'm with classmates, and then I demonstrate knowledge of some particular facts or maybe I've read a particular book, and then, . . . my classmates sometimes will look extremely surprised." For P8, "They think like maybe [because] you don't really speak the [English] language, you might not know the topic." Some participants, who were among those who did not state they had difficulties in expressing themselves in English, experienced another form of microaggression. They said they witnessed verbal expressions of surprise from some individuals regarding their linguistic skills. For example, when speaking of the behavior of some of his classmates, P3 said,

> People . . . , . . . when I . . . speak in class . . . very loudly and . . . confidently, . . . they . . . pull me back at the end of the class, and . . . express shock that I can speak English as if English were . . . an indicator of intellect or intellectual capacity.

He also stated that some individuals made comments like "Oh my God! . . . You speak so much English!" In the same context, P5 reported that the Asian student asked her

questions such as "Your country is in Africa. How is it that you speak French and English so well?"

Unequal opportunity. Six participants mentioned that they did not get the same opportunity as their peers to succeed in their programs, to improve their grades, to pursue their ambitions, to participate or express themselves in the class, or to socialize. In that context, P2 stated:

> A lot of times, we were not being given the same opportunities, and by opportunities, I mean . . . for example, if we wanted to have a deadline extended, it wouldn't really necessarily be okay for us, but then when somebody else requests, then it would be okay.

P4 described how an instructor was giving points to racial majority students in some areas but was denying them to racial minority students, mostly Africans:

> When you solve a math problem, especially in a course like differential equations, sometimes you don't reach the final answer, but you actually score based on your steps as you actually walk towards the final answer. And this often, the professor will actually grade you for those different steps . . . depending on how much you had correct, even without the correct final answer. So in this class, for the minorities, when you don't arrive at the expected final answer, you do not get some of these partial points that you see . . . your classmates actually get . . . Those [classmates] are not in the minority group.

P8 stated that African students in his program did not have the same chance as other students to complete their programs. They were expelled from the school after the

first unsuccessful attempt to pass their comprehensive exam. At the same time, other students who were not from Africa were able to take the exam more than once. "Give us a chance, a fair chance like everybody else," he said. P2 used a metaphor to portray inequality of opportunity for African students. She viewed opportunities as doors that are less open for African students. "A lot more doors, I feel like, are open to others compared to us, and . . . I just feel like . . . [I] have to work a lot harder in order to get where I'm going," she said. In the same perspective, P8 compared microaggressions to roadblocks set up in the way of African students: "They keep . . . putting like roadblocks in front of us." P1 observed:

> Finding yourself in a situation where they set the communication, or they set the interaction like 'you do not belong here' or 'you are not one of us' limits your social life. It limits your networking in the class with other students."

P3 also evoked the notion of being limited: "I just felt like I was being . . . limited on the basis of the fact that . . . I [am] an African."

Theme 2: Sense of Resignation

The participants exhibited an attitude of resignation. Although they were not happy about their experiences with microaggressions, they coped with the situation. Microaggressions were not a surprise for them. P4 indicated, "I wasn't too surprised because I've heard these things before from like other friends that have experienced something like this before." P7 also said, "I know what's going on in the country I live in, so I just let it go."

The participants stated they could not change the situation. P6 pointed, "Hey, those things will always happen, and there is nothing you're going to do about it." P1 said, "It's not something that you can ask a student or a professor to help you with," and P8 said, "You know that it's not right. You know that it's not fair, but you deal with it." Fighting back seemed to be a losing battle for him. "I told myself, you know, there are things out of your control or out of your hands," P8 noted. He did not want to engage in any confrontation with individuals in a position of power. For instance, he stated, "I was upset about it, but what can I do? You know, like those are your professors. . . . At the end of the day, to get your [degree], . . . they're going to have the final say on it. So I didn't want to get into a confrontation with any of them." P6 was the only participant who said he always defended himself by talking back. "I always make sure that when someone tries to display any [micro]aggression-based behavior towards me, I make it clear to the person . . . I'm the wrong person to mess . . . with," he said. Still, he said afterward, "I moved on with that. That doesn't define me, you know. It just happened, and you move on."

Having got used to microaggressions, the participants accepted the circumstances as they were and moved on. They ignored the discrimination and putdowns they were going through. According to P2, "The bad feeling was at the very beginning when you first realized what is happening, but then after you . . . get used to it and just deal with it, . . . it doesn't matter anymore." P4 said, "I just pretty much accepted it the way it is, and I just moved on." Although the participants accepted their condition, the acceptance was not passive. They were more focused on surviving than fighting back.

Theme 3: Survival

The participants shared how they survived microaggressions. They stated they were frustrated, annoyed, or intimidated by microaggressive acts and behaviors. Still, they adopted strategies to overcome and survive microaggressions. Five participants said they were persistent and focused, rose above the situation, and kept moving toward their goals.

Persistence and focus. The participants said they were persistent and committed to survive microaggressions through hard work. They sustained having worked hard and put more effort than was required to survive and prove themselves to the individuals who discriminated against them. For example, P1 stated, "You have to be a persistent student." and P 8 pointed out, "The only thing that I can do to survive is to work hard and prove myself." P1, who said she volunteered for additional tasks in her teams, noted, "You overcome that microaggression by being a hard worker, by overworking yourself, by having more to do in your study than it's actually required." Some participants stated they remained focused on their goals. For example, P2 said, "I had a goal, and I just had to . . . do everything I needed to do on time, and I had to just make sure I put in extra work". P1 said, "You have to be a student that is really objective, disciplined, and know why you are in this class."

Rising above microaggressions. P1 used the expressions *to rise above* and *go over those obstacles* to describe her approach to surviving microaggressions. Similarly, P2 said she had to "go above and beyond" and "push through." P6 had similar imagery. For him, African students were facing two choices, either they let microaggression "bury"

them, or they "rise up and keep moving." The philosophy of P2 was, microaggression "can either make you stronger or it can . . . make you weaker. So, you just have to choose." She observed, "I just feel that [microaggression] made me a stronger person . . . It made me have a tougher skin, and this made me feel like I know that things would never be easy."

Keep moving. The participants stated they kept moving forward despite the obstacles that they found on their way. P8 said, "I try to block it from my mind. I know it's happening, but you know, you need to find a way to move forward. I'm not going to let it stop me from moving forward." P7's principle was, "You just brush it off and just take it one day at a time. . . . So, the problem is you need your education, and my attitude has always been I won't let anyone affect my ability to succeed." For instance, she described an incident where an African American student imitated how she spoke and made comments such as "Oh no! You're not gonna talk. Are you?" and "Are you gonna make sure I understand?" when she was getting ready to go to the front of the class to make a group presentation. She noted,

> My motivation went from 10 to like zero . . . I felt like I was dragging myself to the front of the classroom, but then I realized, oh my gosh, I really need to score really high on this presentation. So that made me give . . . a good presentation.

Avoidance and distancing. Five participants stated they avoided putting themselves in situations where they were likely to be the targets of discrimination. They did so by complying with rules and requirements imposed on them and by distancing themselves from their microaggressors as much as possible. For example, P2 said, "I

would be a person that would always have everything done on time, and I would be a person that would never have to give an instructor a reason to . . . do something that would not benefit me or to stress me out." P7 stated she made sure she did not repeat the type of spelling error on which the instructors commented with "Speak American English.", and P4 said he asked his instructor for help once and did not ask him again after the unsuccessful attempt to get academic support from him. P2, P7, and P8 stayed away from or limited contacts with the individuals who perpetrated microaggressions against them. P2 stated she "did not have any more interactions other than faculty/students type of relationship" with the instructors and administrators who treated her differently. P7 indicated that whenever she saw the name of the instructor who told her to speak American English associated with a class, she did not select that class. In the case of the African American student who imitated her accent and the White student who told her to join another group, P7 stated, "I just tried less and less to interact with them unless it's something really, really related to the classroom." Regarding the faculty members who declined his requests, P8 stated, "I try to stay away from them as much as possible . . . If you know that whatever you are going to ask them, [the answer] is going to be a *no*, so what's the point of going there?" P5 almost had a similar approach when the Asian student kept asking her the questions that made her feel uncomfortable. She stated:

> At first, I was like, oh, I don't think I want to be close to this person. And then later on, when I figured out that he just didn't know anything, I think I became

more positive about it because he showed that he was interested in actually learning more about my background."

Summary

Three major themes emerged from the data. They were (a) feelings of marginalization, (b) sense of resignation, and (c) survival. The participants experienced exclusion, ignoring, belittlement, and unequal opportunity in their higher education institutions in the United States. They were aware of what was happening to them and accepted the situation as it was. At the same time, they were persistent and focused on their goals. They rose above the situation of microaggressions, and worked hard to survive and prove themselves to the individuals who underestimated them or exhibited a form of discrimination towards them. The participants also made an effort to comply with rules and requirements imposed on them and limited their interactions with their microaggressors, to minimize their exposure to microaggressions. In Chapter 5, I will present my interpretation of the findings and acknowledge the limitations of the study. I will also make recommendations for future research and discuss the possible implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan international graduate students who have experienced microaggressions in a higher education institution in the United States. I adopted the approach of transcendental phenomenology to help me have a good understanding of the experiences of the participants. The main themes extracted from the data were marginalization, sense of resignation, and survival. Exploring and understanding the experiences of African students in U.S.-based universities and colleges is essential for gathering the information that can be used to support the advocacy for the improvement of the experiences of African students in higher education institutions in the United States.

In this chapter, I will compare the findings with the results of prior studies. I will also analyze and interpret the findings in the context of the theory of microaggressions. Then, I will present the limitations of the study, the recommendations for future research, the implications for positive social change, and the conclusion of the study.

Interpretation of the Findings in the Context of the Literature

The key themes that emerged from the participants' description of their experiences with microaggressions were marginalization, sense of resignation, and survival. All participants indicated that they experienced marginalization from instructors, administrators, office staff, or peer students. The subthemes associated with marginalization, namely being ignored and excluded, sense of belittlement, and facing unequal opportunity, align with findings from studies by Houshmand et al. (2014),

Chavajay (2013), and Lee and Opio (2011). For example, the subthemes of being ignored and being excluded from course activities and group discussions support the findings from the study by Houshmand et al.'s (2014), where Asian international students reported that domestic students and faculty of the university rendered them invisible through exclusion and avoidance. The results regarding the subthemes associated with marginalization also support the findings of Newsome and Cooper (2016), where students reported that instructors and domestic students disregarded international students' inputs in classroom group discussions and were unwilling to talk with them. Those students reported feelings of rejection from students and instructors.

Participants of the current study stated that faculty members and peer students' comments, questions, and attitudes towards them made them feel belittled. The sense of belittlement was also a finding in Houshmand et al. (2014) and Lee and Opio's (2011) works in terms of ridicule based on negative stereotypes and the participants' accents. Findings from research by Zhang (2016a) showed that the feelings of being ignored, being excluded from discussions, and being treated as if they were not as qualified as domestic students for their academic programs were factors that limited Chinese international students' participation in debates or conversations in their university. One of the strategies the participants of this study used to survive microaggressions was to distance themselves from the individuals who subjected them to microaggressions. The finding is an indication that microaggressions can negatively affect African students' interpersonal relations with individuals who perpetrated microaggressions against them. Distancing, coupled with noninclusive attitudes of other students towards the participants,

could interfere with the opportunity for them to make friends. The latter findings may justify why Chavajay (2013) categorized interpersonal relationships among the significant challenges for international students who study in the United States.

The subtheme of unequal opportunity referred to the participants' feelings of discrimination from some faculty members who demanded more from African students in terms of compliance and academic performance. Lee and Opio (2011) had similar results in their study, where African students stated some instructors graded or treated them unfairly compared to non-African students. In the present study, the findings of discrimination from instructors, administrators, and other staff members, related to their unwillingness to work with African students, granting their requests, or providing them with other supports that they needed, sustains Lee and Opio's findings of scarcity of faculty members' support to international students.

The results related to the themes of sense of resignation and survival as part of the experiences of African students with microaggressions extend the knowledge in the discipline. They are an indication of how the participants coped with and survived microaggressions. The participants showed resilience through how they responded to and dealt with microaggressions in their educational institutions. In front of the situation of microaggressions, the participants had two principal responses: resignation and survival.

Resignation was a passive attitude the participants had towards microaggressions. They developed an awareness of their condition of marginalized ethnic minority group members and got used to it. Having realized that they could not end microaggressions,

they accepted their condition as it was and took their focus away from the treatments of marginalization to place it on their academic goals.

Survival characterized the active response of the participants to the microaggressive behaviors that targeted them. It was a description of the actions the participants, who were empowered to work harder, took to survive discrimination and achieve their educational goals. The participants did not give up and did not let microaggressions distract them from their academic goals. Instead, they were determined to succeed in their academic programs and transcended what they saw, heard, or felt in terms of microaggressions. The participants protected themselves through avoidance and distancing by reducing their exposure to microaggressions. The Asian international students in the study of Houshmand et al. (2014) also exhibited an attitude of avoidance in response to microaggressions by engaging with their fellows Asians and keeping away from some academic activities or environments.

The subtheme of persistence and focus designated how the participants worked harder than they were required to succeed, survive discrimination, meet all academic demands imposed on them, or earn respect, acceptance, and inclusion of their peers. It reminds of the theme of self-determination in the research of Edward-Joseph and Baker (2014), where Carribean oversea students stated they were determined to succeed and excel in their studies. The determination of the Carribean students helped them develop confidence in their ability to do their required academic work. They were also willing to work hard. In the present study, the perceptions of microaggressions lead the victims to adopt a proactive approach that gave them the strength to overcome microaggressions. It

was not the case in the study of Lowinger et al. (2014), where perceived discrimination predicted procrastinative behaviors among male Chinese students of three universities in the United States.

Interpretation of Findings in the Context of the Theory of Microaggression

The themes identified in the responses of the participants were related to the theory of microaggression. Feelings of marginalization involved the three categories of microaggressions, namely microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations, which Sue et al. (2007) identified in a taxonomy of microaggressions. Some acts or behaviors of microaggressions belonged to more than one category. Microassaults refer to explicit derogation mostly intended to hurt the victim (Ong, 2013; Sue et al., 2007). The participants reported some behaviors that fit into the category of microassaults. Those behaviors consisted of acts such as imitating their accents, complaining about their accents, interrupting them when they were talking, and verbally rejecting an African student by telling her or him to join another group.

Microinvalidations consist of actions that negate, exclude, or nullify the feelings or experiences of an individual who is from a different racial minority group (Ong, 2013; Sue et al., 2007). Microinvalidations are also behaviors and communications that question or delegitimize the ideas and experiences of persons from racial minority groups (Joshi et al., 2015). Some examples of microinvalidations the participants reported would be instructors refusing to help African students address their academic challenges or not letting an African student who is having difficulties to express his or her thoughts in English finish his or her statements. Another example of microinvalidations, which is

based on Joshi et al.'s definition, is rejecting every suggestion an African student makes in a group project, even if it could benefit the group.

Microinsults refer to behaviors, remarks, or comments that subtly insult, degrade, or minimize the racial or ethnic legacy of a person (Ong, 2013; Sue et al., 2007). In the context of this study, the degrading behaviors or communications targeted the cultural background and the nationality of the victims. Ignoring African students and acts such as comments about their accents, derogatory statements about Africans and their countries, or verbal and non-verbal expression of annoyance and impatience when an African student was speaking fell into the category of microinsults.

Limitations of the Study

One of the possible limitations of data collected for this study was the absence of nonverbal cues from participants during the data collection process. Telephone interviews were the principal data collection tool for this study. The use of telephone interviews did not allow me to see the body language of the participants. I might have missed some nonverbal information from their body language that could have expressed their feelings and emotions, or ideas and thoughts that they did not communicate verbally.

The possibility of limited transferability of the results may be another limitation for consideration. The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan international graduate students have who have experienced microaggressions in a higher education institution in the United States. Therefore, the results may not be transferable to other populations of international students in the United States. Also, the

data collected from a small sample of eight participants reflect the experiences of those individuals. The data do not necessarily represent the experiences of all the Sub-Saharan African students in the higher education institutions the participants attended. Neither do the results represent the experiences of African students in all higher education institutions in every state in the United States. As a result, the findings cannot be assumed to be transferable to all African students in every state in the United States.

Also, the study may present a limitation in the transferability of the findings to groups of students from other parts of Africa. I attempted to recruit participants from other African countries such as Liberia, Gambia, Ghana, Benin, and Côte d'Ivoire without success. I was able to interview only five Togolese, one Nigerien, and two Nigerians. Therefore, the results of the finding may not be transferable to the population of other African students from other Sub-Saharan African countries in the United States.

Researcher bias may be another limitation of this phenomenological study. Despite my efforts to control bias through the use of bracketing, my researcher bias might have influenced data collection and interpretation, mainly because I belong to the target population of the study. Because I was the person who conducted the interviews, my own experience with microaggressions and my personal beliefs might have influenced some of the probing questions that I asked the participants during the interviews. My beliefs and experience might have influenced my interpretations of the data and the findings as well.

Finally, the language used in the interview protocol may also be a source of limitation for the study. All the participants were fluent in English. However, the fact

that I conducted the interviews in English might have presented an obstruction for some of them to fully communicate their experiences because English is not their first language or mother tongue. Those participants might have had difficulties in finding and using the right words to describe their experiences or feelings in English. Consequently, they might not have accurately put some of their thoughts into words in the description of their experiences with microaggressions.

Recommendations for Future Research

In this study, I explored the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan international graduate students who have experienced microaggressions in a higher education institution in the United States. The eight participants I interviewed are originally from Togo, Niger, and Nigeria. Due to the limited geographic areas from which the participants come, the results of this study may not be transferable to other populations of international students in the United States. Therefore, more qualitative studies should be conducted to examine the experiences of students of other cultures or nationalities with microaggressions in U.S. colleges and universities.

With the rise of online education in this era of technology, a recommendation for future research would be to conduct a mixed-method study of the experiences of African students in the online academic environment. The study could provide empirical evidence of the issue of microaggressions in the virtual higher education world. The quantitative component could allow the researcher to assess the prevalence of microaggressions against African students in the online educational setting, and the qualitative part would enable the researcher to document the types of microaggressions

perpetrated against them. The study could help create awareness for students and faculty of the issue of microaggressions directed against a racial minority group of international students online. Also, the study could contribute to creating a safe virtual learning environment for marginalized groups and ultimately bring a positive social change in the contemporary world of education (Hoekman & Carroll, 2015).

The experiences of the participants in this study were delimited to microaggressions in their school. Therefore, this study did not address microaggressions perpetrated against African students in other settings outside their educational institutions. A further qualitative study should explore African students' experiences with microaggressions in academic residencies, conferences, or student exchange programs. The study could help gain an insight into the experiences of African students with microaggressions beyond the boundaries of their higher education institutions.

This study involved a sample of individuals from Africa who completed their graduate studies within the last 5 years in a university based in the United States. Therefore, the themes of resignation and survival derived from the data collected were based on the experience of African students who completed their programs. A future quantitative study involving individuals who are pursuing or who have taken graduate courses, regardless of whether they finished their academic programs, could help establish the relation between coping mechanisms of African students with microaggressions and academic success. The study could lead to determining which coping strategies are most effective in helping the students cope with microaggressions, which could benefit African students and other international students. Information

gathered from such a study could potentially be used to design and develop interventions to help students address the issues of microaggressions that they face.

This study addressed the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan international graduate students who have experienced microaggressions in a higher education institution in the United States. An additional qualitative study could be conducted to determine the perceptions of domestic students and faculty members regarding the issue of microaggressions targeting African international students in the United States. Findings from such a study could lead to a platform for discussions among international students, domestic students, and faculty members regarding the various forms of discrimination in higher education institutions in the United States and how to address the bias. The debate could lead to a shared understanding of the perspectives of one another and contribute to the improvement of the relationships between international students, domestic students, as well as faculty members of higher education institutions in the United States.

Though colleges and universities have a system in place for students to report discrimination and bias, the participants of this study did not report the abuses. A mixed-method inquiry about international students with reporting instances of microaggressions should also be conducted. It could provide knowledge of the barriers to reporting cases of microaggressions in universities and colleges. The research could benefit educational institutions that strive to create an inclusive, respectful, and equitable environment for all students without distinction of race, ethnicity, or nationality.

Implications for Positive Social Change

Findings from this study contribute to the existing body of literature on the experiences of international students with microaggressions in higher education institutions in the United States. Results from this study could be used to provide empirical evidence to raise awareness of the discrimination against African students attending some universities and colleges in the United States. Human services professionals and professionals in other fields could use the information from the results of this study to advocate for policy changes or the development of policies that prescribe procedures for addressing microaggressions against international students in the United States.

The findings from this study could be used to promote social change by highlighting the need for legislation that protects racial minority students from microaggressions or forms of discrimination not covered by the Civil Rights Act. Human services and other professionals could use the results of this study to advocate for the development of intervention programs such as support groups that could help African and other racial minority students cope with the various forms of microaggressions. Furthermore, the findings could be used as empirical evidence for higher education institutions' administrators to take proactive steps toward developing initiatives and programs that promote positive campus climates for African and other racial minority students. For instance, college or university administrators or other faculty members could organize social events or classroom fun activities that facilitate interactions and friendship between international students and domestic students.

Some of the acts or behaviors of microaggressions described in the findings exhibited a lack of cultural competency or diversity and cultural awareness from the instructors, school administrators, other faculty members, and the students who perpetrated them. Culturally competent educators are expected to value cultural differences and demonstrate respect towards different cultures, languages, and beliefs, which should reflect in their teaching methods (Wilson, McChesney, & Brown, 2017). Teaching practices that take the cultural heritages of students into account are useful tools for engaging students from diverse backgrounds (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015). Therefore, higher education professionals should develop programs of cultural awareness and sensitivity and diversity to educate both faculty and students on matters of diversity and inclusion. All those actions could have implications for positive social change.

Conclusion

The results revealed how African students were subject to microaggressions in their higher education institutions in the United States. The data showed that the participants in this study were the targets of microaggressions from individuals who played various roles in educational institutions. The discrimination the participants dealt with made them feel ignored, not included, belittled, and not given the same opportunity as their non-African peers to succeed and network. In front of the situation, the Participants adopted an attitude of resignation and were empowered to overcome and survive discrimination through persistence, focus, hard work, avoidance, and distancing.

The results also showed that domestic students and the instructors focused on the cultural identity of the African students and how they were expressing themselves instead

of focusing on the message they tried to convey and their work. That attitude might have prevented them from understanding what the African students said. Microaggressions represent a reputational risk for the perpetrators and the educational institutions where they occur. This study will contribute to the existing body of literature on the experiences of African students with microaggression in educational institutions of the United States, which combined, may to lead to policy changes.

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Appendix A: Study Invitation Flyer

VOLUNTEERS WANTED FOR A RESEARCH STUDY

Lived Experience of African Students With Microaggression in U.S.-Based Higher Education Institutions

I am looking for men and women who

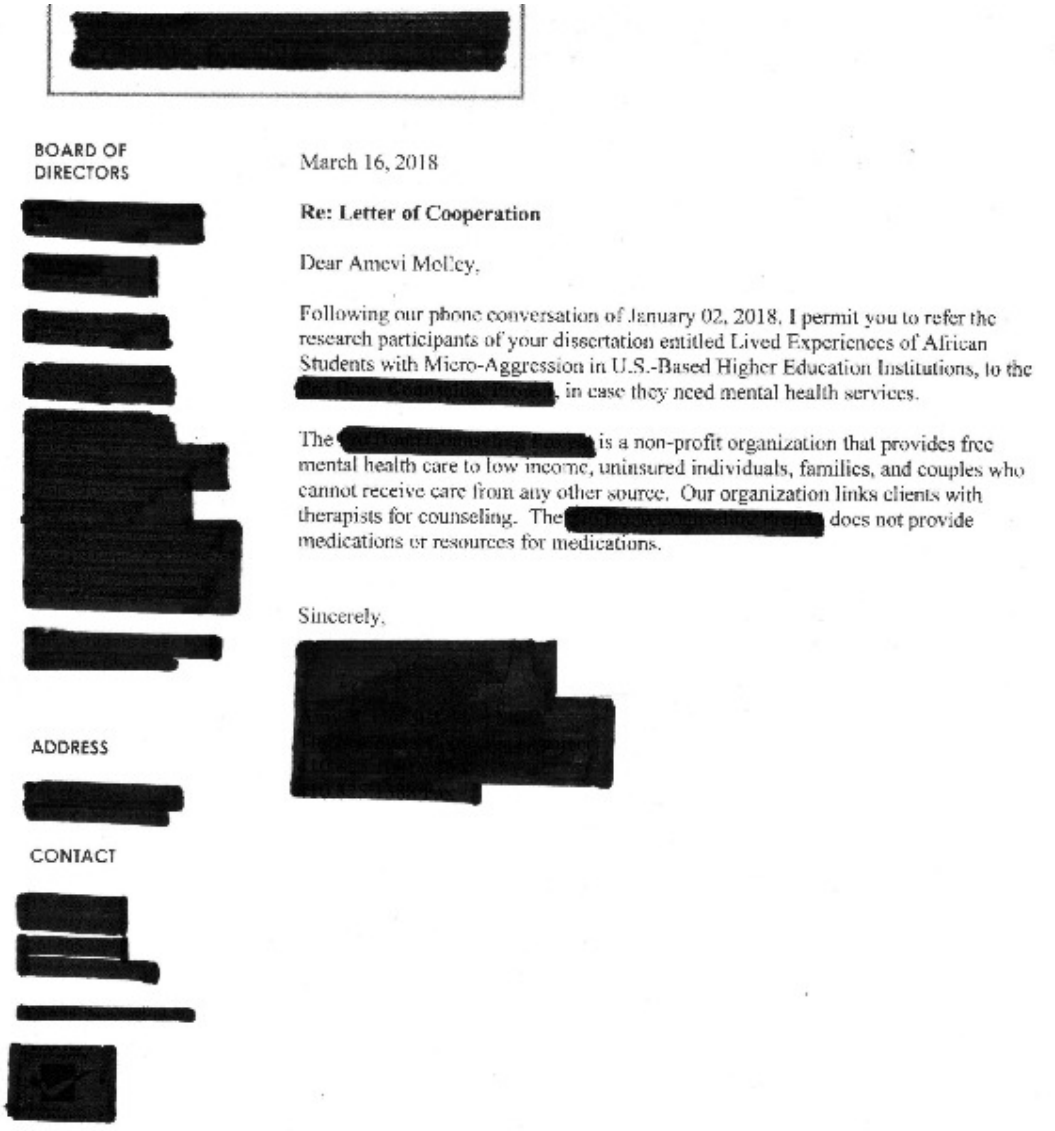
- are originally from a Sub-Saharan African country;
- have completed a graduate degree or certificate in the United States within the last five years;
- have experienced microaggressions (i.e., covert and subtle forms of discrimination) in a U.S.-based university;
- were born and raised outside the United States;
- are living in the United States;
- are 18 years of age or older;
- are fluent in English; and
- are willing to participate in a telephone interview;

to take part in a research study about the lived experiences of Black African students with microaggressions in U.S.-based universities. This research project is part of a dissertation study conducted by Amevi Molley, who is a Ph.D. student at Walden University.

The study will explore the experiences of Sub-Saharan African graduate students who have experienced microaggressions within a higher education institution in the United States. Sharing your experience can contribute to the literature on the topic of microaggressions in U.S. universities. The literature may serve as the basis for program, policy or practice changes to improve Sub-Saharan African students' experiences on American campuses.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please call or text Amevi Molley at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation 1



[redacted]

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

[redacted]

ADDRESS

[redacted]

CONTACT

[redacted]

March 16, 2018

Re: Letter of Cooperation

Dear Amevi Mellcy,

Following our phone conversation of January 02, 2018, I permit you to refer the research participants of your dissertation entitled Lived Experiences of African Students with Micro-Aggression in U.S.-Based Higher Education Institutions, to the [redacted], in case they need mental health services.

The [redacted] is a non-profit organization that provides free mental health care to low income, uninsured individuals, families, and couples who cannot receive care from any other source. Our organization links clients with therapists for counseling. The [redacted] does not provide medications or resources for medications.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation 2

[redacted] Re: Request for Permission to Refer Research Participants

[redacted]

Tue 3/27/2018 8:58 AM

To:Amevi Molley <amevi.molley@waldenu.edu>;

[redacted]- Please type your reply above this line -[redacted]

Your request [redacted] has been updated. Reply to this email or click the link below:

[redacted]

[redacted]
Mar 27, 8:58 AM EDT

Hi Amevi,

Thanks for reaching out, and for your interest in spreading the word! We welcome you to share us as a resource, using the standard language provided below. Feel free to add context as needed:

[redacted]

I hope this helps, but please don't hesitate to reach out with any further questions.

Amevi Molley
Mar 27, 6:52 AM EDT

Good Morning,

I am a PhD candidate at Walden University. I am conducting research as part of the requirement for my PhD dissertation about the "Lived Experiences of African Students with Micro-Aggression in U.S.-Based Higher Education Institutions ". I am writing to request the permission to refer my research participants to your organization for support, in case they experience distress as a result of participating in my research.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Amevi Molley

[redacted]

This email is a service from [redacted]

Appendix D: Initial Interview Questions

- Could you please describe your experience with microaggressions when you were studying in a U.S.-based higher education institution?
- What role did the persons serve in the higher education institution?
- How did the situation make you feel?
- How did you respond to the situation?
- How have you coped?
- How did the situation affect your interactions with the individual (s) involved?
- What else would you like to share about your experience that would be significant for this research?