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A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF EXPERIENCES OF ACCULTURATION, ACCULTURATIVE STRESS, AND COPING AMONG BLACK INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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STUDENTS

By

MAAME ESI A. COLEMAN

B.A., University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, 2015

A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts Degree

Department of Psychology in the Graduate School
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MAAME ESI A. COLEMAN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial

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for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the field of Counseling Psychology

Approved by:

Dr. Tawanda Greer-Medley, Chair

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Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Maame Esi A Coleman, for the Master of Arts degree in Counseling Psychology, presented on January 17, 2019 at Southern Illinois University Carbondale

TITLE: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF EXPERIENCES OF ACCULTURATION, ACCULTURATIVE STRESS, AND COPING AMONG BLACK INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Tawanda M. Greer-Medley

This study was designed to describe the experiences of acculturation, acculturative stress, and coping behaviors among Black international students. While research exists on the acculturative and coping experiences of international students in the United States, very few studies have been designed to explicitly examine the experiences of Black international students. A majority of the existing literature has focused on experiences of Asian and Latin American international students (Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014). This study was intended to provide information about the acculturative experiences of Black international students enrolled at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Interviews were conducted with four focus groups, with three groups comprising of three participants and one group comprising of two participants. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using an interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA). The themes that emerged from the interviews shed light on experiences related to acculturative stress, anti-Black and anti-immigrant discrimination, and adjusting to a new academic environment. Themes also highlighted several ways that Black international students coped with these experiences (e.g., talking to other Black international and American students, keeping in contact with family and friends in their home country, and relying on a faith community). Results from this study will inform future research on how Black international students learn race within the U.S context, how geographical location influences the acculturative

experiences of Black international students, and the interactions between Black immigrant communities and African American communities. Results of this study could also be used to develop diversity trainings for university staff and community members, and to develop social programs specifically for Black international students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The United States of America has currently hosted more than half of the world's total number of international students, and remains the top country of choice for foreign students (Bai, 2016).According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), during the 2015-2016 school year, international college students in the United States topped one million for the first time ever, recording a seven percent increase in international student enrollment from the previous year. (IIE, 2017). The IEE also reported that international or foreign students currently make up about five percent of the total student population at U.S institutions of higher education. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), roughly 1.9% of students in four-year non-doctorate degree-granting public universities are foreign or international students. Two-point four percent (2.4%) of the students in public four-year doctorate granting universities are foreign or international, and 4.7% of the students attending private nonprofit four-year doctorate granting universities are internationals or foreign students (U.S Department of Education, NCES, 2012).

Despite the presence of international students on many U.S college campuses, little research exists on their experiences of acculturation, acculturative stress, and overall adjustment to the host countries. Although Black international students have an increased presence on U.S university campuses, there is very little research on their acculturative process and experiences as immigrant students of color in the United States. Researchers often to focus on the experiences of international students from Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Studies also homogenize international students, failing to recognize the racial and ethnic differences that impact their experiences in the host countries.

Acculturation

When international students relocate to the host countries, they acculturate into the new society, adopting practices and social norms of the host culture. According to one of the earliest definitions in the existing literature, acculturation occurs when individuals from different cultural groups continuously interact with each other, resulting in changes in the original cultural expression of either or both individuals (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). In more recent literature, acculturation has been conceptualized as a multidimensional process whereby an individual gradually adapts to, and identifies with, a host culture (e.g., Telzer, Yuen, Gonzales, & Fuligni, 2016; Vaclavik et. al., 2017). Although change can occur in both those who are acculturating and the citizens of the host country, acculturation often results in significant changes to the cultural expressions of the visitors (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1936). International students constantly interact with individuals in their host countries, absorbing aspects of the host culture, while imparting aspects of their original cultures unto members of the host country. International students, through their daily interactions with the host culture, may experience profound conflicts in cultural values (Constantine et. al., 2005). Acculturation can produce a significant amount of stress, and as some theories have suggested, a poor person-environment fit can exacerbate that stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Acculturative Stress

International students in the United States face challenges that may be unfamiliar to their American counterparts. One of such challenges is acculturative stress. Acculturative stress is explained as stress that emanates from adjustment into a new culture (Berry & Annis, 1974). Acculturative stress is different from general life stress in that it is directly related to the immigrant's acculturative process and can result in changes in the person's physical,

psychological and social well-being (Han, Pistole & Caldwell, 2017). The situations, challenges or incidents that result in the experience of acculturative stress are termed acculturative stressors. Common acculturative stressors that international students experience include language barriers (Yeh & Inose, 2003), homesickness (Smith & Khawaja, 2011), loss of social support (Constantine et al., 2005; Smith & Khawaja, 2011), educational and academic stressors (Misra & Castillo, 2000; Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008; Bai, 2016; Han, Pistole & Caldwell, 2017) and socio-cultural stressors (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Black international students, in their acculturative process also experience incidents of racism and discrimination, which lead to acculturative stress (Constantine et al., 2005; Boafo-Arthur, 2018). Because many of them come from country where they are part of the racial majority, becoming members of a racial minority in the U.S and experiencing racism might negatively impact their acculturative process. Since studies on international students rarely distinguish between race and ethnicity (Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014), there is little research exploring how issues of race affect Black international students' feelings of acculturative stress.

Coping and Coping Mechanisms

International students often develop a variety of coping strategies to handle the stressors of being minority students and acculturating to a new culture (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008). To understand and explain the processes of coping, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) developed the transactional theory of coping. Coping in this model is conceptualized as the individual's cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage both internal and external demands that have been appraised as exceeding the individual's resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). The transactional theory of coping identifies emotion-focused and problem-focused coping as two

types of coping mechanisms. Emotion-focused coping involves regulation of emotions, and problem-focused coping involves working to change the person-environment relation that is causing the distress (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen,1986). Some of the strategies that international students may adopt to cope with stressful person-environment interactions include making friends with other international students, remaining in close contact with their families of origin, relying on religion and spirituality, and very rarely, seeking psychological services. Although there is existing published literature on the coping mechanisms that international students utilize, researchers treated international students as a homogenous group. Therefore, there is very little research focusing on the coping experiences of Black international students. There is also a gap in the incorporation of research findings into university programs aimed at assisting Black international students in their transition. Hence, very few resources exist on many university campuses to assist international students in coping with acculturative stress. Given these gaps in literature, qualitative studies are needed to further understand the experiences of Black international students, and the support services they would need.

The current study was designed to qualitatively examine Black international students' experiences of acculturation, acculturative stress and stressors, and coping. In the study, I also examined how these experiences influenced students' perceptions of their academic performance. Themes from this study included positive and negative experiences of adjusting to the United States, level of identification with home countries, experiences of language barriers and speaking with a foreign accent, experiences of racism, profiling and discrimination, and using food, friends, family and food as coping mechanisms.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

International students often experience challenges in United States (U.S.) universities and colleges related to their international status (Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008). Acculturation difficulties are the challenges that international students' experience in adjusting to the host country and culture (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Such difficulties may include cultural (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005), academic (Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet & Kommers, 2012) and language challenges (Sawir, 2005). International students may also struggle with adjusting to the new country of residence and new identities as minority students. Furthermore, they may face rejection and hostility from individuals and institutions in the host country. Despite the growing population of international students in U.S. universities, research on their acculturative experiences is sparse. Specifically, there is limited published information on the acculturative experiences of Black international college students in the United States.

Acculturation

Acculturation is a well-researched concept in the social and psychological sciences. Acculturation has been researched among students, immigrants, and people of color socialized in the United States. Acculturation is defined as the process of change that occurs because of multiple cultures encountering one another (Berry, 2005). Acculturation can result in cultural changes for both the immigrants and citizens of the host country. However, the individual immigrant or migrant group often experiences more change than the members of the host country (Berry, 2005). Therefore, for international students, the acculturative process may result in significant changes in their cultural presentation than it would for citizens of the host country.

Adaptation and Acculturation

Adaptation is a concept often associated with acculturation in research related to immigrant populations in America. Researchers have explained adaptation as the relationship between an immigrant and their host country or culture (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Adaptation occurs on both psychological and socio-cultural levels. Psychological adaptation includes the affective responses, such as the individual sense of high self-esteem and well-being, and the affinity that the visitor has for their host culture or country. Socio-cultural adaptation is the behavioral response related to how effectively a person connects with the new culture. Some indicators of the level of socio-cultural adaptation include a person's competence in managing tasks required for daily intercultural interactions (Ward et al., 2001).

Berry (1997; 2005; 2006) suggested that psychological adaptation is often experienced as a significant life event that involves many life changes, like moving to another country to become a student. The changes are cognitively appraised by the individual and can be viewed as either growth opportunities or stressful events. If the event is subjectively appraised as an acculturative stressor, the individual decides whether they had sufficient coping mechanisms to overcome the stressor. Depending on the individual's ability to cope with the life event, adaptation can result in the experience of acculturative stress. (Berry, 1997, 2006).

Acculturation Theory

Berry (2005) is commonly cited for the conceptualization of acculturation theory. Berry's work was influenced by Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of coping in which the authors regard stress as the by-product of a poor person-environment fit or interaction. When an incident occurs, an individual cognitively appraises it as either harmless or harmful. If appraised as harmful, the individual then assesses their coping resources to determine if the

harmful incident will be taxing to their resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In his conceptualization of acculturative stress, Berry (2005) suggested that international students experience varying levels of stress resulting from negative acculturative experiences. Acculturation occurs on both individual (i.e., psychological acculturation) and group (i.e., cultural acculturation) levels. Psychological, or individual acculturation, occurs when there are changes in the psychological self-concept of the individual. Group, or cultural acculturation occurs when there is a change in the culture of the acculturating group (Berry, 1997). For most international students, acculturation occurs at the individual level, since most of them move to host countries alone (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Berry (1997) developed a typology consisting of four forms of acculturative attitudes: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Integration occurs when the individual shows a keen interest in maintaining their culture of origin, while simultaneously participating in daily interactions with other cultural groups. Assimilation occurs when the individual does not wish to maintain their original cultural identity and instead seeks to adopt a cultural identity consistent with the host culture. Separation stands in direct contrast to assimilation, whereby the individual places strong emphasis on retaining their original cultural identity while avoiding or minimizing interactions with the host culture. Marginalization occurs when there is little possibility or interest in maintaining one's original cultural identity, and little interest in interacting with or assimilating to the host culture (Berry, 1997). Marginalization often results in individuals being isolated from both their original and host cultures, since they minimize or discontinue interactions with both cultures. The type of acculturative attitude adopted by an individual influence their interactions with members of the new culture, and thus influence their acculturative experiences (Berry, 1997).

Acculturation Among International Students

Berry's (2005) conceptualization of the acculturative process of immigrant populations was supported by published studies on the experiences of international students. Cemalcilar and Falbo (2008) examined the effects of initial cross-cultural transitions on the psychological well-being, social and academic adaptations of international students in the United States (U.S.). The researchers collected data in two different phases. The first phase of data collection included providing questionnaires to incoming international students who had been accepted into a large southern university for the 2002-2003 school year (Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008). Two hundred and sixteen students responded to the first questionnaire while still in their home countries. Students who participated in the first phase of data collection were then contacted after the school semester began. One hundred and thirty-one of those students completed the second questionnaire. The final sample consisted of 90 students who had participated in both phases of data collection (Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008). The mean length of stay in the U.S. at the time of the second data collection phase was about 3.4 months. Participants were primarily from India and China (Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008).

The researchers used the Acculturation Index (AI), originally developed by Ward and Rana-Deuba (1999), to assess the degrees of home and host nation identities in the participants. The seven-point Likert-scale yielded two independent similarity scores measuring the home and host identities of participants. The Socio-cultural Adaptation Scale (Ward & Kennedy, 1994) was used to measure how well-adjusted participants were to daily life in the host country. A fifteen-item abridged version of the scale was used in this study. To measure academic achievement, the authors created an 18-tem scale that measured students' subjective perceptions of and satisfaction

with their academic performance, instead of using GPA as an indication of academic achievement (Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008).

Overall, the results of the study suggested that international students' transition into their new country can be psychologically challenging, even for those with substantial host culture language skills (Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008). After completing about three months of the first semester, most of the participants reported significant declines in their psychological well-being. Cemalcilar and Fablo (2008) also found that participants significantly assimilated to the host culture, while retaining strong levels of identification with their home countries. Furthermore, they found that students who had adopted a marginalized strategy (i.e., distancing themselves from both their original and host cultures) also had significantly lower social adaptation to the host culture. Cemalcilar and Falbo's (2008) findings support Berry's (2005) model of acculturation, in which immigrants with very limited consistent contact with the host culture (i.e., marginalized) are the least adapted to the host culture.

Acculturation Among Black International Students

It is valuable to separate Black international students from the larger international student umbrella, as their experiences are unique and need to be studied separately. Due to their racial identity, international students of color, primarily from the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, experience different forms of discrimination based on their skin color, ethnicity and nationality from faculty and students (Fries-Britt, Mwangi, & Peralta, 2014. They also experienced systemic racism embedded in American national policy (Fries-Britt, Mwangi, & Peralta, 2014). International students also experienced more incidents of discrimination than their white counterparts, which negatively impacted their adaptive experiences (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Fries-Britt et al., 2014). Although there is

heterogeneity in the cultural backgrounds of Black international students, similar stereotypes about Black people were applied to them due to assumptions of their ethnicity (Boafo-Arthur, 2014)

A few researchers have examined the acculturation experiences of Black international students (e. g., Constantine et al., 2005; Haskins et al., 2013; Boafo-Arthur, 2014)**.** Haskins and colleagues (2013) used a phenomenological approach to examine the experiences of Black international students in a graduate counseling program. In their study, the researchers explained the phenomenological approach as a "form of research exploration that seeks to understand, examine, and describe the experiences of the participants under investigation" (Haskins et al., 2013; p. 164). The participants in this study were recruited from a predominantly White institution (PWI). Prior to beginning the study, the researchers discussed their previous knowledge, preconceptions, and personal experiences related to the topic. This was an effort to reduce any form of researcher bias during the interviews, and while developing themes. After transcribing and coding the interviews, the researchers identified themes that emerged from the interviews. Some of the themes reported included: (a) the lack of inclusion of Black counselor perspectives in the course work, (b) feelings of tokenization as a Black student, (c) isolation as a Black student, and (d) differences in the interactions with their department faculty (Haskins et al., 2013). The use of a qualitative method in Haskins and colleagues' (2013) research is important because it lays the groundwork for further qualitative exploration of the experiences of Black international students in academic spaces.

Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell and Utsey (2005) also examined the cultural adjustment experiences of a group of African international students from Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria using the phenomenological approach. Students from these three specific countries were

selected because international students from Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria comprise the three largest groups of U.S. international students from Africa (Constantine et al., 2005). Twelve participants were included in this study, with an equal number of students self-identifying as Nigerians, Ghanaians, and Kenyans. All participants had been in the United States between four months and four years. All the participants had lived in their home countries until migrating to the United States for college. Of the 12 participants, only two indicated that they had received any financial support from government agencies in their home countries. The researchers collected data using interviews. The researchers developed a coding system to organize data into several domains and sub-domains. An audit, cross-analysis, and audit of the cross-analysis were all conducted to ensure objectivity in the domains and sub domains developed.

The themes that emerged from the interviews were reflective of participants' perceptions of the U. S. prior to their arrivals, their time spent in the U.S., and cultural adjustment difficulties they experienced in the U.S. (Constantine et al., 2005). Most of the participants indicated that prior to immigrating into the United States, they believed the U.S. provided many personal and academic opportunities for international students from African countries. Participants also reported believing that the higher education system in the U.S. was better than systems in their home countries, and that there was more personal freedom of choice in the United States. After immigrating to the United States, participants reported that they recognized that White Americans possessed a lot of power in the United States. Specifically, they endorsed that White Americans held most of the economic and political power in the U.S. and that the education system was Eurocentric. Regarding cultural adjustment, all participants indicated experiencing prejudice or discrimination (e.g. being called racial slurs by White Americans), which negatively impacted their acculturative experience (Constantine et al., 2005).

Summary and Critique: Acculturation

Although acculturation occurs when two different cultural groups frequently interact with each other, the visiting individual experiences more changes in their cultural presentation than members of the host country. The acculturation process occurs on an individual level, when a person moves into another culture and becomes a part of that society. Visitors in the new country may either assimilate, integrate, separate, or marginalize themselves from the new culture. Visitors who assimilate to the new culture may report lower levels of acculturative stress, while visitors who separate or marginalize themselves from the host culture experience higher levels of acculturative stress. Although there is existing literature detailing the acculturative experiences of international students, only few studies focused on the unique acculturative experiences of Black international students. When researchers treat international students as a homogenous group, they may miss how racial and ethnic differences influences some international students' acculturation. For example, Black international students might experience higher incidents of discrimination and prejudice than their European counterparts. Therefore, it would be beneficial to qualitatively exploring the acculturative processes and experiences of Black international students.

Acculturative Stress

When individuals move into a host country, they acculturate to their new environment. The acculturative process, which occurs on an individual or group level, can result in the experience of acculturative stress. Acculturative stress has been defined as the emotional and physical stress responses that result from the acculturative process (Berry, 2003; Han, Pistole & Caldwell, 2017). Acculturative stress has also been explained as a stress reaction that occurs when a person experiences challenges related to their acculturative experience, and they recognize that these challenges might not be resolved by simply assimilating to the new culture

(Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Acculturative stress is different from general life hassles and stress, in that it impacts the psychological, physical and social well-being of individuals who are experiencing acculturation (Han, Pistole & Caldwell, 2017).

Acculturative Stress Among International Students

Several researchers have explored acculturative stress and how it impacts international students in the U.S. International students often reported feeling culturally misunderstood on their campuses, which caused them to feel lonely and isolated. Acculturative stress among international students increase when they have difficulty creating meaningful and positive social connections with others (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Behl, Laux, Roseman, Tiamiyu and Spann (2017) examined the needs and acculturative stress among international students in CACREP-accredited counselor education programs within the United States. Thirty-eight international students were recruited from various CACREP-accredited programs. Participants were from different countries and had lived in the U.S. between one and twelve years (Behl et al., 2017). The researchers used the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994) to measure the level of acculturative stress that international students experienced. A modified needs assessment created by Stabb, Harris and Talley (1995) was used to identify language, academic, social, cultural and financial needs of the sample (Behl et al., 2017).

Results of the study indicated that the academic needs of the participants were related to their acculturative experiences. The participants who had difficulty acculturating to the mainstream U.S culture also had difficulty in the classroom and were generally unsatisfied with their academic performance (Behl et al., 2014). Results also suggested that participants' social needs were related to acculturation. Participants who did not have meaningful social relationships in the U.S. generally reported higher levels of acculturative stress. Participants who

struggled with written and oral English also experienced more social isolation, as they were unable to form strong social relationships with their American peers (Behl et al., 2014). Cultural differences with American faculty and peers also served as hinderances for some participants, which led them to feel lonely and isolated. Discrimination from others also reduced the amount of positive social interactions some participants had, further increasing their feeling of loneliness and isolation (Behl etl al., 2014). The results of this study suggest that the acculturative stress international students experience from difficult or negative acculturative experiences create needs that these students may not have to address in their home countries.

Mukminin (2012) also qualitatively explored the acculturative process of Indonesian international graduate students in the U.S. using Oberg's (1960) Culture Shock Model and Berry's (2006) Acculturative Stress Model as guides. Thirteen Indonesian graduate international students were sampled from a public university in the southern part of the U.S. with a large international student population (Mukminin, 2012). Participants completed short demographic questionniares and participated in two in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions. Participants were allowed to answer interview questions in either English or Indonesian Bahasa, since all participants spoke English as a second language. The researchers analyzed the individual and focus group interviews using within-case and cross-case displays and analyses (Mukminin, 2012).

Five salient themes emerged from the individual and focus group interviews, as the researcher reported. The first theme suggested that Indonesian graduate international students skipped the honeymoon phase of Oberg's (1960) Culture Shock model and directly encountered stressful life events resulting from academic, personal and English language stressors. The second theme suggested that the absence of perceived discrimination, absence of financial stress,

adequate time to learn and adjust to academic expectations, connecting or reuniting with family, and forming supportive friendships helped participants feel less stressed. The third theme shed light on personal and academic crises that resulted in participants' experience of acculturative stress. The fourth theme indicated that participants typically adapted to the academic shock they initially experienced after spending about one semester in their host university, implying that acculturative stressors were most prominent in the first semester (Mukminin, 2012). The fifth theme focused on strategies that participants used or did not use to combat acculturative stress. Researchers noted that none of the participants mentioned seeking counseling services, citing a lack of time. Participants instead used strategies like seeking support from co-national students, avoiding direct confrontation, and sleeping and engaging in physical activities (Mukminin, 2012). Although this study focused specifically on the experiences of Indonesian international students, the participants' experiences of discrimination is shared by other international students of color, who often must assume a new racial and ethnic identity in the United States.

Researchers have also highlighted the impact of racism and discrimination on the acculturative stress of internationals students. Lee and Ahn (2011) conducted a meta-analysis on racial discrimination and resulting mental outcomes among people of Asian descent. Studies included in the meta-analysis were extracted from two rounds of comprehensive searches. The first round was a comprehensive search of research articles on EBSCOhost, PsychINFO and ERIC. The second round involved articles searches done independently by the two authors on the same databases. The first search used *racial discrimination* and *Asian* as the key terms, whereas the second search used *racism* and *Asian* as the key terms. Studies that were included in the final analysis were those that included data relevant to the coping or mental health outcomes of racial

discrimination of Asians. Lee and Ahn (2014) found that racial discrimination had significant

positive correlations with anxiety, depression and overall psychological distress

     Wei, Wong and Heppner (2012) conducted a study on Chinese international students to

expand the results found by Lee and Ahn's (2011) meta-analysis. The sample consisted of 383

participants recruited from two public Midwestern universities. The majority of the participants

identified China as their home country, whereas others identified Taiwan and Hong Kong as their

home countries. The average length of stay in the U.S. at the time of participation was 29.7

months (Wei, Wong, & Heppner, 2012). In order to measure perceived stress and social

connectedness, the researchers used the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamark, & Mermelstein,

1983), Perceived Discrimination subscale of the Acculturative Stress Scale for International

Students (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994), The Social Connectedness in the Ethnic Community Scale

(Yoon, 2006) and Social Connectedness in Mainstream Society Scale (Yoon, 2006). Wei, Wong

and Hepner (2012) found that perceived racial discrimination positively predicted post-traumatic

stress symptoms after controlling for general perceived stress. There was a significant moderation

effect of social connectedness with the participant's ethnic group. However, there was no

significant moderation effect of social connectedness with the mainstream group on the

association between perceived racial discrimination and post-traumatic stress symptoms (Wei, et

al., 2012). In sum, feeling more connected with one's own cultural group provided better

opportunities to reduce the effects of perceived racial discrimination (Wei et al., 2012).

Acculturative Stressors Among International Students

     Researchers have defined acculturative stressors as incidents that people who immigrate

experience in their host countries, and may interpret as stressors (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Han,

Pistole and Caldwell (2017) identified academic settings, such as different classroom behavior

expectations, learning styles, and faculty-student interaction norms, as predictors of acculturative stress. Yeh and Inose (2003) identified language barriers, such as speaking English as a second language or speaking with a different accent, as predictors of acculturative stress. Other researchers (e.g., Yeh & Inose, 2003; Constantine et al., 2005) found that socio-cultural factors like transitioning from a collectivistic to an individualistic culture influence experiences of acculturative stress. These types of stressors may be more common among international students, since many of them come from non-English speaking backgrounds, have been educated in different educational systems, and have left behind their support system in their home countries.

Language difficulties and accents as stressors. Language barriers appear to be the most challenging struggle for international students (Yeh & Inose, 2003). For international students in the United States, language barriers often manifest in lack of English proficiency. Language barriers are stressful for international students who are unable to express their academic ability in English (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Sawir, 2005; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2009). Due to their difficulty expressing themselves, international students may find themselves underperforming, or experiencing decreased performance relative to their home countries (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2009). English language barriers for international students in the U.S. also hinder them from interacting with their American peers, causing social and emotional isolation (Yeh & Inose, 2003). In a study conducted by Yeh and Inose (2003), the frequency of English language use, fluency level, and the degree to which participants felt comfortable speaking English, predicted lower levels of distress. Participants who spoke English often were more fluent in English and felt comfortable speaking English. They also reported lower levels of distress than the participants who were not very fluent in English, did not speak English often, or did not feel comfortable communicating in English. International students with higher English

fluency may also feel less embarrassed while communicating with others, and less self-conscious about their culture of origin. Higher English fluency also allows international students achieve more in some classes, since they may feel more comfortable to participate or ask for help from instructors (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Socio-cultural stressors. International students from more collectivist cultures may find themselves struggling to succeed in a host culture that places more emphasis on gaining independence from others (Yeh & Inose, 2003). In the United States, maturity is often measured by how well a person functions independently of others (Yeh & Inose, 2003). This cultural expectation is carried on to university campuses, where students are expected to figure things out for themselves and not rely heavily on peers, family, or faculty for support. For international students from more collectivist cultures, this version of maturity may be difficult to enact. This may be especially true if they are from a culture where it is normative to rely on family, friends, and other community members or conceptualize one's identity in relation to others. These students may also experience a weakening of sense of self, as most of them have left behind significant others who have bolstered their sense of self in the past (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Educational and academic stressors. Educational and academic stressors were explained as stressors related to international students' involvement in academic work, as well as educational needs that may cause significant levels of stress (Misra & Castillo, 2000). Misra and Castillo (2000) conducted a study comparing academic stressors and reaction to stressors between international students and American students. Their study consisted of 392 international and American students from two Midwestern universities. Five categories of academic stressors (i.e. frustration, pressure, change, conflicts and self-imposed) and four categories describing reactions to reactions (i.e. physiological, cognitive, emotional and behavioral) were examined

among participants (Misra & Castillo, 2000). Academic stressed was measured using Gadzella's Student-Life Stress Inventory (Gadzella, 1991). Misra and Castillo (2000) found that American participants reported more behavioral reactions to stressors than international students. Stressors also seemed to have an effect on cognitive reactions for international students, although this finding was not statistically significant (Misra & Castillo, 2000). Consistent with the research findings of Cemalcilar and Falbo (2008), Misra and Castillo (2000) also found that difficulties adjusting to the host culture were shown to negatively impact academic success and overall well-being of international students. Many international students were ranked at the top or near the top levels of their home country institutions by the time they enrolled in U.S. universities (Misra & Castillo, 2000). Thus, their expectations of replicating the same academic success in a new educational environment may be unrealistically high (Misra & Castillo, 2000). Additionally, pressure to attain limited financial aid and scholarships available to international students in America contributed to their educational stress (Misra & Castillo, 2000).

Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers (2012) conducted a cross-institutional comparison study among 958 students enrolled in five different business schools across the Netherlands. The purpose of the comparison was to identify differences in academic performance between Dutch and international students by focusing on levels of social and academic integration (Rienties et al., 2012). The dataset created from this study was part of a larger national project called "Acculturation," which was designed to identify and rectify potential obstacles in adapting to Dutch higher institutions. Participants' academic integration was measured using the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (Baker & Siryk, 1999), and social integration was measured with a questionnaire developed by the authors based on existing research. Rienties and colleagues (2012) found that academic performance was positively related

to academic integration. International students who were well-integrated into their universities and utilized academic services performed better academically (Rienties et al., 2012).

In a qualitative study, Yan, and Berliner (2009) explored the academic stressors of Chinese international students on U.S. campuses. Using a thematic approach, the researchers identified specific contributors to the academic stress that the Chinese students experienced. Many of the participants cited language barriers as a major academic stressor. Language barriers limited their ability to participate in class discussions, ask for clarification, or perform well on tests (Yan & Berliner, 2009). Students also identified their own high motivation to succeed, as rooted in traditional Chinese cultural values of education and hard work as another major source of academic stress. Interactions with faculty were also identified as a source of academic stress for participants in the study. Specifically, language insufficiency, lack of initiative and autonomy, verbal passiveness, and indirect modes of communication were factors that influenced interactions with faculty (Yan & Berliner, 2009).

Perceived support from educational institution as a stressor. Researchers have also found that perceived support from educational institutions impact international students' experience of acculturative stress. Bai (2016) investigated predictors of acculturative stress among international students in the United States. Alongside language barriers, age of arrival in the United States, socio-economic status, ethnic identity, and immigration status, Bai (2016) also examined how school-related elements like academic achievement and perceived support impacted acculturative stress. A sample of 186 international students with diverse nationalities were recruited; however, only data from 152 participants was analyzed and included in the study. Bai (2016) measured participants' English proficiency with the Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL). A TOEFL score is generally required for students from certain countries who

wish to study in the United States. The researcher measured participants' academic achievement by their self-reported grade point averages (GPAs), which is a common grading system in U.S. universities. Perceived support from participants' school was measured using a nine-item scale developed by the researcher (Bai, 2016). Cronbach's alpha for the scale was reported as 0.789. Acculturative stress in participants was measured with the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994).

Bai (2016) found that participants from Middle Eastern and African countries demonstrated the highest levels of acculturative stress, although acculturative stress was generally high within the sample. Perceived social support from the academic institution also significantly predicted acculturative stress. For participants who reported higher levels of support from professors, American peers, and staff members, levels of acculturative stress were generally low. However, participants who did not feel supported by members of their academic institution reported higher levels of academic stress (Bai, 2016). A qualitative exploration of how international students perceive and access support from their academic institution would be beneficial, as it could provide guidelines on how academic institution could provide concrete and needed support to their international student population.

Acculturative Stress and Stressors Among Black International Students

Few researchers have explored the experience of acculturative stress among Black international students in the United States. Boafo-Arthur (2014) discussed acculturative experiences that often lead to acculturative stress among Black international students. For many Black international students, moving to the U.S. presented as a culture shock. Culture shock was described as feelings of general discomfort experienced by anyone adjusting to a new culture or country (Boafo-Arthur, 2014). Culture shock included confusion about role expectations, feelings

of alienation, feelings of rejection and anxiety about fitting into a new society, and a loss of

social support (Boafo-Arthur, 2014). Black international students also experienced acculturative

stress from their new identities as racial and ethnic minorities in the United States. They

experienced discrimination regardless of their personal affinity towards other racial groups or

whether or not they identify with other Black minorities socialized in the U.S. (Boafo-Arthur,

2014).

Inyama, Williams, and McCauley (2016) conducted a review of research conducted on the

experience of African health science international students in predominantly White institutions

(PWI's) in the U.S. The authors conducted an electronic search for literature between 1990 and

2015 on CINAHL, Medline, Google Scholar and Scopus databases. The authors used a

combination of keywords such as *experiences, African nursing students, minority students,*

learning experiences, and *clinical experiences* (Inyama, William, & McCauley, 2016). Twenty-

three research articles that provided information on the experiences of minority students in

various health science disciplines in different countries and settings were chosen (Inyama et al.,

2016). The authors paid attention to how research articles examined African students'

adjustment to their environments, how the process of integration occurred, and how African

students conditioned their coping to fit with their new environments (Inyama et al., 2016).

On adjustment to new environments, several research studies included in the review

supported Boafo-Arthur's (2013) claims that Black international students further underwent

discriminatory and prejudicial treatment in addition to feelings of alienation and isolation. A

phenomenological study by Omotosho (1998) to explore the acculturative experiences of African

nursing students also indicated that students experienced a detachment from their home

countries. This sense of detachment and unfamiliarity then led to the experience of acculturative

stress, as they felt unaccepted and different. On integration, the results of a qualitative study

conducted by Hyams-Ssekasi, Mushibwe, and (2014) with a sample of twenty-one postgraduate

African international students indicated that students often felt socially excluded and unwelcome

by their American peers. This isolation and exclusion by members of their host university

impacted the students' learning and classroom experiences (Hyams-Ssekasi. On conditioning, a

study included in the review (Nebedum-Ezeh, 1997), the results suggested that African students

initially felt at a loss for not having an African staff member involved in the administrative affairs

of African international students. However, with time, the students conditioned themselves to

cope by forming strong bonds with each other and providing social and emotional support for

each other (Nebedum-Ezeh, 1997).

Understanding race as an acculturative stressor. Although several frameworks existed

for race and racial identity development, they did not fully capture the perceptions of non-

American people of color. Fries-Britt and colleagues (2014) developed a framework for learning

race in a U.S. context (LRUSC) to capture perceptions of race and ethnic identity in foreign-born

people of color living in the United States. The LRUSC framework originated from broader

models of racial identity, specifically Phinney's (1993) Ethnic Identity Development Model,

Helms' (1995) People of Color (POC) Racial Identity Model, and Sue and Sue's (1999)

Racial/Cultural Identity Development Model. In his model, Phinney (1993) explained ethnic

identity and social identity as emanating from association with a social group, specifically the

significance a person placed upon the social group membership. Helms (1995) and Sue and Sue

(1999) developed somewhat identical identity models that were intended to be applicable to all

people of color. Developers of both models suggested that all people of color who are socialized

in the United States internalize racial stereotypes about their various groups, and attaining a healthy racial identity requires transcending internalized racism.

Fries-Britt and colleagues' (2014) framework presented the home country and U.S. racial contexts as separate but overlapping, conveying the bidirectional influence of each context on the non-American person of color. Foreign-born people of color begin with disengagement from the racial context in the U.S., resisting racial distractions. When they encountered incidents of racism, foreign-born Blacks examined their racial-ethnic identities within a U.S. context. This often results in them using race as a motivation to succeed, in an effort to disprove racial stereotypes and separate from Black people socialized in the U.S. (Fries-Britt, Mwangi, & Peralta, 2014). The last step in the framework is the development of an integrative awareness of race. Foreign-born people of color at this stage become aware of how the racial context in the U.S. affected their time in the U.S. and begin to conceptualize their racial experiences using the U.S. context (Fries-Britt et al., 2014). The framework by Fries-Britt and colleagues (2014) can be used to explore Black international students' racial experiences, since the authors recognized that these students may have different race contexts than what currently exists within the United States.

Racism as a source of acculturative stress. Racism is broadly defined as intentional and unintentional instances where the dominant racial group exercises power against another racial group identified as inferior (Carter & Murphy, 2015). Racism could be blatant or subtle. Blatant racism was defined as the expression of perceived superiority over another racial group that is supported by laws and social norms. Subtle racism was explained as the pairing of positive explicitly-stated beliefs that supported equality with lingering negative feelings towards members of other racial groups rooted in societal stereotypes (Carter & Murphy, 2015). Blatant racism is

easier to recognize, whereas subtle racism can be more ambiguous and difficult to identify. Jones (2000) identified three levels of racism: (a) institutionalized, (b) personally mediated, and (c) internalized racism.

Molina and James (2016) used Jones' (2000) theoretical framework to describe race-related incidents that immigrants of color experience while living in the United States. Institutionalized racism is an umbrella term for the restricted and unequal distribution of goods, services, and opportunities, all of which negatively impact the lives of people of color (Molina & James, 2016). Examples of institutionalized racism are hiring policies in workplaces, lack of healthcare facilities in communities of color, and underfunded schools in communities of color. Personally-mediated racism, commonly referred to as individual racism, is characterized as either the intentional or unintentional acts against people of color, through prejudice and interpersonal interactions. Examples of personally-mediated racism include being provided poor service in public establishments and being followed in stores. Internalized racism occurs when an individual accepts the negative attitudes, ideologies, and stereotypes perpetuated by the dominant culture as being true of their own racial group (Molina & James, 2016).

Summary and Critique: Acculturative Stress

Existing research suggests that international students report higher levels of acculturative stress than some American students in American universities and colleges (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004). Acculturative stress was typically a result of the experience of one or multiple stressors, which included language barriers, educational and academic barriers, and sociocultural stressors. There were also existing scales developed to capture acculturative stress among international student samples (e.g., Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). Researchers found that lack of fluency in English resulted in students' inability

to express themselves academically, resulting in low academic performance (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Lack of access to limited federal funding for international students also exacerbated educational stress, resulting in poor academic performance (Misra & Castillo, 2000).

International students of color may experience racism and discrimination due to their racial and ethnic identifications. Specifically, Asian and African international students report higher levels of perceived discrimination. Experiencing any or a combination of these stressors has been shown to lead to international students' feelings of acculturative stress, which if not poorly handled, can result in severe mental health concerns (Mori, 2000). For example, acculturative stress has been linked to depression among Asian, Latin, and African international students in American universities (Walker et al., 2008). Although acculturative stress has been documented in international students from different countries, there are few resources available on some campuses to help students cope with the stressors. Research reviewed on acculturative stress among international student rarely focused specifically on Black international students, a group that might experience higher levels of acculturative stress due to their racial identification and its implications in the United States. In the research reviewed, current measures and existing research did not capture Black international students' experiences of racial prejudice and discrimination, and how these experiences impact subsequent experiences of acculturative stress.

Coping and Coping Strategies

Researchers have defined coping as a person's cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage internal and external demands that are believed to exceed the person's coping resources (Folkman et al., 1986). Coping involved three distinct features. The first feature of coping is process-oriented, as it focuses on a person's thoughts and actions in a situation and how that changes as the encounter unfolds. Second, coping is contextual in that it is influenced by the

individual's appraisal of the actual demands in the encounter and the resources for managing them. The third feature of coping is the lack of evaluation of whether the coping mechanism is good or bad. Coping therefore refers to the individual's efforts at dealing with stressful person-environment interactions and not whether or not these efforts were successful (Folkman et al., 1986).

Transactional theory of coping. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) developed the transactional theory of coping, which encompassed the cognitive appraisal of events and coping as mediators of stress and stress-related adaptational outcomes. The cognitive theory of stress and coping is both relational and process oriented. The relational process was observable in the theory's definition of stress. Stress in the model is defined as the relationship between a person and their environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding their well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The relational definition of stress separated this theory from others that defined stress as a stimulus or a response such as a physiological arousal or subjective distress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

According to the cognitive theory of stress and coping, stress is not a property of the person or the environment, nor is it a stimulus or response. Stress is conceptualized as a relationship between the person and their environment. The process orientation aspect of this theory has two meanings. The first meaning is that the person is in a dynamic relationship with their environment. The second meaning is that the relationship between the person and their environment is bidirectional, with the person and the environment both acting on the other. The relational and process-oriented aspects of the cognitive theory of stress and coping have important implications on how beliefs about and the appraisals of personal control are understood (Folkman, 1984). The relational orientation means that control ought to be

understood in the specific person-environment relationship within which it is embedded. The process orientation means that appraisal of personal control is subject to change throughout a stressful encounter, due to the shifts in the person-environment interaction.

To understand how beliefs of personal control affects stress, it is important to be aware of the significance or meaning of an event to an individual. The meaning of the event is suggested by the cognitive appraisal processes (Folkman, 1984). There are two major forms of appraisals identified in the coping literature: (a) primary appraisal and (b) secondary appraisal. Primary appraisals occur when the person rates the significance of a situation or event in relation to their well-being. This results in a judgment that an encounter is irrelevant, benign-positive, or stressful. When the interaction is judged as irrelevant it has no significance for the well-being of the individual. When an interaction is judged as benign-positive this means that the situation does not exceed the person's resources and signals only positive consequences. An interaction is judged to be stressful if it is judged to represent harm/loss, threat of harm, or challenge (Folkman, 1984).

Primary appraisal, as explained above, occurs when a person rates the significance of a situation in relation to their well-being (Folkman. 1984; Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). A primary appraisal, whether it be harm, loss, threat, or challenge, is influenced by a myriad of personal and situation factors. Beliefs and commitments are two of the most important person factors. Beliefs were defined as pre-existing notions about reality that act as a perceptual lens and influence how a person's perception of the person-environment interaction (Folkman, 1984). A person's generalized beliefs about control, which concerns the extent to which they assume they control outcomes, are among the beliefs that influence primary appraisal. The best-known formulation of control is Rotter's (1966) concept of internal versus external locus of control. An internal locus

of control indicates the belief that events are dependent upon one's own behavior, and an external locus of control indicates to the belief that events are not dependent upon one's actions, but are because of luck, fate, or more powerful others. Primary appraisal is also influenced by situational factors (Folkman, 1984). Some of these factors include the following: (a) the nature of the harm or threat, (b) whether the event is familiar or new, (c) the likelihood of the event occurring, and (d) whether the expected outcome is ambiguous.

After primary appraisal of a situation has occurred, secondary appraisal is conducted. Secondary appraisals happen when an individual evaluates coping resources and options that are available to them (Folkman, 1984). Secondary appraisal is the examination of coping resources, which encompass the physical, psychological, social, and metal assets, in relation to the demands of the situations (Folkman, 1984). Physical resources include a person's health and stamina. Psychological resources include beliefs that sustain hope, problem-solving skills, and self-esteem. Material resources refer to money, tools, and equipment, and other tangible resources the person possesses. Secondary appraisals of control occur in addition to secondary appraisals of the event. Secondary appraisals of control refer to the person's judgment about occasions for control in any encounter. They typically emerge when the person's analysis of the demands of the situation, on one hand, and the person's coping resources and ability to apply the required coping strategies, on the other hand (Folkman, 1984).

Coping Strategies Among International Students

Researchers have explored a number of coping strategies that international students use to cope with acculturative stress. Among these coping strategies are religiosity (Wei, Ku, Chen, Wade,Liao & Guo, 2012), relying on personal and multicultural strengths (Yakunina, Weigold, Hercegovac & Elsayed, 2013), relying on social support (Ra & Trusty, 2017) and identifying

with other international students (Schmitt, Spears and Branscombe, 2003). These coping

strategies alleviate feelings of loneliness and rejection by the host culture. Additionally, some

coping strategies also allow international students to build communities of support and harness

their own personal strengths to cope with experiences of acculturative stress.

Religiosity. A prevalent coping mechanism that has been identified in research with

international students is religiosity (e.g., Wei, Ku, Chen, Wade, Liao, & Guo, 2012; Hsein-

Chuan, Krageloh, Sheperd & Billington, 2009)). Like many others, international students may

turn to religion and personal faith beliefs to cope with acculturative stress, the stress of a new

identity, and the stress of moving away from home. Wei, Ku, Chen, Wade, Liao and Guo (2012)

examined whether one's attachment to God moderated the relationship between perceived stress

and well-being. The researchers surveyed 83 Chinese Christian international students and

immigrants from seven Chinese churches in the midwestern and southern geographic regions

within the United States. All participants had been in the U.S. for about 7.35 years (Wei et al.,

2012). Researchers used The Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) to

measure the degree to which the participants perceived situations in their lives to be stressful.

The Attachment to God Scale (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002) was used to measure anxious and

avoidant attachment to God whereas the Emotionally-Based Religiosity Scale (Granqvist &

Hagekull, 1999) was used to measure participants' secure attachment to God. General life

satisfaction was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, &

Griffin, 1985). The researchers measured participants' general positive affect with the 10-item

subscale from the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). All the

measures were translated from English to Mandarin using a three-step process.

Wei and colleagues (2012) reported that Chinese Christians in America who perceived high levels of stress in their lives also reported lower levels of life satisfaction. This finding was also extended to Chinese international students and immigrants in the U.S., who dealt with the challenges of entering a new society, adjusting to a new society and competing for job opportunities with American-born workers. Results of the study also suggested that Chinese international students and immigrants who perceived a secure attachment to God reported greater life satisfaction and positive affect. This finding was consistent with attachment theory and literature that suggests that a secure attachment relationship with God often serves as a safe haven and source of comfort and confidence in stressful situations. Finally, the researchers also found that although a secure attachment relationship with God could serve as a source of haven for some, those with an avoidant attachment to God understood stressful situations as evidence of God's disinterest, inaccessibility or indifference (Wei et al., 2012). Thus, not all people who are religious rely on their relationship with God as a source of coping in difficult times.

Hsien-Chuan Hsu, Krageloh, Shepherd, and Billington (2009) also examined the role of religiosity as a coping mechanism in international students in New Zealand. The researchers used a younger, non-native sample because many of the researchers examining religiosity as a coping mechanism have studied older or terminally-ill people. Domestic students were included in the study as a comparison for the international students. Although Hsien-Chuan Hsu and colleagues (2009) found that religiosity significantly correlated with the psychological quality of life for both domestic and international students, religiosity also significantly correlated with international students' social lives. In this study, international students turned to religious activities and beliefs to cope with the acculturative stress they experienced (Hsien-Chuan Hsu et al., 2009).

Relying on personal and multicultural strengths. International students are also often encouraged to cope with acculturative stress by accessing their personal and multicultural strengths. Because they deal with different stressors than American minority students, international students may not have the same resources available to cope with the higher levels of stress. Therefore, they are often required to cope on their own, turning to other international students for support or reaching out to their support systems in their home countries (Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003).

Yakunina, Weigold, Hercegovac, and Elsayed (2013) tested personal growth initiative, hardiness, and universal-diverse predisposition as predictors of acculturative stress and successful readjustment to new communities among international students. The researchers intended to explore the assumption that international students can successfully rely on personal and multicultural strengths to combat acculturative stress. Three hundred and thirty-six international students were recruited from the top 20 universities and colleges with the largest enrollment of international students in the U.S. (Yakunina et al., 2013). Participants had lived in the U.S. from one month to ten years at the time of recruitment. A demographic form was used to collect information about participants' lengths of stay in the U.S., fluency in English, and cultural backgrounds. A 16-item Personal Growth Initiative Scale (Robitschek et al., 2012) was used to measure personal growth initiative among participants. Personal growth initiative was explained as the conscious decision to grow and develop across different life domains (Robitschek et al., 2012). The scale consists of four different sub-scales: (a) Planfulness, (b) Readiness for Change, (c) Using Resources, and (d) International Behavior. The scores from the sub-scales are averaged to produce a total score for the scale.

Yakunina and colleagues (2013) operationalized universal-diverse orientation as a general ability to be appreciative of cultural differences and similarities and was measured with the Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale- Short Form (Fuertes, Miville, Mohr, Sedlacek, & Gretchen, 2000). A universal-diverse orientation is related to multi-cultural open-mindedness, in that both concepts encourage the acceptance of other cultural world views. A universal-diverse orientation is especially encouraged in international students because it is believed to help reduce acculturative stress and increase adjustment in cross-cultural contexts (Yakunina et al., 2013). Acculturative stress in participants was measured using the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). Psychological adjustment was measured with the Schwartz Outcome Scale, which includes items that rate adjustment over the last 7 days in a variety of life domains including interpersonal relationships, subjective happiness, and life satisfaction.

Yakunina and colleagues (2013) found that personal growth initiative predicted adjustment, which happened independent of acculturative stress. The participants who endorsed higher levels of personal growth initiative also reported higher levels of adjustment, even when they faced challenges related to their status as an international student. Individuals who showed high levels of personal growth initiative tended to be very organized, were open to change, and readily used external sources available to achieve goals. Because people high in personal growth initiative were organized and goal-oriented, they could reframe stressful situations as possible opportunities for growth, thus reducing the negative impact of stress. Yakunina and colleagues (2013) also found that hardiness had a direct positive effect on adjustment, and a partially mediated effect on acculturative stress. Individuals who were hardy could prosper and thrive in very challenging situations, which made them better able to cope with stress (Yakunina et al.,

2013). They also found it easier to adjust to difficult situations because of their optimistic outlook. Despite the benefits of relying on personal and cultural strengths, international students should not be held solely responsible for preventing acculturative stress (Yakunina et al., 2013).

Social support. Researchers have examined how social support is used as coping among international students. Ra and Trusty (2017) investigated the effects of social support and coping on acculturation and experiences of acculturative stress among international students. The researchers recruited a sample of 232 East Asian international students from China, South Korea, Taiwan and Japan who were living in the United States. The Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (SL-ASIAN; Suinn et al., 1987) was used by the researchers to measure participants' levels of acculturation. The researchers also used the Index of Life Stress scale (ILS; Yang & Clum, 1995) to assess participants' levels of acculturative stress. The Index of Social Support (ISS; Yang & Clum, 1995) was used to measure participants' perceived social support. The Coping Inventory of Stressful Situations (CISS; Endler & Parker, 1990) was used to measure participants' levels of coping. Higher scores correlated to higher levels of effective coping.

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis and the Baron and Kenny (Baron & Kenny, 1986) mediation test procedure revealed that how participants perceived social support and coped with their stress accounted for some degrees of variance in the relationship between levels of acculturation and acculturative stress. The experiences of acculturative stress led participants to seek social support and coping strategies, which then led to a decrease in levels of acculturative stress (Ra & Trusty, 2017). The researchers also found that participants who had lower acculturative stress and higher psychological well-being had more social support and a greater level of coping. Finally, Ra and Trusty (2017) found that East Asian international students' social support and coping explained their adaption to the new cultural environment.

Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser, and Kumar (2014) also examined the effects of social support on acculturation and resulting acculturative stress among Chinese international students. They also explored how participants compared their support system in China to their support system in the United States. The researchers interviewed eight undergraduate Chinese international students in a midwestern university, all of whom had completed two years of study at a Chinese institution prior to moving to the U.S. All participants had spent between one and two years in the U.S. when they were sampled for the study (Bertram et al., 2014). The researchers established five domains to explore the effects of support on participants' acculturation and acculturative stress. The first domain included participants' positive and negative perceptions of the U.S. prior to coming to the country. The second domain involved positive and negative perceptions of the U.S. after living in the country for a while. The third domain explored how participants perceived their social support in China. The fourth domain explored participants' experiences of acculturative stress in the U.S. The fifth domain explored how the participants perceived their social support in the U.S. (Bertram et al., 2014).

Results of the study indicated that language difficulties contributed to acculturative stress. Participants also indicated that certain aspects of mainstream American culture, like the focus on materialism, influenced their perceptions of the U.S. after moving into the country. Participants also identified some acculturative stressors related to establishing and maintaining social support. Some of these stressors included feelings of being disconnected from others, difficulty speaking and understanding English, and being faced with different cultural and value systems (Bertram at el., 2014). Results also suggested that participants experienced lower levels of satisfaction with their social support in the U.S., indicating that this system was not as adequate as what they had in China. Therefore, it was not the breadth of their social support that mattered, but the depth of

the support that was impactful in reducing the acculturative stress of the participants (Bertram et al., 2014).

      Identifying with other international students. To cope with feelings of rejection by and isolation from the host culture, international students often turn to each other and bond in their shared sense of otherness. Schmitt, Spears and Branscombe (2003) investigated how perceptions of rejection by the host culture correlated to a sense of identification with other international students. Based on the rejection-identification model (Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey, 1999), the researchers predicted that perceiving prejudice and rejection from the host culture would negatively impact internationals students' psychological well-being (Schmitt et al., 2003). Ninety-nine non-European, non-native English-speaking international students were recruited from a midwestern university. The researchers hypothesized that this group of students would experience higher levels of discrimination than their European and native-English speaking peers.

      Schmitt and colleagues (2003) measured perceived prejudice and discrimination by asking participants to respond to items about whether they believed their American peers looked down on them or discriminated against them because they were non-American. Participants were also asked how strongly they identified as part of their university or with their home country. Lastly, participants were briefly assessed for high or low self-esteem. Schmitt and colleagues (2003) reported that identification with a pre-existing, long-term group membership like national group did not mitigate the consequences of perceiving discrimination on self-esteem. Identification with a relatively new category that was relevant to the local context did offer psychological protection. Results also indicated that identification with other international students mediated a self-protective response to perceived discrimination (Schmitt, Spears and

Branscombe, 2003). International students had the option of turning to their national identity since it is a relatively fixed and long-term identity. However, that group membership and its collective experience were not relevant to their current context and experience of discrimination. Forming a new shared identity with other international students was more beneficial, given the new context. Although there were differences in nationality among international students, a common group identity arose around shared perceptions of discrimination and rejection by the host culture (Schmitt, Spears and Branscombe, 2003).

Coping Strategies Among Black International Students

Despite the increasing number of international students in the U.S., few studies exist on the coping strategies that international students develop to deal with acculturative stressors. Even fewer published studies exist on the coping strategies of Black international students, who have to navigate experiences of racism and discrimination. In their qualitative exploration of the adjustment experiences of African international college students in the U.S., Constantine and colleagues (2005) presented themes that suggested that African international students used different coping strategies to deal with acculturative stress. Participants maintained close ties with family members in their home countries and discussed difficulties with family members. They also reached out and received financial and emotional support from their families in the United States. Participants also relied on a supportive network of African students on their campus and across the U.S. (Constantine et al., 2005). Because there were so few African students on their campus, they created close connections with each other and relied on these connections for social and emotional support. When the support from fellow African students on their campus was not enough, participants reported reaching out to other African students they knew across the U.S (Constantine et al., 2005).

Themes from the interviews conducted with participants also suggested a reluctance to seek psychological counseling for acculturative stress. Although some participants indicated a willingness to seek counseling for general stressors, none of them expressed an openness to seeking counseling for their adjustment issues (Constantine et al., 2005). Participants were more comfortable using physical activity and sleep as coping strategies, rather than seeking counseling services. Participants also often kept problems and concerns to themselves instead of talking to a professional, as they were concerned about bothering others. A possible explanation for participants' reluctance to seek counseling services for acculturative stress is because of the unfavorable way they perceived psychological services. Many African cultures believe that mental health and social stress have a spiritual etiology, therefore it did not fit in that worldview to seek psychological services (Constantine et al., 2005).

Osikomaiya (2014)'s dissertation qualitatively explored the experiences and coping strategies of Sub-Saharan African international students in the U.S. Four participants were recruited for the study, three of whom had been non-immigrant international students during graduate school but were resident immigrants at the time of the study (Osikomaiya, 2014). All participants had received undergraduate and graduate degrees in a predominantly White institutions (PWIs). The researcher conducted semi-structured ninety-minute interviews with each participant. Using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the researcher identified emerging themes, recorded patterns across the emerging themes, and established patterns across the cases (Osikomaiya, 2014).

Themes across the cases indicated that participants often turned to their African identity as a way to cope against the sense of displacement they felt, as well as experiences of racism and ethnic discrimination. Participants disclosed that they stood their ground in the face of

discriminatory attitude and asserted themselves whenever it was necessary to do so. Participants also indicated that they sought help from university authorities when they experienced discriminatory treatment from professors (Osikomaiya, 2014). Themes from the interviews also indicated that discriminatory experiences gave a sense of resilience to participants, as they learned to push past these experiences and become stronger from it. This sense of resilience was carried into the workspace, where participants continued to deal with assumptions of incompetence based on their racial and ethnic backgrounds (Osikomaiya, 2014).

Summary and Critique: Coping

Folkman and Lazarus' (1980, 1984) transactional theory of stress and coping explains how a person appraises an event and assesses their coping resources. The theory also suggests that coping is typically problem focused, or problem focused, with either one or both types being used to cope with a stressful situation. Folkman and Lazarus' (1980, 1984) model has been used to understand appraisals of acculturative stress in immigrant populations as well as the development of coping mechanisms. However, this model does not consider that Black international students may encounter challenges unique to the new country, therefore they would not have adequate pre-existing resources to cope with them. Folkman and Lazarus' (1980, 1984) model also points out the over-emphasizing of problem-focused coping and distrust toward emotion-focused coping in Western cultures. This has implications for Black international students, some of who may come from non-Western backgrounds that do not place much emphasis on problem-focused coping. Living in a host country that favors problem-focused coping may therefore reduce their access to other forms of coping. Black international students may also face challenges that they do not fully understand, such as racism and ethnic discrimination, and may be unable to access coping resources. Also, the use of survey

methodology to identity various coping mechanisms might be inadequate, since they do not capture how an individual's cultural background, pre-existing beliefs about appropriate coping mechanisms, and general comfort about discussing challenges impacts their answers on surveys and questionnaires.

The Current Study

The current study was designed to qualitatively explore experiences of acculturation, acculturative stress and coping strategies among Black international students. Specifically, I explored how Black international students adjust to their new country, their experiences of acculturative stress, and the coping mechanisms used to manage acculturative stress. Visitors in the United States face unique challenges that may not be experienced by U.S. citizens. Some of these challenges include language barriers, homesickness, financial restrictions and hardships, and general difficulty in adjusting to the dominant American culture. International students may experience some difficulty in communicating with American students and professors due to lack of English proficiency (Yeh & Inose, 2003). They also experience homesickness and isolation, as many of them move to the U.S. without their social support systems (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Boafo-Arthur, 2014). International students of color may also experience instances of racism and discrimination, which could negatively impact their acculturative experiences and mental health (Lee & Ahn, 2011; Wei, Wang, & Heppner, 2012). The challenges that international students experience often result in acculturative stress (Berry, 2003; Han, Pistole & Caldwell, 2017).

Additionally, research has examined potential coping strategies that international students use to mitigate experiences of acculturative stress. However, very little research exists on the acculturative and coping experiences of Black international students, as some researchers treat international students as a homogenous group. Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to

fill the gap in literature on Black international students by qualitatively exploring their experiences of acculturation, acculturative stress and use of coping strategies. I hypothesized that (a) Black international students would encounter acculturative stressors which would result in the experience of acculturative stress and (b) Black international students' understanding of the racial context of the U.S. and their experiences of racism and discrimination would influence their acculturative process as existing research has suggested.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Participants

Fourteen Black international students were initially recruited for this study from Southern Illinois University Carbondale**.** In total, twelve students participated in the study. Two participants signed up but did not show up for the study, and one participant's data was removed from the final analysis because she did not complete the interview portion of the study. The final sample size was 11 participants who were placed into four focus groups. Three of the focus groups were comprised of three participants, and one focus group was comprised of two participants.

Materials

Demographic questionnaire. Participants completed a short demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A) assessing age, academic standing, highest level of education completed, country of origin, racial identification, and number of years spent in the United States. Responses for age, country of origin and racial identification were open-ended. The demographic questionnaire also included a portion of the McArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status, to allow participants to self-report their social status.

Social status. The MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status **(**Goodman et al., 2001**)** was used to measure participants' self-reported social status. This scale was included in the demographic form and is shown in Appendix A. This scale was designed to assess subjective perceptions of socio-economic status (SES) in comparison to others in American society (Goodman et al., 2001). The scale consisted of two ladders that instruct participants to rate their

family's SES and their own SES. Choosing a part of the ladder closer to the top indicated perceived high socio-economic status, whereas choosing a part of the ladder closer to the bottom indicated perceived lower socio-economic status. Since participants completed the ladder themselves, it was a subjective appraisal of their own and their families' socio-economic statuses.

   Acculturative stress. The Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994) was used to measure participants' experiences of acculturative stress. This scale is shown in Appendix B. The ASSIS was designed to assess the types of acculturative stress experienced by international students (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). In the beginning stages of its development, the ASSIS comprised of 125 items, with each item in a five-point Likert-scale format, with 1as *strongly disagree*, 5 as *strongly agree*, and 3 as *not sure*. The ASSIS was developed in two steps. Using two different strategies (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). The first step involved 13 student participants from an urban university in the southern part of the U.S. The sample consisted of eight men and five women, from different countries. The second step was the identification of prevalent themes of adjustment difficulties that international students experienced. The original 125-item scale was piloted with 17 undergraduate and nine graduate students. The participants were encouraged to provide feedback about the item wordings and comprehension level. Some of the themes identified with the initial 125-item scale included perceived discrimination, anger/disappointment, mistrust, and communication problems. After revision, the ASSIS was reduced to 78 items, with six to nine items under each sub-scale (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). Examples of items include the following: "*others are biased toward me", "I am denied what I deserve",* and *"I feel intimidated to participate in social activities".*

To validate the scale, a national sample of 86 men and 42 women international students were recruited from ten different U.S regions. The majority of the participants were from countries in Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, with the rest of the participants (12.5%) from Europe and Africa combined. Correlation and factor analyses were conducted to analyze the data gathered from the sample. The overall Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was reported at 0.864, and all the individual measures of sampling adequacy were reported to be larger than 0.76, suggesting a strong support for the application of factor analysis with the data (Sandhu &Asrabadi, 1994). The ASSIS is beneficial for capturing and assessing the acculturative stress of international students in U.S campuses and helps administrators and counselors to create special strategies and programs to help alleviate some of that stress.

Academic self-concept. The Academic Self-Concept Scale (ASCS; Reynolds et al., 1980) was used to measure participants' academic self-concept. The scale is shown in Appendix C. The ASCS is a 40-item scale that was designed to measure of the academic aspect of general self-concept in university students (Reynolds et. al., 1980). The items on the ASCS were developed using a four-point Likert-type scales, with 1 indicating '*strongly disagree*', and 4 indicating '*strongly agree'*. Reynolds (1988) validated the ASCS with other measures of general academic self-concept, using both bivariate and multivariate procedures to analyze the scale's convergent and discriminant validities. Participants for the validation study were students from three universities in New York that represented a wide variety of academic disciplines. Participants were given the ASCS, along with the Internal-External Scale (Rotter, 1966), Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Scale, and the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (1960, 1964). The three other scales were specifically selected for the validation of the ASCS (Reynolds, 1988). Convergent validity of the ASCS scale was determined by correlation between

the scale and grade point average (GPA) which was reported at 0.40 with $p < 0.001$. Validity of the ASCS was also established by examining the correlation between the scale and the Rosenberg Scale, with the correlation reported at 0.45, with $p < 0.001$. The three other scales were specifically selected for the validation of the ASCS (Reynolds, 1988). Internal reliability of the ASCS was reported to be .91, and a test-retest reliability of .88 was obtained with a sub-sample of 82 participants and a two-week interval between testing (Reynolds, 1988). The correlation between the ASCS and GPA was reported at .40 in an initial scale validation (Reynolds, 1980)

Factor analysis of the ASCS produced a seven-factor solution that accounted for approximately 52.6% of the total variance in sores on the scale's items (Reynolds, 1998). The seven factors of the ASCS include: (a) grade and effort dimension, (b) study habits and organizational self-perception, (c) peer evaluation of academic ability, (d) self-confidence in academics, (e) satisfaction with school, (f) self-doubt regarding ability, and (g) self-evaluation with external standards. The ASCS yields a universal score, with 7 individual sub-scale scores.

Acculturative strategies. The Measurement of Acculturation Strategies for People of African Descent (MASPAD; Obasi & Leong, 2010) was used to measure the acculturative strategies of people of African descent**.** This scale is shown in Appendix D**.** The MASPAD is a bi-dimensional 45-item scale designed to generate scores on four different acculturation strategies: (a) traditionalist, (b) integrationist, (c) marginalist, and (d) assimilationist. The MASPAD (see Appendix D) is not designed to assume that people of African descent in the U.S only acculturate to European-American ethno-cultures, and thus uses two dimensions in the same scale to measure acculturation. The first dimension (D1) is "the relative preference for maintaining one's heritage ethno-cultural group", and the second dimension (D2) is the "relative preference for having contact with and participating in the society of a different ethno-cultural

group" (Obasi & Leong, 2010, p. 527). The authors conducted two studies to create and validate the MASPAD. The first study was designed to generate and test the initial item pool that accurately represents the acculturation construct for people of African descent. To create the bi-dimensional MASPAD scale, the researchers combined two other acculturation measurement scales validated with an African American sample: The Acculturation Scale (Snowden & Hines, 1999) and the African American Acculturation Scale (Landrine & Klonoff, 1994). Participants for this study were recruited from larger universities and communities in several regions of the U.S.

The second study was created to test the validity and reliability of the MASPAD on a different sample. More specifically, the second study was designed to examine discriminant validity with the life satisfaction scale, and concurrent validity was examined with an already-existing acculturation measure. The procedure and participant recruitment were similar to first study, except a different sample was used for this study. The final MASPAD consists of 45 items with Likert-type response format, ranging from 6 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). Overall, independent raters found high face and content validity, and high item quality for the MASPAD. The MASPAD subscales also produced scores with moderate reliability, with a Cronbach's alphas of 0.87 and 0.75 for dimension one and two, respectively. The results suggested that this measure may be a valid measure to use with Black international student, since it accurately captured the different styles of acculturation. Although the MASPAD is an effective measure for capturing the acculturative stress of different ethnic minorities within the larger Black racial label, it may not properly capture stress in recent international students, who combine the stress of recent immigration and being a student with a new minority identity

Procedure

     Pilot interviews. Prior to conducting interviews with participants, I piloted the interview protocol with an individual international undergraduate student and again with a group of four international students at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. I conducted the first pilot interview (individual interview) to test the coherence of the questions on the interview protocol and receive feedback on ways to simplify and improve these questions. I conducted the second pilot interview (group interview) to determine the approximate duration of the entire study, receive feedback about participants' ability to understand and answer interview questions, and identify the best strategies to minimize my presence and opinions in the interview. Participants from the pilot studies were advised not to share any information about the study with other students. Pilot study participants were also excluded from participating in the final focus groups, since they had had prior exposure to the measures and interview protocol.

     Recruitment. An email request was sent to the international students' coordinator in the Center for International Education, who forwarded it to international students on my behalf. The email indicated my name and program of study, the purpose of the current research and my advisor's contact information. An account was also created on SONA to recruit participants from Introduction to Psychology classes, upon approval of the Undergraduate Program Coordinator for the Department of Psychology. Participants who signed up for the study were provided with a two-hour time slot on a weekend, with each time slot open to multiple participants. Therefore, all participants who chose the same time slot became a focus group. Through this process, four focus groups were formed. Three of the groups included three participants each, and one focus

group included two participants. Each focus group reported to the same location on Southern Illinois University campus on different days.

  Data collection. Upon arrival at the interview site, each participant was handed a small packet of papers. On the top of the packet was the Informed Consent form, which detailed the purpose of the study, duration of the study, possible harm and benefits of the study, and participants' right to withdraw participation at any time during or after the study. The second document in the packet was the Consent to Audiotape/Videotape, which allowed participants to provide separate consent to have their interview audiotaped. Participants received two copies of each consent forms, one to sign and return to the researcher and the second copy to keep in case they had questions, comments or concerns about the study. After signing the consent forms, each participant completed their copy of the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994).

  Next, the participant completed the Academic Self-Concept Scale (ASCS; Reynolds et al., 1980). Participants then completed the Measure of Acculturation Strategies for People of African Descent (MASPAD; Obasi & Leong, 2010). After each participant had completed their packet of consent forms and questionnaires, the researcher begun the interview. Participants were told prior to the start of the interviews that they would be entered into a drawing to win one of three $10 Amazon gift cards upon completion of the study. I reminded participants that I could not guarantee confidentiality of information shared within the focus group. Participants were also assured about the anonymity of their identities during transcription and presentation the research data. I conducted all interviews in group format. Each interview lasted between an hour and an hour and twenty minutes.

To ensure credibility of the information, participants were encouraged to be honest, and I emphasized that there are no right or wrong ways to respond to the interview questions (Shenton, 2003). The interviews were semi-structured, beginning with specific pre-selected questions and including probes as related to participants' answers. The development of the interview protocol was guided by existing literature on international students (see Appendix F). Questions touched on participants' experiences of interacting with members of the SIU-C campus community, living in the United States, difficulties adjusting to the new country, coping strategies. After the interview was completed, the researcher thanked each participant for their participation and reminded them to contact the emails on their consent forms should they have any comments, concerns or complaints about the study. Participants were also reminded that those who were randomly selected to receive a gift card would be contacted via email.

Interview transcription. As per Braun and Clarke (2006), Greer (2010), and Sisley et al (2011), all interviews were transcribed verbatim in a Word document by undergraduate research assistants. After the interview had been transcribed, another research assistant read over the transcription to correct mistakes and ensure that the transcription was verbatim. I also read over each transcription to correct part of the interviews that were unclear. I, along with the three research assistants, also read the transcripts after they had been corrected to develop familiarity with the topics discussed in the interviews.

Data Analytic Strategy

Descriptive analyses. First, descriptive statistical analyses were conducted for the demographic questionnaire, as well as the ASSIS, the ASCS and the MASPAD. The means and standard deviations were calculated on the various measures for each focus group. Means and standard deviations were also calculated for participants' age, number of years spent in the

United States, and subject socio-economic status. No inferences were made from the data collected using the measures, since this study was designed to qualitatively explore experiences of Black international students. The demographic form and measures simply served as another source of information about participants' acculturative experiences, experiences of acculturative stress, and coping strategies.

Phenomenological approach. A phenomenological approach was used to explore the acculturative experiences, experiences of acculturative stress, and the use of coping strategies among Black international students in this study, due to the limitations discussed in the Summary and Critique sections. Because there is very little published research on the experiences of Black international students in the U.S, the phenomenological approach was beneficial in capturing individual experiences of the constructs of interest, preserving any nuances in experiences, as well as presenting first-person accounts of participants' experiences. Husserl (e.g., 1970, 1973, 1982) was the first researcher to use the phenomenological method (as cited in Klein &Westcott, 1994). He developed the approach to explore the basis of math and logic. Husserl established three specific requirements for phenomenological psychology: (a) it must be applicable to all beings, (b) all conclusions drawn from it must be necessarily true, and (c) it must be specific in its methodology and application (Klein &Westcott, 1994). Klein and Westcott (1994) compared different types of research conducted in modern phenomenological psychology to the initial Husserl approach. They outlined four varying but recurrent types of phenomenological psychology including traditional, experimental, empirical, and hermeneutic. These specific categories were created to "revealed relationships among the location of the experience in the researcher versus another person, the interpretation of that experience by the researcher versus the subject, and the employment, of a priori versus a posteriori bases for generalization." (Klein

& Westcott, 1994, p. 138). Phenomenological approaches have been used to research the construct of ethnic minority identity (Merino, 2011), care giving of sick relatives (Lee & Lau, 2013), dealing with dementia (De Witt, Ploeg, & Black, 2010) and the experiences of African American men living with schizophrenia (Anderson, 2014).

Interpretive phenomenological analysis with focus groups. I followed the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) steps outlined in Palmer et al. (2010). The steps were developed as a guide for applying interpretive phenomenological analysis to focus group data. The original study (Palmer et al., 2010) focused on the experiences of caregivers, therefore the steps were developed with this specific sample. Although the current study followed all eight steps outlined in the original study, some of the steps were altered to fit the focus of the current study.

Step 1: Identification of objects of concern and experiential claims. The first step in this approach involved identifying the major objects of concern for participants. This is a typical start in the descriptive coding process carried out in other IPA studies that analyze one-on-one interviews. Because the interviews in this study were semi-structured, the questions that I asked probed into major objects of concern. I read through each interview, paying attention to each participant's talking turn. A talking turn was operationalized as a participant's turn in answering a question from the interview protocol, a participant's response to another participant, or their follow-up to another participant's comment. In each talking turn, I identified any claims or concerns that were made by the participant. Not all talking turns contained major claims, as some of them were very brief. I kept track of the claims and concerns by compiling a list for each interview. That is, claims concerns that were identified by more than one participant or major concerns that appeared in more than one talking turn were compiled into a list. I also kept track

of emerging themes, as directed by Palmer et al., (2010). The emerging themes were the phrases or sentences that I used to code objects of concerns in each interview. Tracking emergent themes was not the main goal of this step, however, Palmer et al (2010) suggested to begin tracking themes as they emerged, as the final steps in the analytic process involved compiling all major themes that emerged across all interviews.

Step 2: Identification of participants' and researcher's positionalities. The second step involved the identification of the participants' and facilitators' positionalities (Palmer et al., 2010). Positionality refers to the experiential meaning of an individual's stance in relation to any given phenomenon. Because it identifies the experiential meaning of a person's perspective, it is often subject to change, but could also be sustained over time or across several contexts. Positionality is therefore the process of capturing a participant's relationship to, or involvement in, a given topic of concern. In my analysis, I tracked both my positionality and that of the participants. To track my positionality, I read through each interview and underlined all of my speaking turns. I underlined each time I asked a question, offered a minimal encourager, probed into participants' answers, invited a participant to join the conversation or simply agreed with a participant's claim. I also paid attention to how my identity as an African international student influenced my interactions with participant. Specifically, I kept a journal entry with instances where I had agreed with participants' concerns and comments, and also instances where participants had directly included me in the conversation. I repeated this process across all four interviews and kept a journal of my positionality in each interview. To track participants' positionalities to each other and to the claims and concerns they identified, I made note of how participants were interacting with each other, how they talked about their claims and concerns, and how they blocked or facilitated each other in offering perspectives on their experiences.

Because interviews were conducted in a group setting, I also paid attention to how participants related to the group. I repeated this process for all four interviews, then discussed my findings across the four interviews. For example, I discussed my positionality across all four interviews by focusing on my role in interviews and the common ways that I presented in all four interviews.

Step 3: Identification of roles and relationships. For this step, I identified how participants talked about other people, the roles that these people occupied and how the participants related to these roles. I read through each interview and circled instances that a participant referred to another person. I paid attention to the role that person occupied, how the participant talked about that person, and if other participants also discussed other people who occupied a similar role. This was an effort to create a picture of how the group related to an identified role, instead of focusing on individual participants' orientations. How participants described other people determined the relationships that they had with those individuals. I also tracked participants' own roles that they occupied and how they described these roles. I read through each participant's speaking turn and highlighted any roles that they played and how they spoke to the group about these roles. I repeated this step for all four interviews and compiled a list of participants' roles that were consistently described across all four interviews. This was an effort to understand how participants functioned in different roles and relationships, and how they related to major people in their lives. Identifying the various roles and relationships the participants occupied also provided information on the experience of acculturative stress and shed light on some of the coping mechanisms used to address the stress.

Step 4: Examination of systems and participants' orientation to systems. Step 4 was a continuation of Step 3, as it was also an effort to understand how participants related to others, the roles that participants themselves occupied, and how their own roles and those of others

influence participants' acculturative processes. Systems were operationalized as a set of principles or procedures according to which something is done. Working through the interviews, I identified the systems that were discussed, how the group discussed these systems, and the meaning and expectations attached to these systems. I identified the systems discussed within each interview, then compared systems across interviews. I compiled a list of the systems that appeared in multiple interviews, and how the systems were described across the interviews. The systems discussed were often in relation to questions I asked from the interview protocol. Other systems emerged from concerns that participants brought up themselves without my prompting. Systems were also often related to the claims and concerns that I identified in step one, in that some of the claims and concerns were about the systems themselves. The systems that were discussed consistently in more than one interview will be presented in the results in Chapter 4.

Step 5: Identification of participants' stories. The fifth step involved identifying the kinds of stories that participants told (Palmer et.al, 2010). This was an effort to get more insight into the major claims and concerns identified in step 1. I read through each interview, paying attention to talking turns where participants discussed their experiences or shared examples of both positive and negative interactions with systems. I repeated this process for all interviews, keeping notes of stories from each interview. I also paid attention to what these stories meant to the participants by keeping a journal of the similar concept of different stories. For example, I included in my journal, instances where two different participants in the same group shared different stories that held the same significance for both participants. I also compared the stories identified to the systems identified in step 4 and noted instances where the stories shared were directly related to how participants related to systems.

Step 6: Identification of language use. While I was tracking major claims, roles and relationships, and the stories that participants told, I also noted the kind of language that was used. As Palmer et al. (2010) suggested, I noted any use of euphemisms, metaphors and idiomatic expressions. I read through each interview thoroughly, underlying instances where participants had used such language. I also underlined instances where participants had used strong language to express their emotions, actions or reactions to certain interactions. I repeated this process for each interview, keeping a list of the type of language that had been used and where in the interviews they had occurred. After I had completed this process for each of the four interviews, I examined the notes I kept and noted any similarity in the type of language used across all the interviews. For example, if two participants from different focus groups used similar words to describe their reactions to an incident, I noted the words that were used and the stories that the participants had shared. I also tracked how specific language use mapped on to the emergent themes.

Step 7: Identification of patterns and variations in shared experiences. Like Palmer et al. (2010) had suggested, I adapted the emergent themes from step 1 in light with the work that had been done from steps 2 to six 6. Working on one interview at a time, I reviewed all of the coding stages and noted what experiences were being shared by the group, what individuals were doing by sharing their experiences, and how participants made meaning of each other's experiences. In each group, I also noted where there were consensus and conflict, how conflicts played out (if there were any) and whether particular participants' accounts were marginalized by the group. Through this process, I built an overview of what was happening in each group, and revised emergent themes to correspond to the group's narratives. I repeated this process for each group and kept separate notes on each group. This step was in preparation for the final step,

where I consolidated all of the findings across interviews and noted connections and similarities among the interviews.

Step 8: Integration of multiple themes into super themes. In the final step, I consolidated all insights from the previous steps across all the interviews to develop a bigger picture of the experiences of acculturation, acculturative stress and coping strategies of the participants. As suggested by Palmer and colleagues (2010), this step was a continuation of step 7, since I had conducted multiple focus group interviews. The focus group were intentionally structured to be homogenous, in that all participants recruited were international students at SIU and identified as racially Black. This was to facilitate the comparison of various insights across all four interviews. I identified the commonalities between emergent themes, clustering similar emergent themes from all four interviews into larger sub-themes. Then, I clustered sub-themes that represented similar concepts, insights and stories into larger super-ordinate themes. While clustering themes, I frequently checked back to the interviews to ensure that the themes were representative of original claims made by participants. After clustering the themes, I went back to review participants' stories that I had identified throughout the interviews and mapped these stories unto the super-ordinate themes, to make sense of how the themes matched with specific stories. During this final step, I journaled how my experiences were similar to the themes that had emerged from the interviews and purposefully identified the distinctions between my personal experiences and those of the participants. This was to ensure that my own biases and experiences were not reflected in the themes.

Auditing. The themes developed from the focus group interviews were audited by a graduate student with prior experience in qualitative research analysis. The auditor was given access to the transcribed interviews, codebooks of emerging themes of each interview, and a list

of all the super-themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews. The auditor read through the interviews and identified the number of times each theme was reflected within an interview, and also tracked themes that were reflected in multiple interviews. The auditor also double-checked the sub-themes against all four interviews to ensure that sub-themes were consistent with the contents of the interviews. After reviewing the sub-themes, the auditor read through the super-themes to ensure that the super-themes captured the essence of the respective cluster of sub-themes make sure the super-themes accurately represented all accompanying sub-themes. The auditor also wrote a statement of subjectivity, to ensure that the auditing process was completed in the most objective way. Upon completion, the auditor submitted documentation of their audit findings, along with their statement of subjectivity.

Internal reliability checks. As done by Sisley and colleagues (2011), I, along with the research assistants, ensured internal reliability by reading over each other's transcripts. We also met after each interview had been transcribed and reviewed to share our thoughts and reactions to the contents of the interview. . To reduce the influence of my experiences on the interview process, I shared my experience as a Black international student with the research assistants and the auditor. I identified experiences of acculturative stress that were similar to what participants had shared in the group interviews. For example, I shared my own experiences of discrimination and prejudice, incidents where I have been excluded from group projects due to my accent, and incidents where professors had treated me in a patronizing manner due to my ethnic and racial identities.

I also kept a personal journal during the research process, where I documented my own reactions to participants, the stories they shared and how I perceived my presence in the interviews. This was an effort to constantly check my own biases and ensure that my personal

experiences did not influence the analyses of the interviews. I also sought the services of an external auditor to ensure that the overall super-themes were reflective of participants' own experiences and claims, rather than my own. The undergraduate research assistants also discussed their experiences transcribing the interviews and their reactions to the experiences and challenges discussed in the interviews. For all of the research assistants, this study was their first introduction to the acculturative and coping experiences of Black international students, as none of them had prior knowledge about literature on this population.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The results of the seven-step analytic process are presented in a step-by-step manner as outlined in Palmer et al (2010). The results reflect the acculturative and coping experiences of 11 Black international students who completed all phases of this study. The final themes that emerged from the interviews will be presented and discussed in this chapter. The reported themes emerged from the entire sample and were echoed in more than one interview. Descriptive statistics about participants' demographics are also included in this chapter.

Descriptive Analyses

Participants in this study ranged from 19 to 45 years, with a mean age of 24.91 (N = 11, SD = 7.45). Seven participants identified as heterosexual and four participants did not indicate their sexual orientation. Five participants indicated graduate level of academic standing, three participants indicated senior academic standing, two participants indicated junior standing and one participant indicated freshman academic standing. Five participants identified as female and six participants identified as male. Five participants indicated a bachelor's degree as the highest level of education and four participants indicated a high school diploma as the highest level of education. Two participants did not indicate their highest levels of education. The majority of participants placed themselves in the middle of the McArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status. In terms of country of origin, five participants were from Nigeria, two participants were from the Democratic Republic of Congo, one participant was from Republic of Congo, one participant was from Ghana, one participant was from Barbados and one participant was from Togo. All participants in the study had been in the United States for at least two years. A more comprehensive table outlining demographic information is shown in Table 1.

Step One: Identification of objects of concern and experiential claims

I read through each interview and identified objects of concern and experiential claims that participants discussed in their focus group interviews. Not all participants discussed objects of concern and claims in each talking turn. After identifying major claims and concerns in each interview, I compared the claims and concerns across the four interviews and identified claims and concerns that were addressed across all interviews. Some of the objects of concern across all four focus group interviews were communication with professors and peers, treatment received from other people, transitioning into a new environment and participants' identities. The experiential claims were exactly what participants said in relation to the objects of concerns, and how participants discussed those concerns. The major concerns discussed within the interviews were communication issues, negative treatment from others, and general adjustment to a new society.

In terms of communication, the main concerns were speaking English as a second language, misunderstanding others because they spoke too fast, and speaking with a different language accent. Participants shared their concerns about being unable to communicate with others due to their own limited use of English and fearing judgement from others because they spoke with different accents. For several of the participants who spoke English as a second language, they worried about their speaking abilities. For example, one participant described his experience of speaking English as a second language, and how that makes him shy to participate in class discussions. He worried that since he speaks with a different accent, others would have trouble understanding him. He also seemed aware of others perception of him as "stupid" since he rarely spoke in class.

"Yeah for me, my biggest challenge is, is um language [be]cause my first language is not uh English, so I speak French and um yeah the biggest uh change for me here is language uh to know how to speak well without my accent you know. Everybody like accent but trying to speak like a normal people. You know and um like here, as she mentioned, like when you have like accent, they don't understand you. So, it makes you feel like shy in class, so you don't talk. And the issue with that is, here when they see you don't talk, they think you stupid. See that. So *sighs* it's like, how can I explain that, like it makes you shy and sometime kind of frustrating…"

Participants who already spoke English expressed concern about how others reacted to their language accent and being unable to understand their professors because they spoke English with a different and rather fast accent. Participants from Ghana, Nigeria and Barbados had grown up learning English at school, but due to accent differences, experienced instances where others could not understand them. Although it was not as challenging for these participants as it was for those who spoke English as a second language, communication was an object of concern due to the differences in language accents. They understood and could speak English, communication was an object of concern due to the differences in language accents.

"People understanding you – I found out I had an accent when I came here... [b]efore that I never knew. So, when I first came, sometimes like if I'm like in a hurry for something, I'll talk really, really fast in a Nigerian accent apparently and the person wouldn't catch what I was saying even though I was speaking English."

"..some of the things I think of as challenges for example like, okay so there's that communication thing like maybe the way I pronounce a word may be different from other

people, but in general in, you know like, Nigeria we speak English so in general, I have been able to, that has not been like too hard"

Negative treatment from others, specifically professors, academic advisors and immigration agents was also identified as an object of concern. Since interactions with professors occurred on a daily basis, it made sense that most of the negative treatment was from participants' professors. Participants discussed how some professors overlooked them in class, singled them out for having different names and made negative assumptions due to their race and ethnicity. These experiences impacted how participants perceived some of their professors and the university in general. For example, one participant reported how her professor would single her out in class because she had a name that was not "Mary" or "John". The professors' asking her where she was from after seeing her name made her feel singled out and picked on in class.

"Or um by my name, when they're going through the list in class, when it gets to my name, they'll be like oh they just ask, where you from? And the whole discussion just started you know in class the one who gets pick on, so yeah… like by the way you it looks alone they just feel like I'm different from everybody else and asks oh where you from, why don't you ask John or Mary or Sarah?"

Another participant also revealed how he stopped telling professors that he spoke English as a second language because he worried about them perceiving him as unintelligent and under-developed. He was already aware of how he was perceived as a Black man and did not want to be further marginalized because he spoke English as a second language.

"[See] I did that at first and then I started realizing how weird it was when they start treating you like you're some underprivileged individual because I I refused to start at some point I stopped doing that because, also French, English is definitely not my first

language, I got to a point where I was just sitting there and Im like, I don't want to be the

only Black guy in my class and also being treated

like im some ssss weird case of under developed human being…*"*

A third object of concern was the general adjustment to a new society. Some participants

described experiencing "culture shock", while others reported that they had experienced no

difficulty transitioning into the new society. Aspects of culture shock were related to schooling,

language difficulties and food. Other participants also pointed out the differences in how people

in authority are addressed. For several participants who came from societies that placed an

emphasis on respect for those in authority, it was unusual to call professors and supervisors by

their first names. It was also unusual to pass people on the street and not greet them or greet and

not receive a response from the other person. Eye contact was another concept that some

participants were concerned about. For some cultures, it is considered inappropriate to maintain

eye contact for a lengthy period of time, especially if that person is in a position of power.

However, in the U.S., it is expected that people maintain eye contact while speaking,

> "You know? Or passing my professors on campus and saying good morning and them not
>
> replying because it's unusual, was annoying you know? But at the same time the eye
>
> contact was an issue as well 'cause Americans seem to look into your soul when they're
>
> talking to you especially um, white people in power. You know? Th – They lock eye –
>
> eye contact so with my supervisors it's kind of hard at work and my internship to lock
>
> eyes and not feel intimidated because in the back of my head I know I'm being judged
>
> because of the racial hierarchy here that I'm not accustomed to."

Feeling welcomed in the U.S was also a concern related to the adjustment to a new

society. Although participants recognized the sense of community that existed here, some of

them expressed doubt about others' true intensions and feelings toward them. The tendency for others to smile or wave briefly made some participants uncomfortable, as it communicated a sense of fakeness. For some participants, the quick smile and short wave was not genuine because it did not convey warmth or an actual welcome. It was also different from how people interacted with each other in their home countries, where people would often spend long periods of time chatting and checking in on each other. One participant discussed how people often flashed fake smiles at him at the stores and other places, and how this did not convey to him that he was genuinely welcomed into his new community. Therefore, he was concerned about whether he was truly welcome and safe in Carbondale.

"Yeah I'm sure every one of us had experienced this fake smile. They see you out, they just walk past you, and Oh, do you just walk pass you on the store. Just want to process that. I, it's not that at the time I went in finding somewhere, but in some way, I was trying to grab something and yeah, it's kind of about to kind of behaving funny, you know? I mean I do because now it seems I'm not gonna give you a nice attitude to know that you are welcome. I mean they don't really care about you. I mean it's not safe."

Step Two: Identification of Participants' and Researcher's Positionalities

Positionality as related to the interpretive phenomenological approach was defined as the process of capturing a person's relationship to, or involvement in, a given topic of concern (Palmer et al., 2010). I read through each interview and recorded the role that I played in each interview. Since each group of participants was different, it was to be expected that my role would be slightly different in each interview. Across all interviews, I made sure to minimize my presence by limiting my talking turns. I asked questions about participants' experiences of living in the United States, challenges experienced adjusting to a new cultural and academic

environment, and how participants coped with the challenges they encountered. I also followed up with probes when participants' answers were unclear or when they offered additional information related to the question asked. In the interviews where participants were more talkative and forthcoming with information, I was quieter and offered less encouragers. However, in interviews with quieter participants (like in interview 1), I consistently offered minimal encouragers and probed into participants' shorter answers. In all of the interviews, I was keenly aware of my status as an international student, as I related to most of the experiences discussed by participants. I found myself feeling empathic toward the experiences of discrimination and profiling that participants shared. In instances where participants shared challenging experiences, I often offered encouragers and validated their experience. For example, when a woman participant felt uncertain about whether people at her church had excluded her because of her race, I validated the participant's experience of feeling left out and shunned by others.

Another aspect of my positionality was being an African researcher in the interview. As an African, I was treated as a peer and as a member of the group, although I did not offer my own experiences or perspectives. As an African, I was granted access into the room and conversation that I might not have as a non-African researcher. Across all interviews, I found myself wanting to share my own experiences with participants, as a way to validate their reactions to experiences. However, to maintain objectivity of the study, I purposively restrained from sharing my own personal experiences.

Participants generally expressed dissatisfaction with their experiences with professors and peers at SIU. Although some participants suggested that the educational system within the U.S. was more effective than what existed in their home countries, they expressed dissatisfaction at the treatment they received from academic advisors, professors and American peers in the

classroom. On the other hand, some participants expressed gratitude about the help they received from some university staff, members of their faith community and fellow international students. They discussed how these individuals had provided them practical, spiritual and social support, and that support made participants' transitions easier. Participants also expressed gratitude to staff at various university offices who made them feel welcome on the university campus. In relating to each other, participants were generally pleasant and polite. They typically waited for each other to speak, validated each other's experiences and related to each other with a sense of familiarity. Almost all of the participants knew each other in some capacity prior to participating in the focus group interviews, possibly due to the small and close-knit nature of the Black international community at SIU.

Step Three: Identification of Roles and Relationships

For this step in the analysis process, I read through each interview to identify how participants referred to different people in their lives, and the roles that these people occupied. Some of these people included professors, academic advisors, Center for International Education (CIE) staff, and community members. I also identified participants' own roles and relationships with others. Participants across the four focus groups consistently referred to their professors, who occupied to positions of authority. Participants discussed the role that professors played in their academic experiences and how both positive and negative interactions with professors impacted their academic journey. For some participants, they found their professors approachable and supportive, while others discussed negative experiences of being profiled and stereotyped by their professors. These various interactions with professors influenced participants' willingness to participate in class discussions or ask professors for clarification on assignments.

Participants referred to some members of their faith community that they had interacted with. These were people participants attended church or other faith gatherings with. For some participants, these faith community members served as support systems for them, helping them transition into their new community. Although they did not occupy salient roles in participants' lives, they were part of a community that participants identified with. Also, most of the interactions that participants had with members of their faith community were positive, thus participants felt even more connected with these people and with the faith communities. For example, one participant's experience with a church member who had helped him pick up some furniture left a positive impression on him, although he was not close friends with that church member. The church member had come to his aid even when they did not have a personal relationship, simply because they were members of the same faith community.

> Yeah, like here they don't have uh like what when I first come here, they didn't have like Uber and stuff and the bars are kind of useless. So, I was supposed to buy a mattress but how can I um take a mattress from this from the store to my apartment… Oh, oh okay that was a hard, okay he just need to help me to do that and uh yeah he was the uh the first one here to be like use useful to me. He helped to me go shopping, to buy stuff for my apartment so he was kind of okay but imagine if I didn't know him…"

Salient relationships were ones that participants had formed either with people in their home countries or with people in the United States and relied on for support. Roles that participants occupied were mainly as students, friends and workers. Participants often pointed out the roles they occupied in the answers they provided, as they discussed their experiences of living and attending school in a different country. Regarding their role as students, participants expressed mixed feelings. While some mentioned that being students at SIU had initially been

stressful, others commented that being students in the U.S was rather easy. One participant shared his experience of adjusting to school in the U.S by saying that "How ya know, college education is taking a year. The expectations, uh from the instructors and then ya know especially life at the university, and all that it wasn't easy."

Another participant discussed her experience as a student and athlete at Southern Illinois University, "[b]ut that's not my highlight. My highlight is, if there is a question to ask me it's not, okay, so you know what are you studying? 99% of the time it is, so what races do you run is always gonna be associated with the extra, the extra curriculum activity which is sport and not knowledge." In her experience, others seemed to place her athletic performance ahead of her academic interests or performance. Instead of asking about her academic major, people her what races she ran as an athlete, reducing her to just her athletic performance.

"

In terms of their role as friends, most participants discussed their relationships with other students. For several of the participants, their salient relationships were formed with other international students. In those relationships, participants co-depended on each other for social and emotional support. For example, one participant pointed that international students who had been in the U.S for a while shared information with incoming international students. In her experience, "[t]hey make – they – that's – that's actually one of the things we're encouraged to share with new internationals like as soon as they get here you know? Show them how to comm– keep in that communication with the outside world…".

Participants' relationships with other international students also described as a source of comfort and a way to cope with being away from home. One participant discussed forming

friendships with African students due to the similarities between some African and Caribbean cultures.

"Uh circles, just friend circles you know? Um, I don't have a lot of Barbadians here but at the same time uh the African dis– uh culture is very, very close to ours because you know the same ancestors and everything… so, the music is similar, the food is similar, so just getting you know people so just getting…"

Participants also discussed relationships with members of their faith communities. Majority of the participants identified as members of Christian faith communities and highlighted the social and economic benefits of these relationships. One participant shared the support he received from a member of his faith community.

"Oh, oh okay that was a hard, okay he just needs to help me to do that and uh yeah he was the uh the first one here to be like use useful to me. He helped to me go shopping, to buy stuff for my apartment so he was kind of okay but imagine if I didn't know him…"

Participants also discussed their relationships with family and friends in their home countries. Many participants frequently communicated with family and friends in their home countries, as this helped reduce feelings of homesickness. Participants identified their family as sources of support and encouragement. One of the participants highlighted the support she received from her family.

"Then also with my family back home is like, just being a should be assured of their love for me. You don't want like my, I have a chat group with my parents and my sisters and we just talk all the time. So, having that support, that's also very good"

A participant also mentioned that he kept in constant communication with his family as that was the only way he could speak his native language.

"Yeah to add to what she has already said up for to keep contact with family back home, that one is a must, every single day, posting about a, you know, conversation, unless it is very extreme, but you see I have to catch up to make sure that they know you're okay that everything is going well… Mine is every single day I have to call, if I can call or text. Yeah. Like, you know, FaceTime and skype wasn't possible. So, you know, Internet connection problems apart from that. Yeah. And that one keeps us, you know, very strong because uh to be able to speak my native tongue, I have to call home…"

Relationships with members of faith communities, friends and family members helped participants cope with living away from home and the difficulties of adjusting to a new country. Relationships formed with other international students in the U.S. also provided a physical community that participants could rely on for physical, emotional and social support. The roles that professors occupied was also significant for participants, since their main roles were students. Therefore, their own role as students was related to professors as people who facilitated their classroom learning or made their transition into a new academic system difficult.

Step Four: Highlighting Systems and Participants' Orientation to the Systems

For this step, a system was operationalized as an organization or institution with specific sets of rules and identifiable parts. I highlighted participants' identification of the various systems within which they operated. I tracked their orientation to systems by how they described their experiences within these systems. I also noted the impact that participants' interactions within the various systems impacted their overall experience within the United States. For several participants, the various systems often intersected with each other, which meant that two different systems could interact to influence a participant's experiences.

One system that was identified across all four interviews was the academic system in the U.S. One participant had completed high school in the U.S, so was familiar with the academic system by the time he begun college. All other participants were introduced to the U.S academic system for the first time in universities. Some participants expressed positive experiences within the academic system, while others expressed dissatisfaction with academic advising, class scheduling and expectations of professors. For those participants who expressed positive attitudes towards the academic system, it was because they had had more positive than negative experiences within the academic system. They generally experienced their professors as helpful, had positive interactions with peers in the classroom, and felt supported by the university. One participant shared her positive experiences with her professors and academic advisor.

> "And my teachers, like the first day I met them, they're like oh you're a new student, come see me later so I can give you the syllabus and all that. Make sure you do this and do this for extra credit. Cause I'm not used to that, people don't want to see you progress in like but like everyone here's so nice, they want to see you move. Like my advisor, so she's like oh how is classes going? Do you need help in this? Financial issues, anything? Like just come talk to me and all that. And like, they've been helpful a lot…"

Other participants expressed negative orientations to the academic system. These participants were unhappy about treatment from professors and peers, felt frustrated about how overall grades were calculated, and generally struggled to adjust to the structural differences between the academic system here and the ones in their home countries. For example, a participant shared her struggle of adjusting to professors' strict schedules and expectations of timeliness. This participant reported that in her home country, professors and lecturers did not have set appointment times, and timeliness was not as emphasized as it is here in the U.S.

"But no, they stick to their office hours. His office hours are gonna start in like twenty minutes and he's like yeah wait for twenty minutes and I'm – I was really bewildered I'm like just, like – they really, they really stick to schedules here for me I didn't really um – I didn't really have respect for schedules like that…"

A main concern that was related to the academic system was participants' concerns about language and communication. Many participants identified language barriers as a main influence in their negative experience of the U.S academic system. Because some of the participants spoke English as a second language, they felt uncomfortable participating in class discussions, often felt left out of group discussions and projects, and experienced discrimination from some professors and peers in the classroom. For example, one participant shared her difficulty of understanding American slang and how others respond to her when she speaks in a different accent.

"Yeah like they talk fast like really fast. Sometimes I don't know what you're saying, or I have, it's very difficult understanding American slang. So, like when they say something like, I don't know, know what that means, they look at me like where you from? Or like I say something like what. Or like I mean this, and I point it out for them, they're like oh this, why didn't you say this? I'm like I said it this way so it's just…"

Another reason why some participants expressed a negative orientation to the academic system was international students' lack of access to certain academic programs. Some universities did not grant admission to medical and nursing programs to international students, which meant that interested international students had to find other option. For example, a participant pointed out how some nursing programs did not accept international students by saying "…even like nursing like some schools didn't have nursing for international…".

She had to search extensively for nursing programs that would admit international students, and also had to transfer schools until she found the pre-nursing program here at SIU. For her, this lack of access to certain academic programs was quite frustrating.

Another system that was identified across all interviews was the racial/ethnic hierarchical system present within the United States. Some of the participants discussed their introduction to the racial hierarchy in the U.S, which was different from the social classification systems that exist in their home countries. All of the participants grew up in countries where majority of the citizens are racially Black, therefore racial identity was not as salient. However, upon moving to the U.S., participants became members of a racial minority group and had to learn the racial hierarchical system in the U.S. Participants generally expressed negative attitudes toward the racial/ethnic hierarchy within the U.S., since all of them had experienced instances of profiling, discrimination and racism due to their race or ethnicity. The racial and ethnic hierarchical system in the U.S. was also a main influencer in their acculturative process. For many of the participants their racial and ethnic identities became salient only when they moved into the U.S. For example, for one of the participants, it was only when she moved into the U.S. was when she became cognizant of her Black and Nigerian identities.

> "Um, yeah I learned I was Nigerian when I came here. I learned I was Black when I came here. I'd always known I was, you know, I'd always known that like you know the black race was at the bottom of the societal hierarchy, but I grew up in Nigeria the hierarchies we had w – money talks."

Another participant had a similar experience, where he came to learn about his racial and ethnic identities when he moved to the U.S. Suddenly, his race became the main thing that people

noticed about him and influenced how others treated and perceived him in his academic department.

> "…because you know in my engineering, also I was in mining engineering it was just I was Black, there was two Black guys me and another guy and everybody else was White and when we go to certain places [pause] you just stop, people just look at you different they treat you a little different you know people always ask you like if I went to we went to some place we all engineers and then I was the only one being asked so what are you here for."

In the racial/ethnic hierarchical system was also the intersecting identities of gender and race. The intersectionality of gender and race was more salient for the participants who identified as women, since both of these identities are marginalized in the U.S. Three women participants in different focus groups highlighted how their identities had become salient within the U.S, despite them being Black women all of their lives. Although there had been clear gender disparities and oppression in their home countries, the added component of a marginalized racial identity impacted these participants' acculturative processes. For one of the women participants, she had "just lost twice" because she was Black and a woman.

> "But here that was a culture shock 'cause I did not really realize how, um, oppressed black people were until I came here in a country and was assumed. The assumption was I was black… American because… because I – they didn't hear my accent yet… yeah knowing that oh my gosh not only am I black but I am a female… So, I just lost twice…"

A third system that was identified in the interviews was a financial/economic system, which was directly related to the academic system that participants discussed. Since international students can only work a limited amount of time on a valid F-1 visa, their financial and economic

activities are directly related to their status as students. Many of the participants expressed frustration and disappointment at their limited access to employment on and off campus due to their immigration status. Although international students pay out-of- state tuition fees, they are limited in the number of hours they can work and the types of work they can do. One participant reflected on how difficult it had been getting a job on and off campus due to his immigration status. This was not an isolated experience, as other participants in different focus groups shared similar experiences of difficulty finding employment or good-paying jobs.

> "The job opportunity. It's been hard getting a job on campus because we have to use the non-federal work study jobs for international students. Most of the jobs are menial jobs like cleaning the cafeteria. Then what if you don't want to do that what if you want to work on administration or somewhere Nice. but you are not allowed to do it…. [e]ven for an internship job on campus it is kind of hard to get one. They just need to ask a question like are you from here? Are you going to go back after you graduate? So, when you just ask yes, how we go back after graduating. They ask you are you American? No. So it's kind of hard and the thing with that is we paying like 12 more than twice what the American pay the same important and they don't treat us probably no better than them they treat us less than them so that doesn't make sense since we pay more than what they paid. So, I think that is what is very bad here."

Step 5: Identification of Participants' Stories

This step was a continuation of step 1 where I identified objects of concerns and experiential claims, and step 4, where I highlighted systems and participants' orientations to these systems. The stories identified were often in relation to the objects of concern and various systems discussed and served to illustrate experiential claims and impact of these experiences.

Stories sometimes differed between focus groups and among participants in the same group, however, the motives for telling these stories were similar. The stories across interviews centered on racist and discriminatory experiences, experiences of culture shock, academic struggles, and negative perceptions of Africa and Africans.

One of the participants shared a discriminatory experience with immigration officials while entering the U.S. She was randomly selected for a search, where her luggage and emails were searched, and the participant was questioned about her activities in her home country of Nigeria. While the incident was occurring, she thought it was a random search since she had never been searched extensively on previous trips to the U.S. Her story highlighted the discriminatory nature of "random searches", which profiles members of certain faiths and citizens of certain countries. The participant's repetition of the phrase "I was called aside" alluded to being profiled, since she was not the only person in line to enter the U.S.

"Okay coming into the country, it wasn't my first time, it was like my fifth time. I *pause* I like to think it was just a routine check-up but when I told this story to people, they're like that was like harassment and…Yeah, like my rights were not, what do they call them? Breaking of rights or something like that? Yeah 'cause I was called aside and I had passed all the check points and everything but I was called aside and they went through all my stuff and, you know, like this happened this year but this back where you live *laughs*so and he opened my laptop. Read through my emails, my phone, and everything and I thought it was, I don't like getting in trouble, so I thought it was just a like a normal routine check but when I tell people, they are like no."

Another participant also discussed a discriminatory experience, where more documentation was required for this university application process due to him being from

Nigeria. When applying for admission to SIU, he was required to submit original copied of his high school certification exam instead of the scanned copies required for other international students. After he had submitted this, he was asked to submit his original PIN number so that his scores on the certification exam could be verified. He was told by school officials that all of these extra requirements were because he is Nigerian. In recounting his experience, this participant highlighted how his nationality influenced his application process. Like the other participant who had been profiled at the airport, this participant had also been discriminated against due to his nationality.

> "… I had a situation with this school. According to my country, when I was trying to get into this school, um I was supposed to send my details to get into this school. So, they wanted my SAT results s – my WAEC results [unclear] and then when I, when I gave that to them, I scanned a copy to my brother to send to this school and the school specifically just said we can accept these kinds of copies because you're Nigerian. Like specifically picked out my coun – they didn't give me a list they didn't say African countries from s – they didn't, they didn't mention if you're from this side of Africa or if you're a country on this list they just said except you're from Nigeria so we will accept the scanned copies so we literally had to mail original copies of my document…"

Another participant shared two experiences where she was either ignored by others or avoided by others at her church, possibly due to her race. These incidents had occurred at her church with members of the faith community. In the first incident, her contributions and attempts to join a conversation had been ignored. In the second event, a woman whose children the participant was interacting with had pulled her children away under the guise of having to go home. However, the woman had then gone off to join another group instead of heading home like

she had told the participant. While sharing her experiences, the client seemed reluctant to label it as race-related issues until others in her focus group confirmed that she had those experiences because of her race.

"The first experience was um, a conversation was happening and like, so I kinda like saw the person that I came to the church with there. So, I went, and I just stood there and was trying to, like, you know, just join the conversation because I didn't want to just be somewhere in my own. And um, there was one particular person who was kind of like in charge of the conversation, but um, if that makes sense because it's like the main person is talking and like she was like pretty much including everybody looking around the circle and everything and just sort of like not acknowledging me and I did not want. I was like, okay, I'm going to jump to conclusions and think she's not acknowledging me. And so, I was like, let me ask a question. And so, I asked the question. She totally ignored me. I was like, okay, fine. Maybe she didn't hear me, let me just still be listening and then I ask the question again like a few minutes later and she was just like, answered me very abruptly, and just continue the conversation."

Some participants also shared experiences of being discriminated against while seeking employment. A participant shared his experience of talking with a potential employer, whom he met at a social event. While talking with the employer, the participant had disclosed that he was an engineering student. The employer then blatantly told him that he preferred to hire Black people for the human resources department and not engineering position. This had left the participant angry and disappointed. This story is related to the ones discussed above, as this participant had been discriminated against and denied a chance at employment due to his race.

"I one time went to hang out at some friends we had dinner, and a white man was having

fun was having a time with his wife and then he came to me and was just starting random

conversation long story short he told me he owns an engineering firm in Southern

Illinois and like I'm an engineer to no I didn't tell him I'm an engineer saying he was

looking for jobs and like "hey I, I want a job" he's like "send me your resume" I'm like

"ok I'm an engineer I wanna send you" and he was surprised that I'm a Black man who's

an engineer and he literally told me to my face "I'm trying to hire many black people for

HR and not for engineering."

Stories also related participants' annoyance at others' stereotypes about Africa and

Africans. Several participants had interactions with others who made assumptions about them or

said ignorant things to them because they are African. These interactions were with university

staff, community members and peers. One participant shared a story of being made fun of by an

African American student because the participant is African. He expressed feeling anger at the

other student, since they both shared a similar identity of being people of African descent.

According to the participant, the only thing that separated him from the other student was that the

other student was American whereas the participant is not.

"I don't mmm mmm I remember so what, what did he say [pause] so he made fun of

Africa- I don't remember I also should not read my phone sadly is so you know [pause] I

didn't have a car till sophomore year so we was riding with this dude and all sat in the

back and this dude he was black and he, he was like ummmm [pause] cause the car was

really packed so I'm like I'm going to sit outside and the truck was like a pickup truck

so I'm sitting in the back [pause] and this dude was like aye man you have flashbacks of

home…"

Participants also shared stories about their difficulties adjusting to mainstream U.S. culture. Some of the things that Americans might take for granted, like food, norms for social interactions and living away from family units took some time for participants to become accustomed to. Some participants were still struggling to adjust to some of the cultural difference, since they represented shifts in lifestyle or self-concept. For example, a few participants shared how they struggled with living alone. None of the participants had lived away form close family prior to moving to the U.S. Even participants who lived in other countries lived with close aunts and uncles and other family. For one participant who had grown up in a close-knit community, living alone represented a shift from relying on community for support to relying on himself for everything.

"And I will tell you that it wasn't easy at the beginning. There's uh this cultural shock when I came. Lot of things were different, ya know not umm what we're used to seeing on T.V. or hear on the news. The reality on the ground is not that, so you have to adjust to the new culture. The new way of thinking. First of all, you, you're living by yourself. I was, you know with my family back home. When I came here, I had to start living by myself and you know the contact of other people is not the same like back home. Back home we have high contact you know there is a lot of variety. It's not me its ya know, its everybody but where I'm at here you've got to learn how to be by yourself…"

The stories of being discriminated against and profiled due to race, ethnicity and country of origin highlighted the detrimental effects of prejudice. They also communicated participants' desire to be treated with respect as people, instead of being judged and picked on for something as arbitrary as race and country of origin. Participants' stories about culture shock shed light on

how participants experienced and made sense of different aspects of mainstream American culture.

Step Six: Identification Of The Types of Language Used In The Interview Process

I tracked the use of euphemisms, colloquial terms and non-English languages to describe systems, frustrations and experiences. The use of euphemisms or colloquial terms were uncommon in the interviews. Since none of the participants were professionals, there was no use of jargon in any of the interviews. Participants talked informally among themselves, often using slang words like "gotta", "wanna" and "tryna" like they would in casual conversations with each other. When participants discussed objects of concern, they tended to use emotive words. For example, when one participant was discussing her negative experience with professors singling her out in the classroom, she used the term "alien" to draw attention to how that experience isolated her from the rest of the class and made her feel like she did not belong. She stated, "Yeah like my English teacher and the teachers, I just feel like I'm an alien to just give me that look like when they try to pronounce your name."

Another participant also shared a similar experience of feeling alienated in her faith community. While recounting her experience, she seemed hesitant to express disappointment at the treatment she received, since it had happened at her church. However, the other members of the focus group agreed that it had been an instant where that participant had been unwelcomed in an environment. One participant told the entire group that "I would, I would just say that she, she was not welcome in this premise is, but these people couldn't say openly that we don't want you here".

Participants generally discussed systems in language that suggested disappointment, frustration, and anger. Rarely did participants directly use emotive words to express their orientation to these systems. However, how they discussed their experiences in the systems and people they encountered within these systems suggested disappointment or frustration. For example, when recounting his experience with academic advising staff, one participant referred to advisement as "trash", to convey the disappointment and frustration he felt about academic advising services he had received.

"That was okay, except probably the advisory are trash… [n]o they give you they, they say hey, uh you want to do uh civil engineering, look there's something going on right now and if you do this you get a jump faster. They don't do that, they just say, you need to take this class, you need to take that class. So, I don't understand that. And when you ask them a question, like what do you think if I do this instead of doing that? They don't even have an answer, so that is difficult."

Another participant also discussed his reasons for not letting professors know that he did not speak English as a first language. He described his reason in polite language, while using the term "refuse" repeatedly to highlight his resistance and rejection of the negative treatment and assumptions that professors would make if they knew he was a Black student who also spoke English as a second language.

"I did that at first and then I started realizing how weird it was when they start treating you like you're some underprivileged individual because I I refused to start at some point I stopped doing that because, also French, English is definitely not my first language, I got to a point where I was just sitting there and I'm like, I don't want to be the only Black

guy in my class and also being treated like I'm some ssss weird case of under developed human being…"

Participants' stories were also generally told in polite and respectful language, even when participants were expressing anger at their experiences. For example, a participant who recounted an incident of being shut down by a peer in the classroom indicated that although she had not liked the response of the student and professor, it was "alright". However, when I probed further, she explicitly mentioned that the incident had made her angry. Then, she also expressed hopelessness about the situation since the professor did not take her side, stating "…I was angry, I was like I know this. I know better than you can ever knew. But I couldn't do anything 'cause teacher thought she knew better too."

Participants' general use of polite and respectful language could be due to the fact that all participants were still students at SIUC at the time of the interviews. Thus, they may have been worried about coming across as disrespectful or ungrateful to the school and their host culture. Several of the participants also reported that English was not their first language, and that could have impacted their language use in how they described experiences and salient incidents.

Step Seven: Identification of Patterns and Variations In Shared Experiences

I adapted the emergent themes from step 1, and also noted the similarities and differences in the shared experiences within each group. I also noted any conflicts that arose in the groups. There was only one instance of conflict across all four interviews, where one participant had disagreed with something another participant had said. The first participant had shared her perception of her home country as a place where suffering is glorified and romanticized. Another participant, who is also from the same country, disagreed with the first participant's statement.

P3: There's thing that Nigerians do a lot – they glorify suffering. They really do.

P2: What

P3: Yeah, you've never – you don't know it? I will see – I even saw – I even um experienced it here. So, when – for some reason, Nigerians just like difficult things. Right from when I was a kid, I've been told things like um if you go to a female's house and she's got things like um, laundry machines and uh microwaves, you know things to make life easier? She's lazy, run away! Or if somebody went to um a private school instead of a public school they didn't really go to school. Like you, your school experience has to have some kind of suffering in it.

P2: No, I'm not just speaking about what you said I'm just, I'm just trying to make you understand that you – what you're saying is right but what you're taking from it is wrong.

P3: No way

P2: It's not, it's not that we find suffering, it's, it's, it's taking pride in what we stand f – it's just the way –

P3: Taking pride in what?!

P2: Wait, let me talk. It's just the way the black community talks about, about the slavery and whatever happened in this country.

Both participants discussed their points back and forth, in a polite albeit heated manner. Although they disagreed with each other, they both took turns explaining their views to the other person. This interaction was a classic example of how people could grow up in the same country but have very different experiences of their country. After going back and forth for a while, the third participant in the group interjected and tried to create a middle group that the other participants could agree on.

There were some instances where one participant's experience of a system differed from the rest of the group. Example, when participants shared their experiences of the academic system, some participants reported only positive experiences, offering praise for professors and university staff who had been helpful in their transition. For example, in one interview, a participant mentioned that he had never been discriminated against nor experienced racism from his White peers at school.

"I went to high school but uhh, I felt like I was welcomed by people in my school, so I had not really, really experience like racism [pause] so yeah the experience I f-I feel like they're all different…"

Step Eight: Merging All Sub-Themes Under Broader Super-Themes

As directed by Palmer et al (2010), I created sub-themes by clustering similar emerging themes from all four interviews. This was a continuation of step seven, where I identified patterns across the four focus groups. Emerging themes that contained similar stories, experiences or patterns were clustered into a sub-theme. Emerging themes that were not reflected across all four interviews were removed. Sub-themes that represented the same concepts and concerns across interviews were then clustered under a super-theme. Super-themes and their accompanying sub-themes are shown in Appendix A. After an audit process by a fellow graduate student, the super-themes were edited and trimmed. At the end of this process, fifteen super-themes emerged from the interviews. The super-themes represented participants' acculturative process, experiences of culture shock, acculturative challenges, experiences of acculturative stressors and, and the coping mechanisms that participants developed.

Experiences of growing up in various home countries. Participants in all four focus group interviews discussed their experiences of growing up in their various home countries. They

discussed the educational systems and the social structures of their respective home countries.

Many participants described similar educational systems of primary, secondary and tertiary

education. All participants had completed primary (American equivalent of elementary) school in

their home countries. All but one participant had completed their secondary (American

equivalent of high school) education in their home countries, and all participants were in the

process of receiving their undergraduate or graduate level degrees in the United States.

Participants generally had positive experiences of growing up in their home countries. Several

participants discussed their experiences of growing up with close and extended family members,

attending school with the same groups of friends and feeling like they belonged to their

communities. For example, one participant described what it was like growing up in the same

household as members of his extended family.

> "Um, my name is [name omitted] and I'm from Ghana, um *clears throat* growing up in
>
> Ghana was is all about family, where by umm you live with your parents, your grandma,
>
> your grandfather, sometimes your niece and nephew, it's like we all live together one big
>
> family. [pause] now [pause] yeah"

Other participants also examined the gender and socio-economic structures of their

various countries. Participants described that they did not have to adjust to the gendered structure

of mainstream American society since this structure was similar to the gendered structures of

their home countries. They discussed the treatment of different genders, privilege associated with

a male identity and the classist structure of their communities. For example, one participant

addressed the social structures in her home country of Nigeria.

"It's more of a classist system… in Nigeria and so money's something that like I

respected totally. And of course, there's the patriarchy and how compatible that is with

the current interpretation of the Christian doctrine."

Challenges and experiences of dealing with cultural shifts in the United States.

Participants discussed their initial reactions to living in the United States. For several

participants, life in the U.S was quite different than they had imagined. Their experiences

transitioning into the new culture were similar on some level and different on other levels. For

participants who moved here with family member or had family already living here, they

described an easier transition than participants who moved here alone. Participants disclosed

some challenges they had experienced, which included getting used to the cold winters, getting

used to the food, adjusting to interpersonal interactions in the U.S, the treatment of immigrants in

the U.S, and living away from their families. One participant described having to get used to a

different style of interpersonal interactions in the U.S.

"…like in Barbados when you walk the street you have to say good afternoon, good

evening, you have to greet your elders, you have to be respectful to your elders, you

can't   reply or, or you know um, so be rude to your elders or anything like that. So, and

– and   just walking into a room and greeting people even if you don't know anyone so

me walking into a classroom and saying good morning and not having people reply

was frustrating… [o]r passing my professors on campus and saying good morning and

them not replying because it's unusual, was annoying you know? But at the same time the eye

contact was an issue as well 'cause Americans seem to look into your soul when they're

talking to you especially um, white people in power. You know? Th – They lock eye –

eye contact so with my supervisors it's kind of hard at work and my internship to lock

eyes and not feel intimidated because in the back of my head I know I'm being judged

because of the racial hierarchy here that I'm not accustomed to…"

Another participant discussed her struggle in adjusting to different styles of interpersonal

interactions. For her, it was unusual to meet people she knew in public and not have them

acknowledge her. It also shocked her that she took classes with different people different

semesters.

"…sometimes I used to feel really violated like people just wanna come over they

just wanna hangout with you and I'm like I'm just trying to learn I'm just tryna know

who you are I can't be this close you know to you or anything like that and also the fact

that sometimes you take the same classes with people and nobody never say hi. like it's

like they just don't know you, you, you know they just there and when the semester is

off, the next semester new people and you don't even, you don't even remember the first

one and they don't even remember like remember you know but that's been like really

like it still like shock me."

Positive and negative experiences of adjusting to the United States. Participants

shared some of the positive experiences of adjusting to the United States, like the sense of

community they felt, forming new friendships, and positive interactions with academic staff.

Participants also negative experiences such as interactions with unhelpful academic advisors, A

participant also highlighted his positive and welcoming experience of attending high school in

the U.S.

"I have like really you know I have like nice experience you know in terms of being in

America cause in Ghana like you basically can go to any school that you wanna go, but

I came here, I started my uhh..., actually I skipped my sophomore year, but um… that

was kinda new to me but yeah I went to high school but uhh I felt like I was welcomed by

people in my school so I had not really, really experience like racism…"

Another participant also shared their overall positive experience of adjusting to the U.S

"Yeah, it's been great so far and uh I made a lot friend I met a lot of friend, a lot of people

here, wonderful people and uh yeah I think everything is okay so far. It's cool, life and

everything's good."

Participants also shared some of the negative experiences of adjusting to the U.S. Most of

the negative experiences were related to the academic system and their role as students.

Participants described negative experiences with academic advisors who did not express faith in

the students' ability to succeed. Participants also complained about difficulty understanding their

professors, some of whom spoke too fast.

"Yeah like they talk fast like really fast. Sometimes I don't know what you're saying, or I

have, it's very difficult understanding American slang. So, like when they say something

like, I don't know, know what that means, they look at me like where you from? Or like I

say something like what. Or like I mean this, and I point it out for them, they're like oh

this, why didn't you say this? I'm like I said it this way so it's just... that it."

Experiencing growth/change as a result of living away from home. In the interviews,

participants talked about some of the growth they had noticed in themselves, and changes others

had pointed out, due to living away from home. By having to live alone, they had developed new

skills and become more self-sufficient. One participant noticed that she had become more certain

of who she was as she got older

"… It's like you know you I didn't even notice you know my mom was the first one to

be like oh but I, I mean it comes with growth to I mean I I been in America almost 8

years so when you hang out with your friends from back there your mentality has

changed you didn't know we've kept in touch you know we at different points maybe in

our lives umm so [pause] somethings you when I went home 2016 there's certain things

people do back that I just don't tolerate…"

Another participant pointed out that he had become a product of his environment, as he had

begun to think and speak differently than he had prior to moving into the U.S. According to

him,"...you will realize you've changed a little bit… just because you start becoming a product of

your environment to an extent…"

Other participants described how others noticed slight or significant changes in them, even when

the participants were not cognizant of these changes in themselves.

"…when you go back home your cousins will be home your whole life will probably say

yeah you changed… you dress different…"

Identification with home country and African identity. Participants also discussed

how they identified with their home countries, and how living in the United States had influenced

their identities. Several participants identified strongly with their home countries, with few of

them noting any significant changes to that identification since migrating. Although several

participants described some dissatisfaction with aspects of their home country, they also

identified strongly with their home countries.

"Well, with my home country, actually belong to my home country. I've never

considered myself yet, as an American."

Some participants also reflected on their African identity and when that became salient

for them. For many, the realization of being an African came after they moved to the United

States. While growing up, an African identity had not been salient since participants were

constantly surrounded by other Africans. Being African was the normal thing, as one participant described his African identity.

"…so, you also really never ever think to really be African but like it's when you you out of it you just realize you surrounded by other that people coming from all around the world. That's when you like yup, I'm from that continent I'm really proud of it and, and you tend to like really umm bring out your African side more…"

Participants also described other African students' discomfort with their African identity. They mentioned that certain African students hid their African identities, only acknowledging it when discussing their parents' heritage.

"…she made a very good point [pause] when you come here and some people I I know a lot of people who've come here and I I've had a lot of conversations with Africans who like who be like you asked someone where you from they won't tell you that many African or I'm from Chicago but my parents are from Africa."

One participant admitted to being mocked about his African identity and language accent and wanting to deny his identity in an effort to fit into mainstream American society.

"…you want to find your place in this society so you kind of, uh sometimes you try to hide the African in you because I I got mocked and my accent got mocked…"

Challenges experienced in finding employment and accessing resources as an international student. Participants reflected on the difficulties of accessing certain financial resources as international students. As international students, participants could not have access to federal loans or scholarships that require recipients to be American citizens. Although international students pay more in tuition than American students, they are unable to access loans or certain private scholarships due to their immigrant status.

Some participants also reflected on restrictions to seeking employment and internships as international students. One participant described his difficulty in finding an internship, although his major required that he completes an internship before graduation.

"Even for an internship job on campus it is kind of hard to get one. They just need to ask a question like are you from here? Are you going to go back after you graduate? So, when you just ask yes, how we go back after graduating. They ask you are you American? No. So it's kind of hard and the thing with that is we paying like 12 more than twice what the American pay the same important and they don't treat us probably no better than them they treat us less than them so that doesn't make sense since we pay more than what they paid."

Another participant discussed the limited employment opportunities provided for international students on campus and the types of jobs international students could apply for.

"The job opportunity. It's been hard getting a job on campus because we have to use the non- federal work study jobs for international students. Most of the jobs are menial jobs like cleaning the cafeteria. Then what if you don't want to do that what if you want to work on administration or somewhere nice. but you are not allowed to do it."

Participants also discussed their lack of access to certain academic programs. Certain medical and professional programs would not grant admission to internationals students regardless of their academic performance. A participant described her experience of being unable to apply to certain nursing programs because of her status as an international student. According to her, "…even like nursing like some schools didn't have nursing for international… you need a green card…"

Relying on friends, family, faith and food to cope. This theme highlights how participants coped with experiences of acculturative stress. Most of the participants identified talking with African and non-African friends, cooking home foods, relying on religious communities and maintaining contact with their families as ways that they coped with adjustment difficulties. One participant shared how she has relied on her family and friends for support.

> "Uhh, talking has been very important for me. Talking to people that I like, I can trust and can understand. Um, so for example, (name omitted), oh my girl. So like I can open up and talk about anything. She's the one that liked to talk to her about things like that. And then I recently have started building relationships with, umm two very amazing African American ladies who they I mean they were born and raised here. So, they, they have faced challenges that, I mean not to be fully understood, but I'm now starting to sort of step into living as a person of color in this country and so just being listened to me and I listened to them and we're going to meet up today again and talk and just for me talking really helps. And then just um, yeah. Then also with my family back home is like, just being a should be assured of their love for me..."

For another participant, eating food from her home country was her way of coping with homesickness.

> "Yeah about the food, you have to eat it 'cause I stay in the dorms and that's I paid for the food so I have to eat the food and it's not like I have to go, I want to go. I don't have money to spend eating outside, getting food from outside so. You have to eat the food. But like he said, making friends makes your life a lot easier. Especially those that have apartments… [y]eah just like um I'm hungry what are you cooking? Can I get a piece of it"

Several of the participants described being members of various religious communities, and how members of their religious community provided material and emotional support. A participant described how she relied on her faith community in addition to utilizing academic resources when she was struggling to adjust to the academic environment in the U.S.

> "I wasn't mentored but at one point I was just like rock bottom, like stressed out, you know panicking, a lot of other stuff was going on so like academically, it kind of like declined and I was just like freaking out I just had one of those breakdowns and um my coach had – she had me get a um tutor and just you know using some of the school's resources so it was really helpful um in that aspect to some point but mostly um finding God here. Finding Christ through Chi Alpha and – and – and – and – and just being anchored in something bigger than myself…"

Experiences of language barriers and speaking with a different accent. This was a theme that cut across all four of the interviews. Participants shared negative experiences they had because of their language accents, language barriers that they experienced in the class, and how language barriers affected their classroom engagement and interactions with peers. All but one participant spoke another language other than English as a first language. Even for participants who spoke English as their main language, they reported experiencing some language barriers due to the differences in language accents and the use of American slangs. Some participants also discussed how their language accents influenced stereotypes that others had about them.

> "Everybody like accent but trying to speak like a normal people. You know and um like here, as she mentioned, like when you have like accent, they don't understand you. So, it makes you feel like shy in class, so you don't talk. And the issue with that is, here when

they see you don't talk, they think you stupid. See that. So *sighs* it's like, how can I

explain that, like it makes you shy and sometime kind of frustrating…"

Another participant disclosed that his experience of language difficulties had been the most

challenging aspect of his acculturative process.

"Yeah for me, my biggest challenge is, is um language cause my first language is not uh

English, so I speak French and um yeah the biggest uh change for me here is language uh

to know how to speak well without my accent you know"

Benefits and negative consequences of informing professors about language barrier.

In the focus group interviews, participants discussed personal experiences of informing

professors of language barriers, and how that had affected their performance in class. Some

participants shared positive consequences of letting their professors know that they did not speak

English as a first language, while others shared negative consequences of sharing this

information with their professors. A benefit of expressing their limited use of English to

professors was that professors were more lenient in grading and expectations of the students.

"Yeah for me, my biggest challenge is, is um language cause my first language is not uh

English, so I speak French and um yeah the biggest uh change for me here is language uh

to know how to speak well without my accent you know"

On the flip side, one participant discussed his hesitation in letting his professors know that he

was not non-native English speaker.

"[See] I did that at first and then I started realizing how weird it was when they start

treating you like you're some underprivileged individual because I I refused to start at

some point I stopped doing that because, also French, English is definitely not my first

language, I got to a point where I was just sitting there and I'm like, I don't want to be the

only black guy in my class and also being treated like I'm some ssss weird case of under developed human being coming-*"*

Experiences of discrimination, profiling and racism. In each interview, participants shared incidents where they had been treated differently, either due to their racial classification or immigration status. For many participants, their racial identities only became salient after moving into the United States.

"I learned I was Black when I came here. I'd always known I was, you know, I'd always known that like you know the black race was at the bottom of the societal hierarchy…"

Participants also described experiences where they were unsure of why others treated them differently and how they had made sense of these experiences.

"uh well there's just this other class, my English class so I was talking, and another girl told I didn't know what I was saying, she just cut me off and the, I was like what's going, and she said they're explaining what I was trying to explain. That's when my neighbor tapped me, that's what they call white-splaining…"

A participant also described learning what racism meant in the U.S. context.

"Because racism – the racism I was introduced to when I was younger was the whole consciously having um unpleasant thought about people from other races. That was what I had um that's what I had put racism down as that okay somebody doesn't like you because you're black but the racism presence in America that I had to get used to was somebody thinks it's okay to treat you just a little bit less you know just a little bit less because you're black and it – it happ – it's present at varying levels. Sometimes the person realizes that they're doing it and they don't care. Sometimes they don't realize it. Either way um it's something that I had – you, you have to learn to navigate but at the

same time realize you're not here to teach. It's not your job to rehabilitate someone you

know, after some time if somebody, if somebody still thinking a certain way you know

you can't, you can't blame your environment for certain things about you anymore. So

yeah, I learned how to – what I learned the culture shock here was just learning how to

navigate um racial situations because that, that was added dimensions."

Relations and interactions with other Black people in the United States. Some

participants explored their relationships and interactions with other Black peoples in the United

States, especially African Americans. Most of the interactions discussed had happened with

African American students. Some participants highlighted that they had positive experiences

with African American students at SIU, while others discussed negative interactions they had had

with some African American students.

> "…So you know I I f-for me I got good experiences with black Americans in first and
>
> also I've had some bad experiences you know I love I love black people for real like for
>
> me I love their stuff so…"

Another student highlighted how she had had negative experiences with African American

students on her campus and had developed negative perceptions of them.

> "…I really have some violent experience like they from what I had just from what I
>
> had they can't really talk they just feel like it'll, it'll quickly go to phys- like it'll quickly
>
> get physical and I just don't feel safe like to discuss with someone like that…"

Negative experiences with peers, professors and community members. Participants

shared some negative experiences they had with peers and professors within and outside of the

classroom. These experiences often centered on participants' limited ability to communicate in

English or their language accents. Professors and peers would either fail to acknowledge

participants' participation in the classroom, or peers would make fun of participants who spoke English as a second language. One participant shared that he had become reluctant to talk in class because others would laugh at him.

> "Yes. And if you don't talk in class, like my discussion class, you say you don't talk you feel like your dumb. It's like my psychology class on women's gender class. I don't talk in discussion class where she gave us a paper to write it. I scored the highest score. Like how would this look like? How you so intelligent, but yet don't talk because I don't want to be laughed at. Every time I say something wrong and people just start laughing, I don't know"

Another participant shared a negative experience with a professor who had ignored her response but acknowledged the same response from a White student.

> "…uh well there's just this other class, my English class so I was talking, and another girl told I didn't know what I was saying, she just cut me off and the, I was like what's going, and she said they're explaining what I was trying to explain… I was angry, I was like I know this. I know better than you can ever knew. But I couldn't do anything 'cause teacher thought she knew better too…"

Participants also discussed the misconceptions that others have about Africa, stereotypes about Africans and the general lack of knowledge about places and people outside of the United States. Participants expressed their surprise at some of the misconceptions that others held about Africa and Africans. Participants disclosed interactions with others where they had been asked ignorant questions or felt uncomfortable due to the stereotypes that others expressed about Africa and Africans.

"Heck one guy my freshman year who stopped talking to me and we're in the same program now because he told his friend I'm from Africa and he asked me is it true that you know we have animals in our house I was messing around and I said yeah we have some of us have some don't so he called his friend he didn't know I was just teasing cause he gets to ___ before asking a stupid question…"

Another participant also discussed his discomfort at revealing his African identity to professors, as they tended to treat him as less intelligent and incompetent.

"[See] I did that at first and then I started realizing how weird it was when they start treating you like you're some underprivileged individual because I I refused to start at some point I stopped doing that because, also French, English is definitely not my first language, I got to a point where I was just sitting there and I'm like, I don't want to be the only Black guy in my class and also being treated like I'm some ssss weird case of under developed human being…"

Experiences of homesickness, stress and frustration of combining work and school. This theme highlighted participants experiences of homesickness, which was described as often sudden and on and off. Homesickness often included missing the environment a participant grew up in, missing participants' family and friends, craving foods from the participant's home country, and wanting to be able to speak a participant's native language. One participant aptly described the suddenness of homesickness.

"homesickness, it kicks you when you don't expect it… [a]nd it never goes away like no matter how long you've been here"

Another participant shared his experience of crying constantly upon arriving in the US because he missed home.

"Yeah, I think maybe the first two weeks I was crying like crying, crying, crying, crying,

like five years ago, I was crying. That was the first time I uh I like left home. My first like

uh big, big, big travel was to come here. So, it was kind of a big challenge for me. To

leave without my parents, to leave without my friends. I didn't know how to cook, I

didn't know how to do anything so. I had to do that. …"

Participants also discussed the difficulty of balancing work and a full-time school load.

Participants expressed frustration at being behind in their school work, taking classes that are

unrelated to major and managing full work schedules. For several participants, working 20 hours

on campus was the only way they could pay for school and meet other financial needs. However,

balancing work and school often became stressful and a never-ending cycle.

"I think that's social pressure from being in America, creates that environment you live in

this place just think about how much you're paying towards your tuitions and fees in that

so you find yourself with you can't you don't even have the time to be to be thinking

outside of the school professional mindset…people are just busy and when you can when

you have just a little time you need you need a nap…"

Feeling unwelcome in the U.S. but feeling like a foreigner in your home country.

Some of the participants discussed feeling unwelcome in the U. S. due to how others treated

them and questions about future residency within in the United States. Participants reflected on

how inquiries about others on when they would return to their home countries created the feeling

of being unwanted. One participant reflected on this by saying "[y]es, yes. Every single day, this

question reminds you that you don't belong here"

Participants also described instances where others' actions had made participants feel like they

were unwelcomed in certain spaces.

"I would just say that she, she was not welcome in this premise is, but these people couldn't say openly that we don't want you here"

"…[s]o the, the fake smile, which has also sort of like a half acknowledgement, so like I'm not going to be rude and not acknowledge you, but I'm also not going to acknowledge you to make you feel like you're really welcome here…"

Although participants often felt unwelcomed in the United States, they also struggled to fit into their home countries when they visited home. After living outside of their home countries for a number of years, participants recognized shifts in their mindsets that made them seem like foreigners in their home countries.

"I went home last December, and it was a number of things. Well first of all the fitting in part of it is calling me, Oh American now American, and I'm like I'm not don't call me American. It's like I'm trying to identify with home and they're looking at me differently like he said."

How challenges have impacted perceptions of academic performance. Most participants indicated that their acculturative experiences and challenges did not impact their academic performance. For many, the challenges motivated them to work harder and reminded them of the reason for coming to the United States.

"So, expectation to, to make you know, to do well at school is that I don't make so let me do that. And having this as my mindset, I, I don't think I can say something that's impacted my performance"

One participant, however, shared how her difficult transition into university in the United States had initially affected her academic performance.

"I'm doing all these liberal arts stuff and you know not studying for a liberal art based uh

major is kinda it's – it's – it's – it's hard, kind of no brainier that you – you – you –you –

everyone knows you have to read, you have to do the homework you know stuff like that

so um being here, you know having um – I wasn't mentored but at one point I was just

like rock bottom, like stressed out, you know panicking, a lot of other stuff was going on

so like academically, it kind of like declined and I was just like freaking out I just had one

of those breakdowns…"

Therefore, although participants described several challenges in their acculturative process, they

generally did not indicate that these challenges influenced perceptions of their academic

performances.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Although many researchers have studied the acculturative and coping experiences of international students, few have specifically focused on the acculturative and coping experiences of Black international students in the United States. Themes that emerged from the interviews represent participants' acculturative experiences, identification with home countries and African identity, and re-learning of race within the U. S context. Themes also reflect how participants coped with their acculturative experiences, and whether these experiences influenced their perceptions of academic performance.

Acculturation

One of the main experiences explored in this study was acculturation. Acculturation was explained as the process of change that resulted from contact with a new or different culture (Berry, 2005). Participants discussed their transition into a new society and their personal experiences of adjusting to a new culture. Consistent with existing literature on the acculturative experiences of Black international students (e.g., Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Constantine et al., 2005), participants in this study shared both positive and negative experiences of acculturation. For many, moving into the United States (U.S.) was a culture shock. Culture shock is a term first introduced by Oberg (1960) to describe feelings of discomfort experienced by individuals transitioning into a new culture. Participants provided examples of their culture shock, such as getting used to greeting others without receiving responses in return, different styles of dressing, exposure to different types of foods and methods of cooking, and the informal nature by which others addressed people in authority (i.e. professors, supervisors).These experiences were described as jarring for participants, as these practices were deemed unusual or disrespectful in

their own cultures. Many participants belonged to cultures that placed emphasis on respect for elders and others in authority. Some participants also shared the challenge of eating certain foods from the U.S. or not having access to food from their own countries. When food items from their home countries were available, participants struggled to purchase them due to high sales prices.

Participants also discussed the disparity between their expectations of what life would be like in the United States, and the reality of what it meant to live in the U. S as an international student. One participant aptly described it as a mismatch between their expectations and the "reality on the ground." This finding was consistent with existing research on changes in immigrants' perceptions of the United States prior to moving to, and after living in the U.S for a while (Constantine et al., 2005). Some participants described their preconceived view of the United States as a land of opportunity; upon moving to the U. S, they recognized the reality of limited access to opportunities provided within the U.S. Existing views that participants held about the U. S were influenced by imported media in their home countries, which frequently portrayed the U.S. as a fair and just country with equal opportunities (Constantine et al., 2005). To come to terms with the realities of living in the U.S as immigrants, they let go of their idealistic views of the United States and developed views that fit with their own experiences. Although this experience is not unique to Black international students, it was a defining experience for participants in this study (Fries-Britt, Mwangi, & Peralta, 2014; Mwangi et al., 2018).

Several participants shared their experiences of adjusting to a new academic system. Participants described learning to adjust to time constraints, different grading systems, and professors' expectations for students. Participants who had already graduated from secondary education institutions in the U.S. found this transition easy, given their prior experience.

However, for those who had recently come to the U. S., adjusting to new academic expectations was quite challenging. One participant stressed how challenging it was for her to attend professors' office hours, since the concept of rigid office hours, based on time, was vastly different than constructs of time within the academic environments in her home country. Another participant described the expectations of students to read extra materials outside of class and be able to discuss them without guidance from the professor. Yet another participant disclosed that he was still adjusting to the high level of importance attached to graded assignments, since in his home country, assignments only constituted a small percentage of a student's overall grade. Thus, practices that were considered simple for North American students proved to be more challenging for participants in this study, and served as an additional barrier to success

They also discussed their identification with their home countries, which for many, remained strong even after moving to the United States. For several participants, their home countries were where they had spent most of their lives. Even for those who had lived in other countries, they strongly identified with their countries of birth. Although participants admitted that some aspects of their home countries were less than ideal, they did not hesitate to strongly identify with their home countries. It seemed that identification with their home countries served as both a potential coping mechanism and a protective factor from acculturative stress. Holding on to their original cultural identification and strengthening identity with their home country helped participants cope with the sense of isolation and rejection they experienced from the home country.

 Some participants revealed that while they maintained strong ties with their home countries, they had also integrated into the mainstream U.S culture. They disclosed that they had maintained a strong identity with their home countries but had separated themselves from the

mainstream U.S culture. This is consistent with research findings on acculturation, which suggest that certain immigrants assimilate to or integrate with the host culture, while others separate themselves from the host culture (Berry, 1997). Although I did not systematically track participants' well-being in relation to their acculturation styles, those who reported feeling integrated into aspects of mainstream U.S culture shared their appreciation for certain practices such as timeliness and the emphasis on self-reliance and independence. Individuals who felt less integrated described feeling isolated from their peers and having a more difficult time adjusting to the cultural shift.

Another aspect of acculturation was getting used to living alone or away from family. All but two participants moved to the United States alone, and for all of the participants, attending college was their first experience living on their own. Many participants described living alone as an adjustment, since they came from collectivistic cultures that emphasized communal living and strong social ties (Constantine et al., 2005). Although moving away to college is often the first time most American students live on their own (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001), for Black international students, moving away meant leaving behind a tight-knit community and learning to be self-reliant. One participant identified living alone as the most difficult part of his acculturative process, as he was used to living with family and relying on his community for material, social and emotional support. Now, he lives in a place where he does not know his neighbors and is expected to do everything for himself. For several participants, moving away and living alone signified a transition from a collectivistic culture into a more individualistic culture that emphasized self-reliance. Living alone or away from family could also signify a shift in self-concept for participants, since most of them had grown up in communities where a

person's sense of self was in relation to others in their community. Therefore, moving into the United States could mean that participants had to adopt a more individualistic concept of the self.

In discussing their interactions with other Black people in the United States, participants focused their conversations on interactions with African American students. For several participants, forming friendships with African American students had been beneficial to their understanding of the racial hierarchy within the United States. One participant pointed out how she had slowly begun to understand her experiences as a Black woman in the U. S with the help of two African American women. Speaking to and forming friendships with African American peers opened participants' eyes to racial injustices and inequalities that they might have been unaware of. It also expanded participants' understanding of the racial history of the United States and how participants' own experiences of racism might differ from those of their African American counterparts who are more aware of the struggle for racial equality in America (Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014).

However, other participants also discussed negative experience with African American students. One participant disclosed her discomfort with the African American students in her class, as she perceived them as aggressive. For students who held prejudiced views about African Americans, their knowledge of African Americans came from imported Western media, which often portrays African Americans as loud, violent, unintelligent and uneducated. Therefore, to better understand why some Black international students have negative perceptions of African Americans, one would need to recognize the context within which each group's racial identity is formed.

Acculturative Stress and Stressors

For the purpose of this study, acculturative stress was operationalized as the stress resulting from negative acculturative experiences (Walker, Wingate, Obasi & Joiner, 2008). The acculturative stressors were situations or experiences that resulted in acculturative stress. Consistent with existing research on acculturative stressors experienced by international students (e.g., Boafo-Arthur, 2018; Constantine et al., 2005; Misra & Castillo, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003), participants in the current study identified language barriers, financial or economic hardship and academic concerns as significant acculturative stressors. These stressors were captured in themes that emerged from all four focus group interviews.

Language and accent difficulties were identified by participants as a major stressor. Like other studies with international students (e.g., Orapeza, Fitzgibbon & Baron, 1991; Yan & Berliner, 2009), participants in this study described experiencing English language difficulties, which limited their ability to participate in class discussions or engage with peers in the classroom (Sawir, 2005). English language difficulties also seemed to result in participants under-performing in class, since they could not fully understand the assignments or participate in group work. Participants also stressed difficulties in understanding their North American professors, since the professors spoke too fast and with a different accent than they were accustomed to. Even for participants who spoke English fluently, they still struggled to understand North American slang and accents. Participants' own limited English often served as a discouragement against asking professors for clarification (Sawir, 2005). A few participants also expressed a desire to speak with a clearer accent, since they perceived their accent to be a language barrier. The desire to have clearer accents could be a result of negative experiences with professors and peers, such as instances of discrimination, particularly related to their accent. One participant recounted her experience of being laughed at when she spoke in class, and another

participant shared how professors would single her out or treat her differently once they detected her accent. Since these experiences were unpleasant for participants, their desire for clearer accents seemed to be a response to experiences of discrimination. The desire for clearer accents could also be related to stereotypes that people who speak English with a non-American accent are unintelligent and inferior (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Financial challenges, as well as barriers to employment on and off-campus, were identified as acculturative stressors for Black international students. Often-times, there is the assumption that international students are from upper-middle class families or receive financial assistance from their governments to study in the United States. While this may be true for some international students, this is rarely the case for Black international students from Africa (Constantine et al., 2005). Black international students often struggle to make ends meet due to student visa limitations on how many hours they can work and where they can be employed (Boafo-Arthur, 2014). Several of the participants in the current study shared their frustration about the lack of employment opportunities on campus as well as their inability to work off-campus. For these students, employment options open to international students often involved laborious work and little pay, compared to jobs reserved for American students. Although students could not live on the wages from on-campus jobs, they were not at liberty to seek employment off-campus, leaving them in a loop of constant financial instability (Boafo-Arthur, 2014). It is quite ironic that international students are burdened with higher tuition and insurance rates but are also limited in their access to the financial means to pay these excessive fees.

Experiences of racism, discrimination and profiling were also identified as acculturative stressors for Black international students. Participants discussed experiences where they had been treated differently due to their race, nationality or perceived ethnic identity. It is important to note

the contextual experiences of racism. For the participants in this study, race was not a salient identity in their home countries, thus their personal and systemic experiences were not examined through a racial lens. Black international students did not experience racism the same was as African Americans in the United States, who had spent all their lives being members of a minority race. Racial identity only became salient for Black international students once they moved to the U. S and became familiar with the hierarchical racial structure of their new society. Existing research on Black international students indicate that incidents of racism and discrimination often influence acculturative experience and lead to acculturative stress (e.g., Boafo-Arthur, 2018; Constantine et al., 2005). Black international students become part of a racial and ethnic minority once they move to the United States, although many of them grew up in countries where they were members of the racial majority group (Mwangi et al, 2018).

Upon moving to the United States, Black international students had to re-learn and adjust to the new racial structures and become aware of their new minority status. The re-learning process could potentially result in cognitive dissonance about their racial positioning within the context of the U. S (Mwangi et al., 2018). Participants shared how, for the first time, they were acutely aware of their identity as Black people. For many participants, negative experiences of discrimination and profiling occurred with professors, classmates and peers. One participant reported his refusal to disclose his nationality to professors, as professors tended to treat him like "a severe case of underdeveloped human" when he told them he was African. Another participant disclosed being made fun of by an African American friend for being African. Experiences of racism, discrimination and profiling were also noted by Constantine and colleagues (2005) in their study with international students from Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya. For these students, and

for participants in the current study, such experiences created feelings of unease and re-enforced concerns about being unwelcome in the United States.

Coping

Coping strategies were discussed in the current study. For most of the participants, a common form of coping with acculturative stress was relying on relationships. Participants discussed their friendships with other international students, other African students and members of their faith community. These friendships allowed participants to discuss their challenges with people who could relate, offer them emotional support, and sometimes also meet physical and material needs. For example, a participant who lived in the residence halls relied on her Black friend who is also an international student from her home country to cook her meals from home. Since she could not make her home foods in her dorm, her friend fulfilled this need for her. Another participant also mentioned that talking to other Black international students about racist experiences they encountered made sense, this these students had also experienced similar incidents and could empathize. Other researchers (e.g., Constantine et al., 2005) who explored coping mechanisms developed by international students also identified friendships with other internationals as a way of coping with acculturative stress. By learning to lean on each other, participants were able to alleviate feelings of loneliness and homesickness that they reported feeling.

Relationships formed within faith communities offered participants a space to access faith-based coping mechanisms such as praying and talking with a religious leader. Researchers who studied coping mechanisms used by international students have identified religiosity as a form of coping (e.g. Hsien-Chuan Hsu et al., 2009). Participants also identified members of faith communities provide material support like car rides, which international students cannot always

provide for each other. For one participant, her faith in God meant that there was something bigger than herself and provided her hope in difficult situations. Perhaps, for participants who identified religiosity as a coping mechanism, believing that someone else was in control of their lives relieved some personal pressure to rectify their negative experiences.

Other participants coped by "doing nothing" or using their challenges as learning experiences. For one participant, he described his coping mechanism as recognizing his lack of power in changing situations and focusing his energy on his school work. Although he appraised his acculturative experiences and incidents of racism as stressful, he chose to allocate resources toward his school work. Another participant mentioned that whenever he begun to feel frustrated with his life in the United States, he reminded himself of why he was here in the first place and refocused his energy on his school work. For him, the challenging experiences were opportunities for him to learn and grow. Several other participants endorsed this personal growth initiative style of coping, whereby they view difficult situations as opportunities for growth. This is consistent with Yakunina and colleagues (2013) suggestion that a personal growth initiative approach allows individuals to reframe stressful situations, thus making them more adaptable to different situations.

Implications of Study Results

The results of this study have several implications for university officials, professors and staff who develop programs for Black international students. Results of this study also have implications for campus and community resources provided for international students, specifically Black international students. The findings of this study could be used to create social support programs for Black international students on campus, create diversity and cultural competency trainings for university employees and staff who work with Black international

students and educate community members about how to engage with Black international students in a culturally competent and non-derogatory manner.

Results of this study can be used to inform diversity training for university staff and professors. Many of the negative acculturative experiences discussed by the participants involved interactions with university staff and professors. For example, participants discussed experiences in the classroom where professors assumed that they were incompetent due to their African identity or them speaking English as a second language. Participants also pointed out how faculty treated them differently or singled them out in class due to their "unusual" names. These experiences reflect the lack of multicultural competence of university staff and faculty and findings from this study could be used to inform university personnel about how to work effectively with students from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Based on my findings, training should focus on how to consciously check bias and prejudice and how to create welcoming environments in the classroom for international students. Faculty in academic departments with little racial and ethnic diversity, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) departments could also benefit from trainings that focus on how to interact with diverse students in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner. Academic advisors could also be offered training on how to offer services effectively to Black international students, who often have to pay for their own tuition without government support and dealing with many acculturation stressors as they enter culturally different academic environments. Thus, culturally tailoring advising services to meet the specific time and financial constraints of Black international students would ensure that these students benefit from academic advising services and promote a more inclusive university environment.

University officials, students and community members could also benefit from conversations that center on how to prevent micro-aggressions. Although participants in the current study did not use the term "micro-aggressions" to explain their experiences, several of them shared instances where others acted micro-aggressively toward them or made micro-aggressive comments to them. Micro-aggressions were explained by Sue (2010) as intentional or unintentional verbal, environmental and behavioral indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory slights and insults to a target group or individual based on racial, religious, gender or sexual identity. For example, one participant described an experience where a former roommate asked him if people kept lions in their homes in Africa. Another participant described his experience of others being shocked that he was afraid of snakes, since others believed that people from Africa should be used to regularly seeing snakes. In both experiences, both participants had been uncomfortable and insulted by the assumptions made about Africa and Africans. Thus, conversations regarding microaggressions would be beneficial in calling others' attention to unconscious acts of micro-aggressions and the negative effects of ignorance, whether intentional or not.

The results of this study could also inform the development of social programs and support services for Black international students. Although most universities in the United States have offices for international students or international education, there is often very few social services targeted toward Black international students. Participants' acculturative challenges suggested that their experiences of racism and discrimination negatively impacted their acculturation process. Experiences of racism and discrimination might not be present from international students who present racially as White within the context of the United States. However, social programs implemented by campus offices that work with international students

do not acknowledge the differences in acculturative experiences of international students based on their racial identification. Therefore, social programs like support groups for Black international students and transition programs could be developed to provide spaces for students to support and validate one another's experiences.

Future Directions

Since there is little research on the experiences of Black international students within the United States, the findings of this study provide opportunities for future research. Based on my findings, it would be beneficial to examine how geographical location influences Black international students' experiences of acculturative stress. The current study was conducted in southern Illinois, a relatively rural part of the state. Like other rural parts of the country, Carbondale does not have a very diverse population, and has a lower number of international students than more urban areas. Although the study was not designed to explore this, some of the participants contrasted their experiences living in urban cities within the United States to the experience of living in Carbondale.

Another topic of discussion throughout the interviews was the emergence of a Black racial identity for Black international students in the context of the United States. Many participants described having to re-learn their racial identity and categorization upon moving to the U.S. This finding is consistent with results from the demographic form. Some of the participants who completed the demographic form identified their racial identity as African, rather than Black, despite presenting as racially Black. In discussions of interactions with African Americans within the U.S, participants also placed an emphasis on their African identities. This could reflect a desire to distance one's self from Black identity because of negative associations with that identity within the U.S context (Deaux, Bikmen, Gilkes, Ventuneac, Joseph, Payne, &

Steele 2007). Some participants commented on how they did not become aware of their Black identity until migrating to the United States. Current researchers of immigrant populations of color suggest that immigrants of color often have to re-learn the racial categorization within the United States, since this categorization is often different from what exists in the immigrants' home countries (Fries-Britt, Mwangi, G., Chrystal, & Peralta, 2014). For example, researchers suggest that Black immigrants often adopt a Black or African American identity after experiencing a critical incident or series of incidents that force them to address racial categorization within a U.S context. (Fries-Bitt et al., 2014). The conversations around race and experiences of racism in the current study thus suggest that there is a re-learning process in relation to racial categorizations when people of color immigrate to the U.S, which is consistent with existing research. Therefore, additional research should be conducted to gain a better understanding of how racial identity transforms across contexts.

Future research could also be designed to explore the intergroup differences between Africans and African Americans. As the results of this study suggested, some Black international students hold negative views of African Americans due to their internalization of negative portrayal of African Americans in the media, which led them to judge African Americans as violent and untrustworthy. Participants also shared negative experiences with African Americans, where participants had been teased for their African accents and origins. This suggests that some African Americans might also internalize negative messages about Africans, causing friction between the two communities. Future research could be designed to explore how members of the two groups interact with each other and how they make sense of each other's race-related experiences.

Limitations of Current Study

A limitation of this study was the small sample size. Although twelve people completed the study, only data from eleven participants could be analyzed. One participant's data was removed from the study due to failure to complete the interview portion of the study. Although a sample of twelve is considered a large enough sample for an interpretive phenomenological study, the limited representation of countries reduces the generalizability of the findings to all other Black international students. For example, there was only one participant from the Caribbean region while all other participants were from African countries. A possible reason for the limited representation within the sample size could be the location of Southern Illinois University in a rural part of the state. The number of Black international students enrolled in SIU is also quite low compared to institutions in more urban locations, thus there was only a small population to sample from.

Another limitation of this study was technical difficulties experienced in the first interview. The interview did not record due to a malfunction in the recording equipment used, thus I had to conduct the first interview a second time with the same group of people. The third participant in the group declined to return for re-taping of the interview and also asked for her data to be removed from the study, which reduced the number of participants in that interview to only two. Re-doing the interview with the same group of participants also meant that the participants had been exposed to the protocol questions. This could have influenced their responses to the questions and also influenced their interaction with each other and with the participant.

The majority of the participants were members of a faith-based organization at SIU. Although I did not recruit exclusively from this group, participants who responded to recruitment

emails sent out by the Center for International Education were members of or attended the faith-based group. This influenced the types of coping mechanisms that were described, as most participants highlighted using their faith as a coping mechanism and relying on their faith community for physical and emotional support. Therefore, their coping mechanisms may not be applicable to Black international students who do not identify as religious.

Conclusion

The current study explored the acculturative experiences of Black international students, resulting acculturative stress, and the coping mechanisms that were developed to cope with these experiences. The purpose of the study was to understand the acculturative processes of Black international students in the United States, as there is a dearth of research focusing on experiences of Black international students. Using an interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA), I conducted four focus group interviews with Black international students from Southern Illinois University Carbondale. All focus group interviews were transcribed verbatim by research assistant who were selected and trained in the transcription process. The interviews were analyzed following a seven-step process outlined by Palmer et al. (2010). The steps analyzed participants' salient experiences, systems and roles within the systems, language use and salient roles and relationships. Themes that emerged across all four interviews highlighted positive and negative experiences of their acculturative process, major acculturative stressors, how participants coped with acculturative stressors and whether their experiences impacted perceptions of academic performance.

Both existing research on international students and the results of this study suggest that Black international students experience certain challenges while adjusting to their new environment. Participants discussed their experiences of culture shock, challenges with English

as a second language or speaking with a different language accent, financial constraints, and lack of access to certain resources due to their international identity, and negative experiences with peers and professors. Black international students' identity as racially Black also impacted their acculturative experiences and understanding of race within the context of the United States. Despite challenging acculturative processes, Black international students leaned on friends and family in their home countries, developed friendships with other students, immersed themselves in faith communities and frequently ate food from their home countries in efforts to cope with their experiences.

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EXHIBITS

Table 1.

Participant Demographic Variables

Participant Demographic	*%*
Gender	
Cisgender Woman	45.45
Cisgender Man	54.54
Transgender Woman	-
Transgender Man	-
Genderqueer/Gender fluid	-
Other	-
Race	
Black	77.8
African	22.2
American Indian or Alaska Native	-
Age	
20 – 30	72.9
31 – 40	20.3
41 – 50	3.4
51 – 60	1.7
61 +	1.7
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	66.7
Lesbian	-
Gay	-
Bisexual	-
Socio-Economic Status	
High	44.4
Moderate	33.3
Academic Standing	
Freshman	9.09
Sophomore	9.09
Junior	9.09
Senior	27.27
Graduate/Professional	54.54
Highest Level of Education	
High school diploma	45.45
Bachelor's degree	54.54
Graduate/Professional degree	-
Country of origin	

Table 1. Continued

Democratic Republic of Congo	18.18
Nigeria	45.45
Togo	9.09
Barbados	9.09
Ghana	9.09
Republic of Congo	9.09
Years in the United States	
1-2 years	9.09
2-4 years	45.45
4-6 years	22.22
6+ years	9.09

Table 2.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis Steps and Examples

Steps	Definition	Examples
Objects of Concern and Experiential Claims	Identified objects of concerns and experiential claims in each interview, while also keeping track of emerging themes.	*"Yeah for me, my biggest challenge is is um language cause my first language is not uh English, so I speak French and um yeah the biggest uh change for me here is language uh to know how to speak well without my accent you know. Everybody like accent but trying to speak like a normal people. You know and um like here, as she mentioned, like when you have like accent, they don't understand you. So, it makes you feel like shy in class, so you don't talk. And the issue with that is, here when they see you don't talk, they think you stupid. See that. So *sighs* it's like, how can I explain that, like it makes you shy and sometime kind of frustrating…"*
Positionalities	Discussed how participants related to each other and to any given phenomenon. I also discussed my own positionality to participants and topics of discussion.	I asked questions, probed into answers, and offered clarifications. Participants related to each other in a friendly and informal manner.
Roles and Relationships	Identifying the people participants talked about, the roles those people occupied, and participants' orientation to those roles. I also identified participants' own roles and how those were discussed.	*"Then also with my family back home is like, just being a should be assured of their love for me. You don't want like my, I have a chat group with my parents and my sisters and we just talk all the time. So, having that support, that's also very good"*

Systems and Orientation to Systems	Identifying systems that were discussed and participants' orientation to these systems.	*"But no, they stick to their office hours. His office hours are gonna start in like twenty minutes and he's like yeah wait for twenty minutes and I'm – I was really bewildered I'm like just, like – they really, they really stick to schedules here for me I didn't really um – I didn't really have respect for schedules like that…"*
Participants' Stories	Stories told by participants that provide more insight into objects of concern.	*"I one time went to hang out at some friends we had dinner, and a white man was havingfun was having a time with his wife and then he came to me and was just starting random conversation long story short he told me he owns an engineering firm in Southern Illinois and like I'm an engineer to no I didn't tell him I'm an engineer saying he was looking for jobs and like "hey I, I want a job" he's like "send me your resume" I'm like "ok I'm an engineer I wanna send you" and he was surprised that I'm a Black man who's an engineer and he literally told me to my face "I'm trying to hire many black people for HR and not for engineering"*
Language Use	Track use of euphemisms, jargon, colloquial terms, general patterns in how participants present objects of concern, experiential claims, stories, systems and roles.	*"Yeah like my English teacher and the teachers, I just feel like I'm an alien to just give me that look like when they try to pronounce your name."*
Patterns and Variations in Shared Experiences	Identify how participants' experiences were similar to each other and varied from one another.	

| *Super-themes* | Cluster emerging themes of similar content under subordinate themes, and then cluster subordinate themes of similar content under super-ordinate themes. | Fifteen super-ordinate themes had emerged at the end of the comparison and clustering process. |

Table 3.

Group Means on Measures

Measures	Groups			
	1	2	3	4
ASSIS	2.7 (0.4)	2.6 (0.6)	2.7 (0.08)	2.3 (0.3)
ASC	2.6 (0.1)	2.7 (0.2)	2.6 (0.1)	2.8 (0.1)
MASPAD	3.8 (0.6)	3.7 (0.3)	3.3 (0.1)	3.3 (0.2)
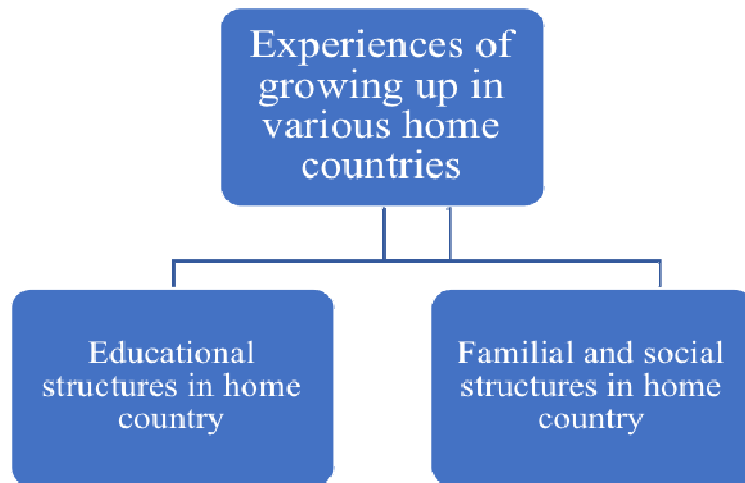
Figure 1.

Super-theme of "Experiences of Growing Up in Various Home Countries" and   Accompanying Sub-themes.

Figure 2.

Super-theme of "Challenges and Experiences of Dealing with Cultural Shifts in   the   United States" and Accompanying Themes.
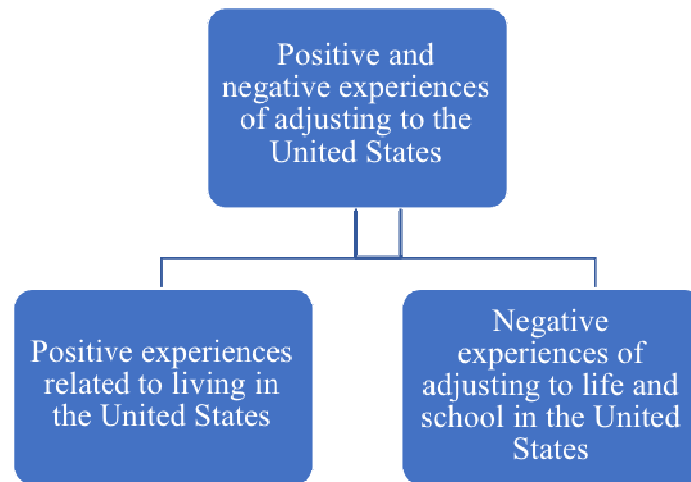
Figure 3.

Super-theme of "Positive and Negative Experiences of Adjusting to the United States" and
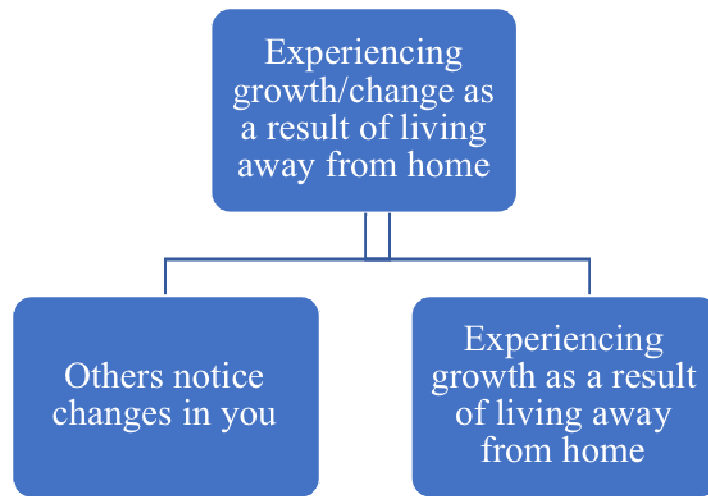
Accompanying Sub-Themes.

Figure 4.

Super-theme of "Experiencing Growth/Change As a Result of Living Away From Home" and
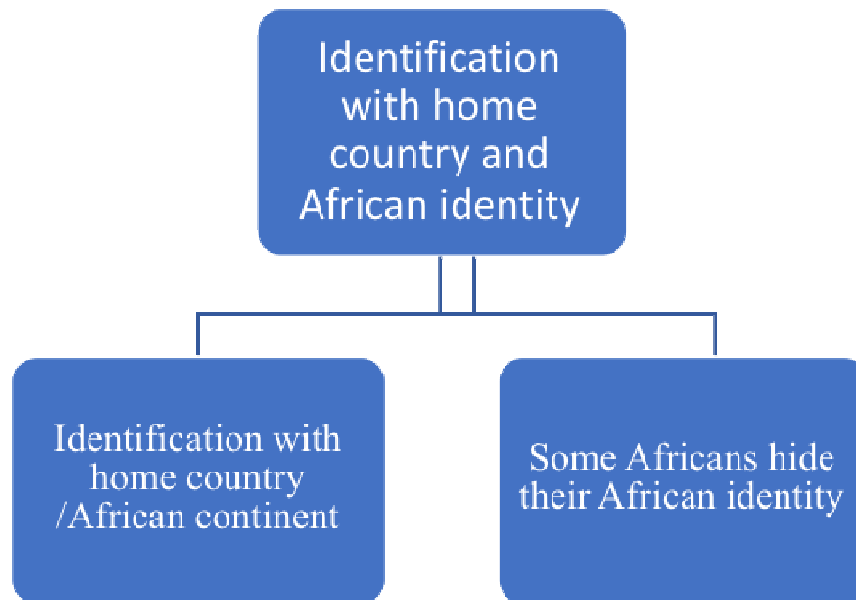
Accompanying Sub-themes.

Figure 5.

Super-theme of "Identification with Home Country and African Identity" and Accompanying
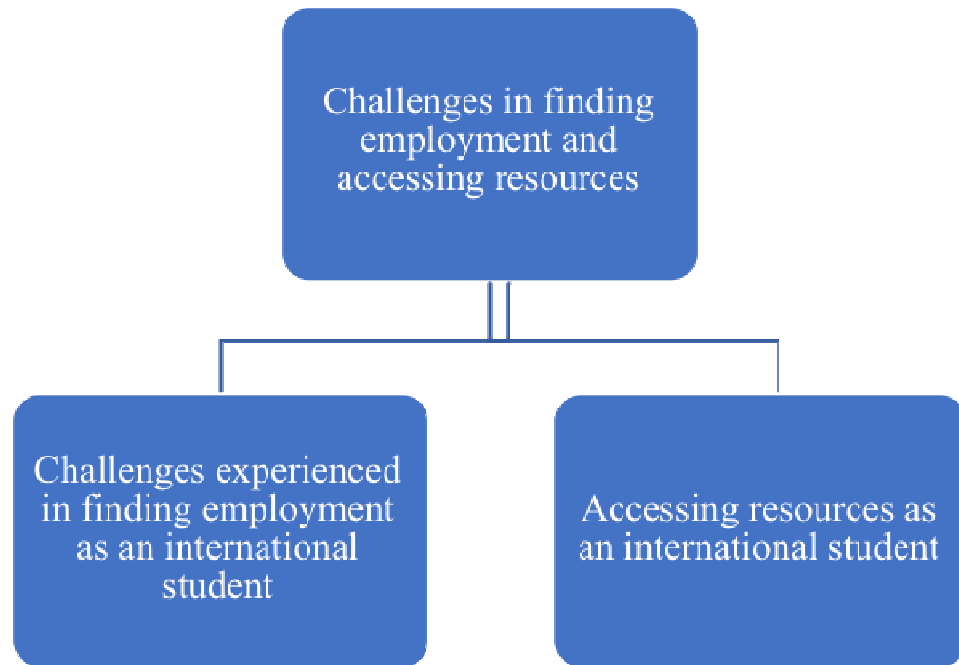
Sub-themes.

Figure 6.

Super-theme of "Challenges in Finding Employment and Accessing Resources"   With
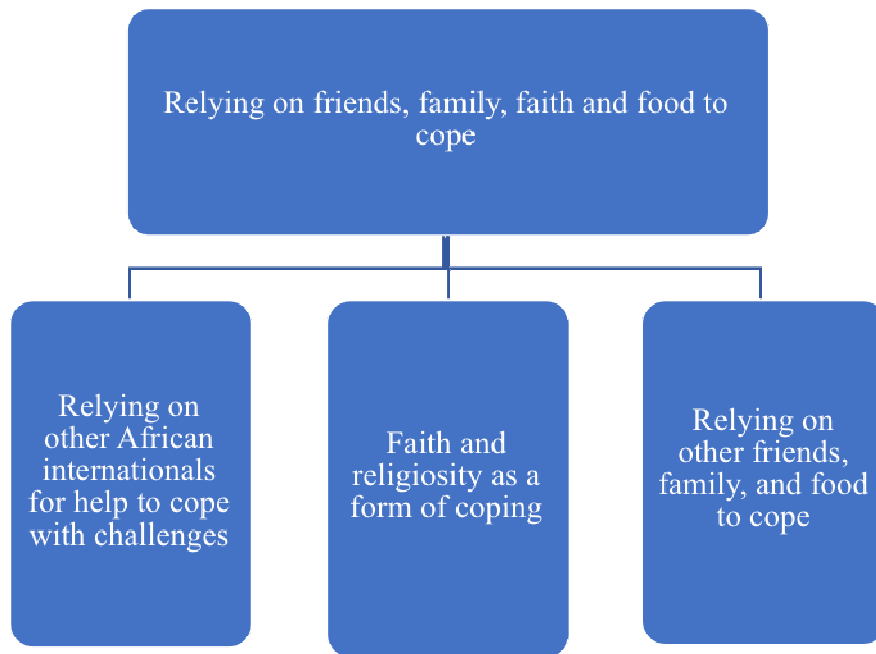
Accompanying Sub-themes.

Figure 7.

Super-theme of "Relying on Friends, Family, Faith and Food to Cope" and Accompanying Sub-
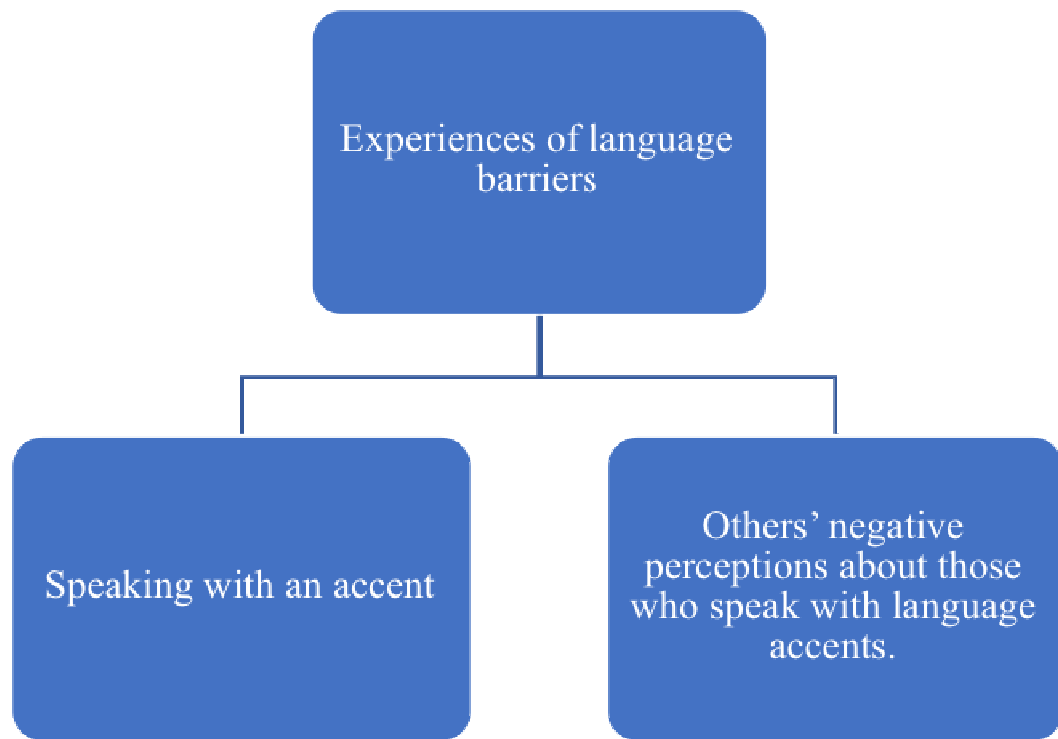
themes.

Figure 8.

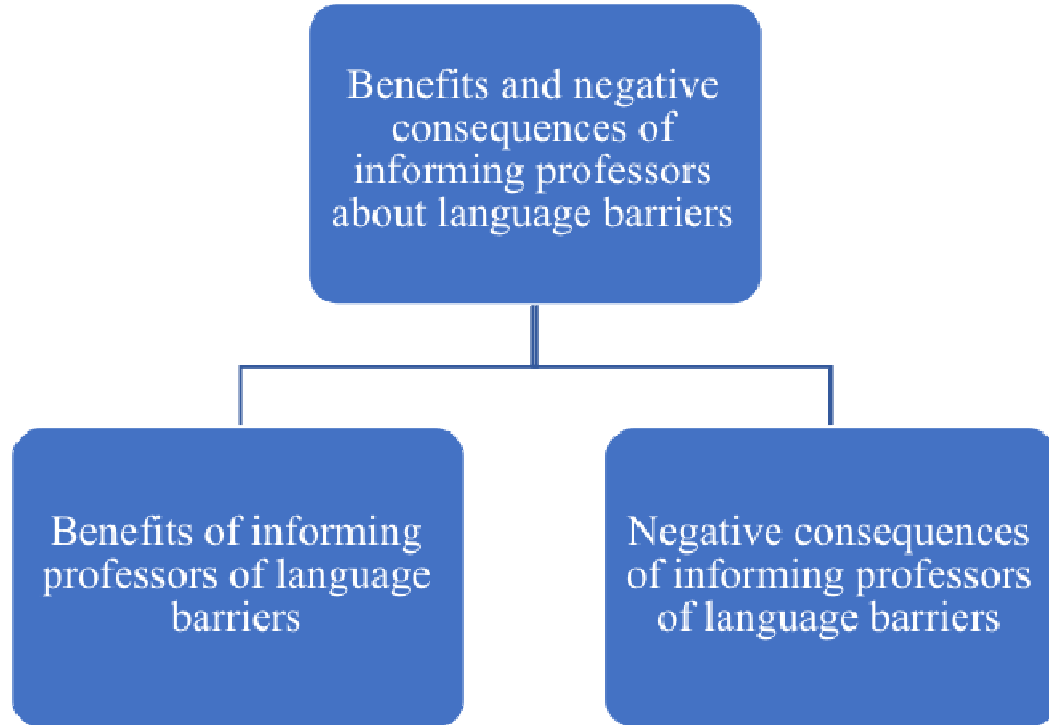*Super-theme of "Experiences of Language Barriers" and Accompanying Sub-themes.*

Figure 9.

Super-theme of "Benefits and Negative Consequences of Informing Professors About Langauge Barriers" and Accompanying Sub-themes.
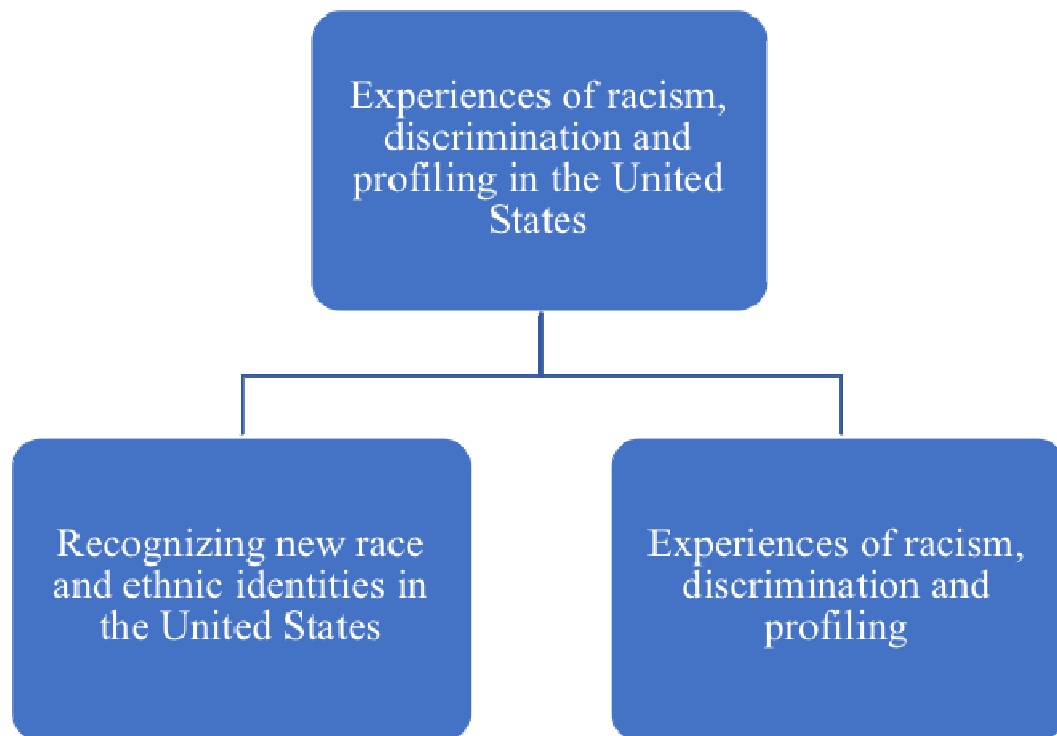
Figure 10.

Super-theme of "Experiences of Racism, Discrimination and Profiling in the United States" and

Accompanying Sub-themes.
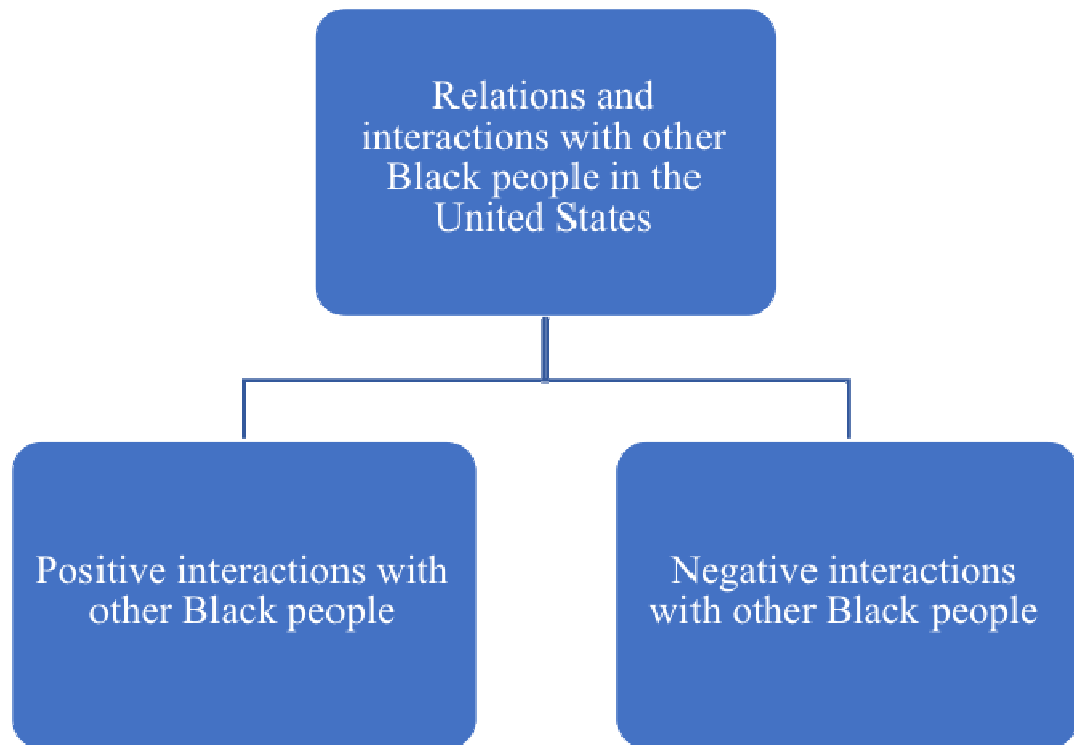
Figure 11.

Super-theme of "Relations and Interactions With Other Black People in the United States" and Accompanying Sub-themes.
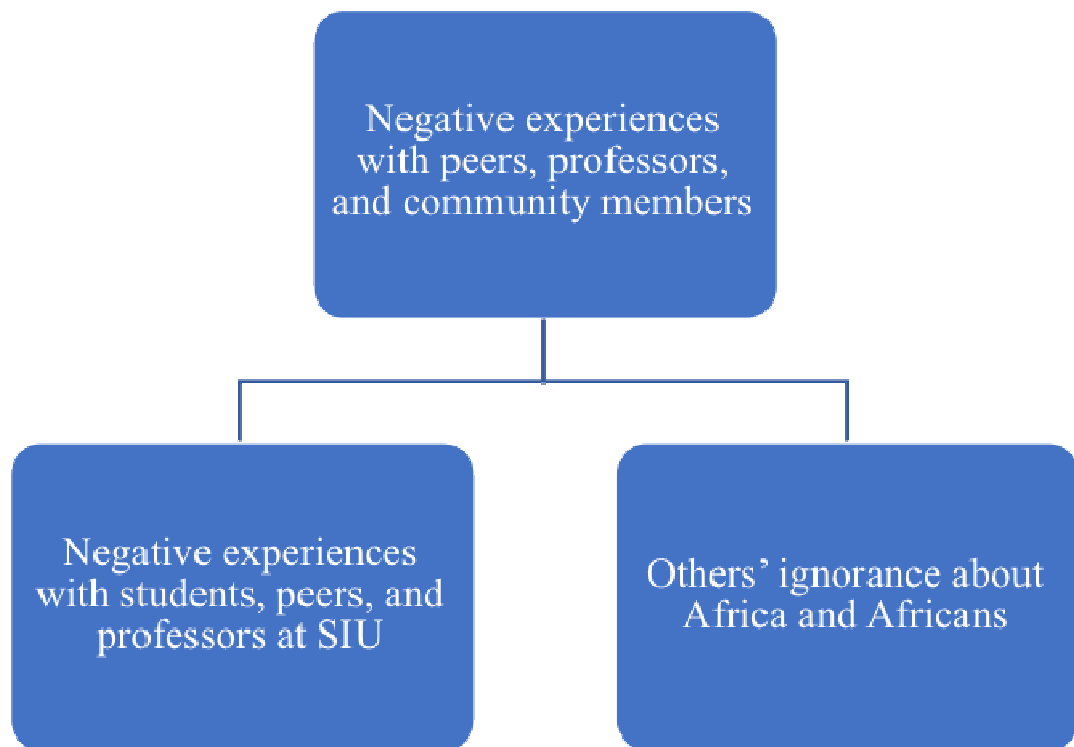
Figure 12.

Super-theme of "Negative Experiences With Peers, Professors and Community Members" with Accompanying Sub-themes.
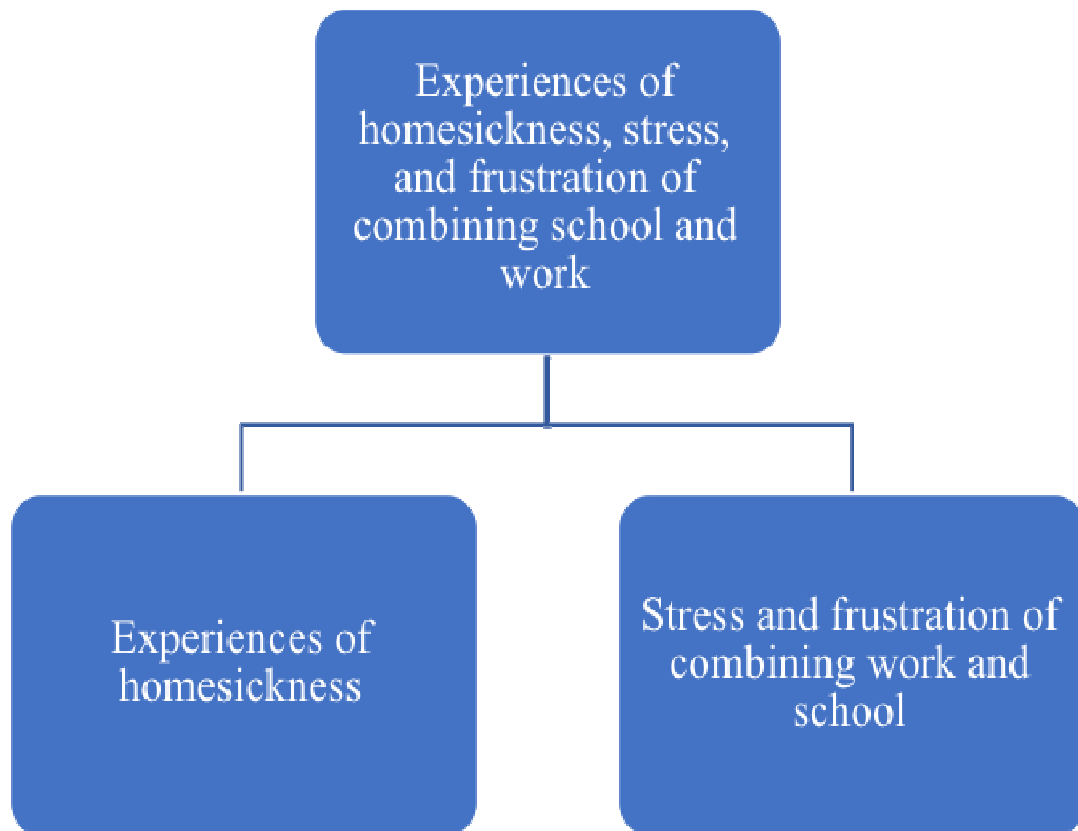
Figure 13.

Super-theme of "Experiences of Homesickness, Stress, and Frustration of Combining School and Work" and Accompanying Sub-themes.
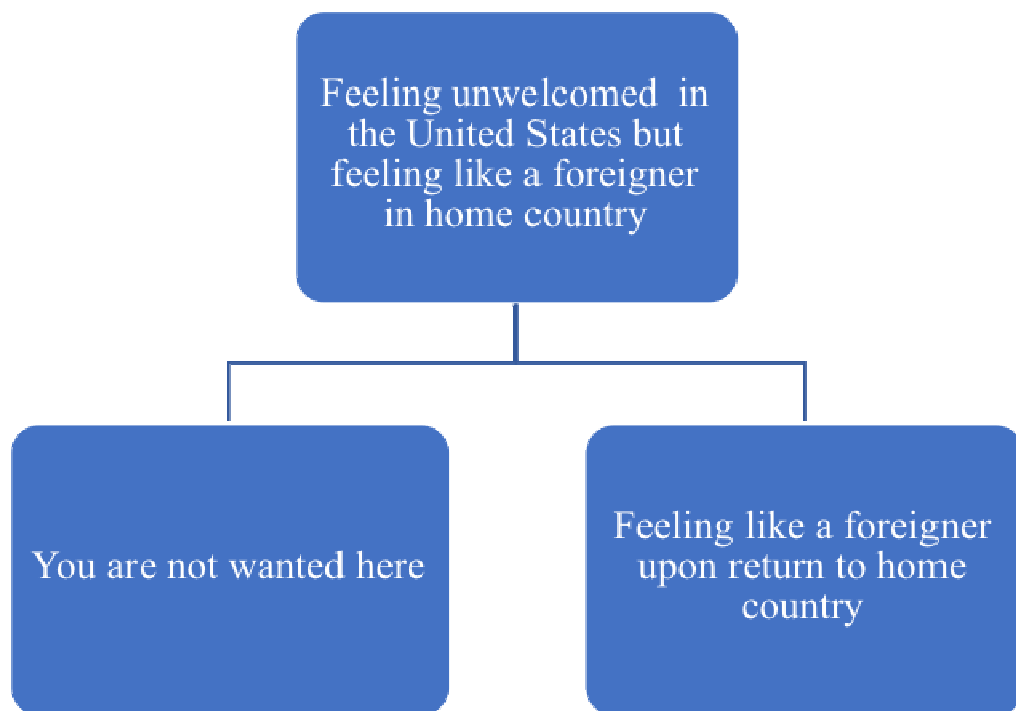
Figure 14.

Super-theme of "Feeling Unwelcomed in the United States but Feeling Like a Foreigner in Home Country" and Accompanying Sub-themes.
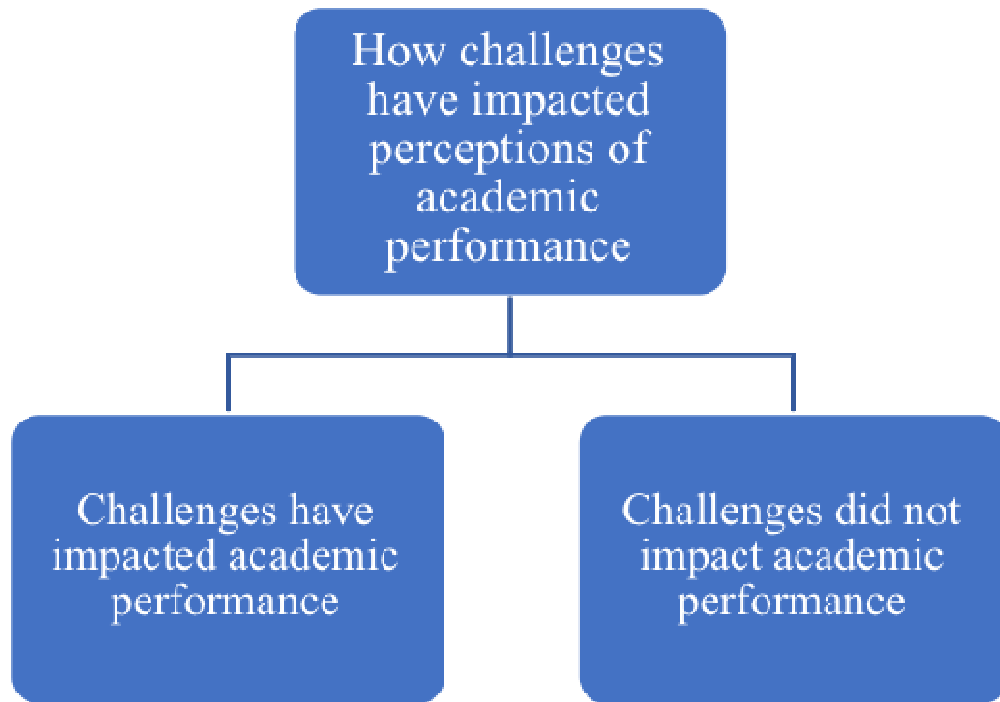
Figure 15.

Super-theme of "How Challenges Have Impacted Perceptions of Academic Performance" with

Accompanying Sub-themes.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

Instruction: Please complete the following information about yourself, to the best of your ability.

Age:

Race(s):

Sexual Orientation:

Gender:

    a) Male

    b) Female

    c) Non-Binary

    d) Other

Socio-economic status (Adapted from the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status):

Imagine that this ladder below pictures how American society is set up.

- At the top of the ladder are the people who are best off—they have the most money, the highest amount of schooling, and the jobs that bring the most respect.

- At the bottom are the people who are the worst off—they have the least money, little or no education, no job or jobs that no one wants or respects.

- Now please think about your family. Please tell us where you think your family would be on this ladder. **Circle the number that best represents where your family would be on this ladder.**
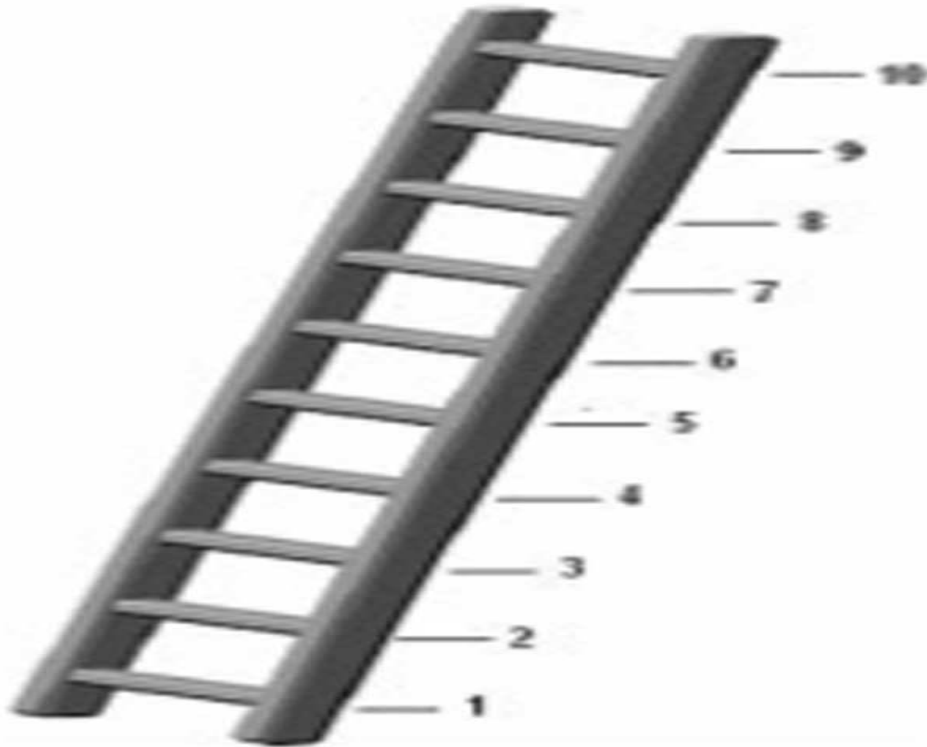
Academic Standing

a) Freshman
b) Sophomore
c) Junior
d) Senior
e) Graduate/Professional student

Highest level of education

a) High school diploma
b) Bachelor's degree
c) Graduate/Professional degree (e.g., Master's, PhD, J.D., etc)

Country of origin:

How many years have you been living in the United States?

a) 1-2 years

b) 2-4 years
c) 4-6 years
d) 6+ years

APPENDIX B

ACCULTURATIVE STRESS SCALE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Directions:

As foreign students have to make a number of personal, social, and environmental changes upon arrival in a strange land, this cultural-shock experience might cause them acculturative stress. This scale is designed to assess such acculturative stress you personally might have experienced. There are no right or wrong answers. However, for the data to be meaningful, you must answer each statement given below as honestly as possible.

For each of the following statements, please circle the number that BEST describes your response.

1= Strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= not sure, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

Because of my different cultural background as a foreign student, I feel that:

1. Homesickness for my country bothers me. 1 2 3 4 5

2. I feel uncomfortable to adjust to new foods

and/or to new eating habits 1 2 3 4 5

3. I am treated differently in social situations. 1 2 3 4 5

4. I feel rejected when people are sarcastic toward my

cultural values. 1 2 3 4 5

5. I feel nervous to communicate in English. 1 2 3 4 5

6. I feel sad living in unfamiliar surroundings here 1 2 3 4 5

7. I fear for my personal safety because of my different

cultural background. 1 2 3 4 5

8. I feel intimidated to participate in social activities. 1 2 3 4 5

9. Others are biased toward me. 1 2 3 4 5

10. I feel guilty to leave my family and friends behind. 1 2 3 4 5

11. Many opportunities are denied to me. 1 2 3 4 5

12. I feel angry that my people are considered inferior here. 1 2 3 4 5

13. I feel overwhelmed that multiple pressures are placed

upon me after my migration to this society 1 2 3 4 5

14. I feel that I receive unequal treatment. 1 2 3 4 5

16. People from some ethnic groups show hatred toward

me nonverbally. 1 2 3 4 5

17. It hurts when people don't understand my cultural values. 1 2 3 4 5

17. I am denied what I deserve. 1 2 3 4 5

18. I have to frequently relocate for fear of others. 1 2 3 4 5

19. I feel low because of my cultural background. 1 2 3 4 5

20. I feel rejected when others don't appreciate my cultural

values. 1 2 3 4 5

21. I miss the country and people of my national origin. 1 2 3 4 5

22. I feel uncomfortable to adjust to new cultural values. 1 2 3 4 5

23. I feel that my people are discriminated against. 1 2 3 4 5

24. People from some other ethnic groups show hatred

toward me through their actions. 1 2 3 4 5

25. I feel that my status in this society is low due to my

cultural background. 1 2 3 4 5

26. I am treated differently because of my race. 1 2 3 4 5

27. I feel insecure here. 1 2 3 4 5

28. I don't feel a sense of belonging (community) here. 1 2 3 4 5

29. I am treated differently because of my color. 1 2 3 4 5

30. I feel sad to consider my people's problems. 1 2 3 4 5

31. I generally keep a low profile due to fear from other

ethnic groups. 1 2 3 4 5

32. I feel some people don't associate with me because of

my ethnicity. 1 2 3 4 5

33. People from some other ethnic groups show hatred

toward me verbally. 1 2 3 4 5

34. I feel guilty that I am living a different lifestyle here. 1 2 3 4 5

35. I feel sad leaving my relatives behind 1 2 3 4 5

36. I worry about my future for not being able to decide

whether to stay here or to go back. 1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX C

ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT SCALE

Select your level of agreement with the following prompts.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Being a student is a very rewarding experience.				
2. If I try hard enough, I will be able to get good grades.				
3. Most of the time my efforts in school are rewarded.				
4. No matter how hard I try I do not do well in school.				
5. I often expect to do poorly on exams.				
6. All in all, I feel I am a capable student.				
7. I do well in my courses given the amount of time I dedicated to studying.				
8. My parents are not satisfied with my grades in college.				
9. Others view me as intelligent.				
10. Most courses are very easy for me.				
11. I sometimes feel like dropping out of school.				
12. Most of my				

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
classmates do better in school than I do.				
13. Most of my instructors think that I am a good student.				
14. At times I feel like college is too difficult for me.				
15. All in all , I am proud of my grades in college.				
16. Most of the time while taking a test I feel confident.				
17. I feel capable of helping others with their class work.				
18. I feel teachers' standards are too high for me.				
19. It is hard for me to keep up with my class work.				
20. I am satisfied with the class assignments that I turn in.				
21. At times I feel like a failure.				
22. I feel I do not study enough before a test.				
23. Most exams are easy for me.				
24. I have doubts that I will do well in my major.				
25. For me, studying hard pays off.				

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
26. I have a hard time getting through school.				
27. I am good at scheduling my study time.				
28. I have a fairly clear sense of my academic goals.				
29. I'd like to be a much better student than I am now.				
30. I often get discouraged about school.				
31. I enjoy doing my homework.				
32. I consider myself a good student.				
33. I usually get the grades I deserve in my course.				
34. I do not study as much as I should.				
35. I usually feel on top of my work by finals week.				
36. Others consider me a good student.				
37. I feel that I am better than the average college student.				
38. In most of the courses, I feel that my classmates are better prepared than I am.				
39. I feel that I do not have the necessary				

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
abilities for certain courses in my major.				
40. I have poor study habits.				

APPENDIX D

**MEASURE OF ACCULTURATION STRATEGIES FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN
DESCENT**

Directions: Answer each question as honestly as you possibly can by identifying the response that
best reflects your agreement/disagreement to each item ["strongly disagree" (1), "disagree" (2),
"slightly disagree" (3), "slightly agree" (4), "agree" (5), "strongly agree" (6)]. There are no right
or wrong answers. Provide only one response to each item. What is your ethnicity?

_____

1. I take a great deal of pride in being a person of African ancestry (African, African American,
Black Cuban, Black Brazilian, Trinidadian, Jamaican, etc.).............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

2. If I have children, I will give them an African naming ceremony.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

3. I do not feel connected to my African heritage.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

4. If I have children, I will raise them to be American first and a person of African ancestry
second.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

5. I was raised to maintain cultural practices that are consistent with people of African
descent.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

6. I have difficulty accepting ideas held by the Black community.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

7. I tend to generate friendships with people from different racial and cultural
backgrounds.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

8. I was socialized to treat my elders with respect.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

9. Everyone has an equal opportunity to be financially successful in this country.............. 1 2 3 4
5 6

10. I am comfortable putting on the mask in order to fit in 1 2 3 4 5 6

11. Despite facing potential discrimination, it is important for me to maintain my cultural
beliefs.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

12. I behave in ways that are consistent with people of African ancestry even if other cultural
groups do not accept it.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

13. The way that I behave in public (work, school, etc.) is different than how I behave at
home.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

14. I consider myself to be a spiritual person.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

15. I do not take things from the Earth without giving back to it 1 2 3 4 5 6

16. I consider myself to be a religious (Christian, Catholic, Muslim, etc.) person.............. 1 2 3 4
5 6

17. It is vital for me to be actively involved in the Black community.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

18. The word "communalistic" describes how I interact with other people.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

19. I prefer to be around people that are not Black.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

20. I participate in many social events where few Blacks are in attendance.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

21. I actively support Black owned businesses.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

22. People should modify many of their values to fit those of their surroundings.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

23. I express different cultural values in order to fit in 1 2 3 4 5 6

24. I was socialized to support Black owned businesses.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

25. My beliefs are largely shaped by my religion (Christianity, Catholicism, Islam, etc.).............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

26. Most of my closest friends and past romantic partners are from a variety of different cultural groups.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

27. I prefer entertainment (movies, music, plays, etc.) that highlights Black talent.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

28. I buy products that are made by people of African ancestry (African, African American, Black Cuban, Black Brazilian, Trinidadian, Jamaican, etc) 1 2 3 4 5 6

29. I do not purchase products from Black owned businesses.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

30. I believe festivals maintain spiritual and physical balance in my community.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

31. I perform various rituals for my departed ancestors.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

32. I see no problem assimilating into other cultural values in order to be financially successful.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

33. People of African descent should know about their rich history that began with the birth of humanity.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

34. I am actively involved in an African spiritual system.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

35. Verbal agreements do not mean as much to me as written contracts do.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6 36. I do not own products that were made by people of African descent.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

37. I use words from an African language when participating in my spiritual practices.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

38. People in America should only speak English.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

39. I will probably marry someone that is not Black.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

40. Members of my culture should have an appreciation for African art and music.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

41. My individual success is more important than the overall success of the Black community.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

42. I expose myself to various forms of media (television, magazines, newspapers, internet, etc.) in order to keep up with current events that impact my community.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

43. Blacks should not obtain reparations for being descendents of enslaved Africans since we are all reaping the benefits of slavery today.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

44. I choose not to speak out against injustices that impact people of African descent.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

45. In embracing my culture, I can also recognize the dignity and humanity of other cultural groups.............. 1 2 3 4 5 6

APPENDIX E

STATEMENT OF SUBJECTIVITY

As the primary investigator in the current study, I am a third-year doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology program at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. I am an international student from Ghana, a country in West Africa. I received my bachelor's degree in Psychology from the University of Oshkosh Wisconsin. As an international student who has attended and is currently enrolled at a primarily White institution (PWI), I share similar experiences and characteristics with the participants in this study. The participants shared their experiences of homesickness, racial and ethnic prejudice, and language barriers, which were similar to my own experiences as an international student. I shared my identity as an international student with the two undergraduate assistants who worked on transcribing the interviews and also highlighted experiences that I shared with the participants. The disclosure allowed me to remain objective while reviewing the transcribed interviews. I did not disclose my identity to the participants during the interview, since I was concerned about how sharing my identity would influence the authenticity of the conversations.

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about your country of origin?

2. Probe- What was it like growing up/living there?

2. Can you tell me about your experiences living in the United States?

3. Probe- How do you identify with your home country, and has that changed since you moved into the US?

4. Can you share some of the challenges that you have faced while trying to adjust to the United States?

5.   What has been your experience on SIU's campus?

6. Probe: Have you had any challenges trying to adjust to being a student here at SIU?

7. Can you share any personal experiences where you believed you were treated differently at SIU campus?

8.   Probe- Why do you think you were treated differently?

9. How have you coped with the challenges you have experienced living in the U.S?

10. Probe: Are there any specific ways that you have coped with the challenges you experienced as a student on SIU campus?

11. How have your experiences here at SIU and in the United States in general influenced how you think of your academic performance?

12. Is there anything else you would like to say that we did not talk about?

APPENDIX G

CONSENT LETTER (CIE Recruited)

Dear _____:

My name is Maame Esi Coleman. I am a graduate student at Southern Illinois University – Carbondale in the Psychology Department. I am asking you to participate in my research study exploring Black international students' experiences of acculturation, acculturative stress, and coping. Participation in this study will help us obtain a better understanding the experiences of Black international students currently living in the United States.
Please read this consent agreement carefully before you decide to agree to participate in the study.

In order to participate in the current study, you must meet the following criteria: must be 18 years of age, live in the United States, and identify as a Black international student with a country of origin other than the United States.

 If you agree to participate in this study, you will begin by completing some psychological measures. You will answer a Demographics Form, an Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS), a Measurement of Acculturative Stress for Peoples of African Descent (MASPAD) and an Academic Self-Concept Scale. You should expect to spend about 20 minutes completing all the measures. After answering the questionnaires, you will be interviewed along with other participants in your group. The group interview will begin after all the members have completed their copies of the measurements. **The interview portion of your participation should last about 50 minutes long. The interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed later. Thus, the entire study is expected to last for about 70 minutes**. All audiotapes will be deleted after the entire research process is completed in June. There are no anticipated risks in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If any portion of this study makes you uncomfortable, you may choose to end your participation at any time. If you do choose to stop the study before it is finished, you will still receive the benefits of completing the study**. All participants will be entered into a draw to win one of three $10 Amazon gift cards. Participants who are selected to win this gift card will be contacted via email to be made aware.**

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. We will take all reasonable steps to protect your identity. **All reports based on this research and written by the researcher will maintain the confidentiality of individuals in the group. Only group data will be reported, and no names will be used. Since a focus group involves a group process, all members of the group will be privy to the discussions that occur during the session; therefore, absolute confidentiality on the part of the participants, themselves, cannot be ensured**. The results of this research study may be published; however, these results

will not contain your name or any other identifying information that could link you to your results.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at maameesi.coleman@siu.edu or my advisor at tmgreer@siu.edu.

After reading the information above, if you wish to participate in this research study please sign your name on the dotted line, and provide an email address if you would like to be considered for the draw to win a $10 gift card.

Name: --

Email: --

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail siuhsc@siu.edu

APPENDIX H

CONSENT LETTER (SONA Recruited)

Dear _____:

My name is Maame Esi Coleman. I am a graduate student at Southern Illinois University – Carbondale in the Psychology Department. I am asking you to participate in my research study exploring Black international students' experiences of acculturation, acculturative stress, and coping. Participation in this study will help us obtain a better understanding the experiences of Black international students currently living in the United States.
Please read this consent agreement carefully before you decide to agree to participate in the study.

In order to participate in the current study, you must meet the following criteria: must be 18 years of age, live in the United States, and identify as a Black international student with a country of origin other than the United States.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will begin by completing some psychological measures. You will answer a Demographics Form, an Acculturative Stress Scale for Internaitonal Students (ASSIS), a Measurement of Acculturative Stress for Peoples of African Descent (MASPAD) and an Academic Self-Concept Scale. You should expect to spend about 20 minutes completing all the measures. After answering the questionnaires, you will be interviewed along with other participants in your group. The group interview will begin after all the members have completed their copies of the measurements. **The interview portion of your participation should last about 50 minutes. The interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed later. Thus, the entire study is expected to last for about 70 minutes**. All audiotapes will be deleted after the entire research process is completed in June. There are no anticipated risks in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If any portion of this study makes you uncomfortable, you may choose to end your participation at any time. If you do choose to stop the study before it is finished, you will still receive the benefits of completing the study**.
For your participation in the research study you will receive credit hours toward your research requirement for the Psychology 102 course.**

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. We will take all reasonable steps to protect your identity. **All reports based on this research and written by the researcher will maintain the confidentiality of individuals in the group. Only group data will be reported, and no names will be used. Since a focus group involves a group process, all members of the group will be privy to the discussions that occur during the session; therefore, absolute confidentiality on the part of the participants, themselves, cannot be ensured**. The results of this research study may be published; however, these results will not contain your name or any other identifying information that could link you to your results.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at maameesi.coleman@siu.edu or my advisor at tmgreer@siu.edu.

After reading the information above, if you wish to participate in this research study please sign your name on the dotted line.

Name: --

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail siuhsc@siu.edu

APPENDIX I

AUDITOR'S STATEMENT OF SUBJECTIVITY

I was contacted by Maame Esi Coleman to audit the themes that emerged from four interviews that she conducted with Black international students. Maame Esi asked questions about the participants' acculturative processes, acculturative stressors that they encountered, and how they coped with stressors. As I worked on this project, it was pertinent that I address my subjectivity. My identity was crucial in the process as I went over the participants' narratives and themes.

I am an applied psychology graduate student interested in studying interactions between individuals along the lines of race, ethnicity, and gender. I identify myself as a Malaysian with Indian heritage. Additionally, I am also a first-generation immigrant to the US. My experiences based on these identities influenced my analyses, as I found similarities and differences among my own experiences and those of the participants. Additionally, my knowledge of how people's identities influence their interactions with others was pertinent in the assumptions and resulting decisions I made with identifying the themes in the narratives. In maintaining objectivity, I did not discuss with Maame about her perceptions of the interviews or how she identified with the themes.

This overall experience was useful for me in learning about the narratives of various individuals, and how my experiences can affect my understanding of the narratives. Once again, I thank Maame for giving me the opportunity to be part of this process and providing with the knowledge for the process.

Vilosh Veeramani

VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Maame Esi A. Coleman

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University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, August 2015

Thesis Title:
 A Qualitative Examination of Experiences of Acculturation, Acculturative Stress, and Coping among Black International Students.

Major Professor: Tawanda M. Greer-Medley, Ph.D.