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# Postimmigration Acculturative Challenges in African Immigrant Couples' Relationships

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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John K. Amoah

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The Office of the Provost

Walden University  
2019

Abstract

Postimmigration Acculturative Challenges in African Immigrant Couples' Relationships

by

John K. Amoah

MDiv, Andrews University, 1997

BA, Canadian Union College, 1994

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

September 2019

## Abstract

African immigrant couples encounter postimmigration acculturative challenges that impact the foundation of their marriages. The purpose of this case study was to explore the postimmigration challenges that immigrant African couples face and how they manage with the acculturative challenges. The theoretical foundation that guided this study was Social Exchange Theory (SET). This study included interviews of 5 couples of African descent who were married in their home countries before migrating to the United States and who have lived for 5 years or more in Massachusetts. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The HyperResearch Qualitative Analysis software was used to analyze the themes and categories (see Booth, Sundstrom, DeMaria, & Dempsey, 2018). From the data analysis, the following postimmigration acculturative challenges and experiences emerged: cultural differences, transitional challenges, communication, finance, couple conflicts, alteration of roles and responsibilities, and conflict resolution. The couples identified that differences in cultures, social norms, and structures between their native cultures and that of the new country contributed to their acculturative challenges. Further, participants indicated that role alterations between couples, such as women's autonomy and economic capacity, shifted the balance of power in couples who came from male-dominated cultures. The role changes fueled the majority of their relationship challenges partly because the men felt a loss of power and control in their relationships. This study leads to positive social change by showing the need for service providers to consider cultural context as they design programs for this immigrant population.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Joseph Osei Yaw Bediako and Esther Boakyewaa whose love, support, encouragement, and words of wisdom propelled me to pursue my dreams. I dedicate this dissertation to my son, Samuel Joseph and the youth and young adults in the immigrant churches I pastored, whose quest and curiosity for knowledge and understanding challenged me to engage in this project. Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to my wife and companion, Chrystine Bernard-Amoah, who daringly sacrificed and supported me throughout this journey. I am mindfully aware that you desire the best for me.

## Acknowledgments

*Soli Deo Gloria: Glory to God Alone.* I thank God for his leading and power of strength that accompanied me throughout this arduous dissertation journey and significant accomplishment. Writing this dissertation was achievable due to the support and encouragement of a great many people. First, I would like to thank and acknowledge my committee members. Thank you, Dr. Scott L. Hershberger, for saying “Yes” to be my dissertation committee chair. I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Dorothy Scotten for accepting to be a committee member. You both took the pains, tolerantly reviewing the chapters and providing suggestions. More pointedly, your pungent comments and recommendations helped to shape my thoughts. Thank you both for being patient, accessible, and decisive, yet open to new ideas on this journey with me. You inspired my suppressed desires, courage and the confidence that spurred me on till the end. I owe you much. Next, I thank the participants for allowing me the opportunity to learn and to understand your challenges. Indeed, this is your story. Finally, to my friends, Dr. Kwabena Donkor and Pastor Charles Asare Bediako, for your prayers and support.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Research about African immigrant couples' relationships indicates that African immigrant couples experience postimmigration acculturative challenges (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Caarls, & Mazzucato, 2016; Ngazimbi, Daire, Carlson, & Munyon, 2017; Santisteban & Mitrani, 2003; West, 2016). Some researchers have explored immigration (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006) and adaptation and acculturation (Berry, 1980; Gordon, 1978). However, few researchers have focused on African immigrants (Obiakor & Grant, 2005) and how acculturative challenges in the new country impact African couples' relationships.

### **Background of the Study**

Couple relationships among Africans prior to migration have been perceived as amicable, dynamic, and peaceful. In their native countries, men enjoy respect, submissiveness from their spouses, and making the decisions in the family (Arthur, 2016; Opoku-Dapaah, 2006). As long as men receive such treatment, the relationships between them and their spouses are deemed positive. These mores not only pervade most African societies but are also envisioned at the inception of marriages in traditional African cultures (Cornwall, 2005). For example, men normally hold exclusive positions including administrators; heads of institutions and organizations; chief executive officers; and heads of tribes, clans, and families (Arthur, 2016). Although certain circumstances may warrant a woman occupying similar positions, the occurrence is limited and does not last long (Arthur, 2016). The roles of women are distinct, marking their different social and

economic positions in their communities.

Arthur (2016) reported that male dominance in the family is a characteristic that prevails in the African family structure. Migration can influence the treatment of African men and affects African immigrant couple relationships (Silberschmidt, 2001). Flake and Forste (2006) indicated that relationship changes after immigration, and marriages are threatened by separation and divorce because of a man's unwillingness to accept the changes. However, after immigration, the women engage in the labor force, contribute financially to the upkeep of the family, and demand a voice in decision making in family affairs (Arthur, 2016). Women's ability to provide economic support and demand a voice in the family affairs poses a threat to their husbands' leadership and results in relationship challenges (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2015).

Ogunsiji, Foster, and Wilkes (2016) claimed that male dominance in African cultures is challenged because life in the new country requires that both husbands and wives work in order to meet their needs and life demands. With the new role alteration, the traditional cultural roles may be called into question, subjecting them to change. Men may begin to believe that their authority is being challenged (Hyman, Guruge, & Mason, 2008; Kalunta-Crumpton, 2015; Ogunsiji et al., 2016). Arthur (2016) posited that the new immigrant typically contends with culture shock, cultural struggles, and struggle for control. These struggles manifest in immigrant couples, and the lack of coping skills can result in couple disagreement, spousal abuse, and domestic violence (Arthur, 2000). Obiakor and Grant (2005) and Obiakor and Afoláyan (2007) argued that these struggles result from a detachment from norms, traditions, and mores of the native culture.

Although researchers have explored how couples struggle in immigrant communities, scholars have not addressed why the immigrant couples are experiencing these struggles. Few researchers have focused on why African couples struggle in their relationships as they carve their individual and couple paths through acculturation. This calls for a study on the causes, challenges, and coping skills of couples who are experiencing acculturation.

The purpose of this case study was to explore how acculturation affects immigrant couple relationships with an emphasis on African immigrants in central Massachusetts. Although couples may migrate at the same time, they may not acculturate uniformly (Berry, 2006). Women tend to acculturate first, then their children, and finally the men (Ataca & Berry, 2002; Berry et al., 2006). The findings from this study may provide researchers, community leaders, and service providers with resources to design programs tailored to the needs and challenges of this segment of the society. Further, the findings may add to the body of knowledge and promote further research to expand the understanding of acculturative challenges facing African immigrants.

### **Statement of Problem**

The concept of immigration has found its place in research in studies on adaptation and acculturation (Gordon, 1978) and paths of acculturation into new host cultures (Berry, 2013; Berry et al., 2006; Santisteban & Mitrani, 2003). Although researchers have explored trajectories in acculturation, they have studied Europeans, Asians, and Hispanics (Santisteban & Mitrani, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2006; van Leeuwen, Rodgers, Bui, Pirlot, & Chabrol, 2014). Few scholars have focused on the migration

among people of African descent. Obiakor and Afoláyan (2007) noted that during the process of social integration, norms from ethnic and host cultures are lost, and immigrants borrow elements of mores from the host country. Grant (2007) focused on the challenges that hamper smooth acculturation among African immigrants but did not look at how couples deal with the challenges in the acculturation process.

African immigrant couples face challenges in the new country because the norms and values, as well as social, educational, and economic structures, in the new country differ from those in their native countries (Obiakor & Afoláyan, 2007). These changes lead to problems and challenges for couples in their roles, parenting, and communication. Prior to migration, African men rule the home because they are the main financial providers. Upon migration, their spouses engage in the workforce and contribute to the financial management in the home, which provides them with a voice in the day-to-day affairs of the family (Obiakor & Afoláyan, 2007). Because husbands and wives engage in dual employment, couples' roles change to reflect the new norms, values, and practices of the new country, which causes relationship problems for these couples (Thronson, 2006).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study was to explore how African immigrant couples deal with the relationship challenges they face in the host country. I explored how couples relate to the social, economic, and societal norms that influence their relationships. African immigrant couples struggle with changes in the new country, which affect financial management, parenting, and sexual relationships (Obiakor & Afoláyan, 2007). Githens (2013) argued that although the Hispanic culture calls for



modesty and respect from women, demands in immigration have led to women often becoming leaders of the family. Flake and Forste (2006) observed this phenomenon as the new normal for immigrant families. The host society promotes equality, and immigrants who migrate to progressive societies either have to fight the new normal or acquiesce to allow amiable couple relationships. Bui and Morash (1999) looked at domestic violence in the Vietnamese immigrant community and discovered that the rate of domestic violence is high and continues to rise because males believe their dominance in the home is fading.

### **Research Questions**

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Why do African immigrant couples face relationship challenges with each other through the acculturation process?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do transitional problems affect couples of African descent?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How do African immigrant couples manage or deal with challenges and difficulties in their relationships in the new host country?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This section includes the theoretical framework that drove the development and design of this qualitative study on how African immigrant couples deal with acculturative challenges in the new host country. The theoretical framework is used to examine the trajectories, trends, gaps, and conclusions of the existing literature and the relationships between findings to determine the scope of study (Creswell, 2013). According to Maxwell (2013), theory provides the foundation for the study by linking the design and

the phenomenon under study. Scholars use theory to develop questions, strategies, and methodology to guide the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). For example, a researcher may choose a theoretical framework to ground the study in the context of other research that addresses the same or a similar topic.

One theory that has been used to analyze the symbiotic relationships involving negotiations, accommodations, shared living, and partnership is social exchange theory (SET; Choi, 1997; Oppedal, Røysamb, & Sam, 2004). SET emerged from three studies of the social behavior as exchange (Homans, 1958), the social psychology of groups (Thibaut, & Kelley, 1959), and exchange and power in social life (Blau, 1964). According to SET, an exchange process, which increases the advantages and diminishes the costs of the social relationship, governs interactions between people (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Liu, Min, Zhai, & Smyth, 2016). In SET, material exchange and collective assets are indispensable components in social relationships. People compare the advantages and risks of relationships to determine whether to remain in a relationship (Choi, 1997; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The gains of social relations include companionship, reassurance, friendship, and excitement; the risks are money, energy, and time that a person spends in the relationship (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). According to SET, when the balance tilts to one side or the other, it threatens the relationship, and one partner may not endure a loss and may seek to exit the relationship (Flynn, 2003). A positive relationship requires that the social advantages outweigh the cost, and if the cost is more than the benefits, then the relationship is considered negative (Choi, 1997; Flynn, 2003). In SET, when partners in a relationship deposit exchanges of benefits into a

relationship, it helps the relationship to grow into a trustworthy, confident, mutual, and committed relationship (Flynn, 2003).

Immigration opportunities, laws, and provisions have paved the way for different classes of people to migrate to other parts of the world, especially to the United States (Dadoo, 1997). For example, in the early 1960s, people who migrated to North America came for educational, commerce, and tourism purposes, and the goal was to gain knowledge, do business, or visit and return home (Oppong, 2004). The passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act (1965) provided opportunities for others to migrate to the United States not only to study, do business, or visit and return but also to live as immigrants (Massey, 1995). This offered opportunities for professionals, educators, scientists, and those with little or no education to migrate to the United States to live (Koven & Götzke, 2010; Massey, 1995).

In studies about the challenges that immigrants of African descent face in the United States, scholars have generally focused on the economic, social, and political experiences of this segment of immigrants (Arthur, 2000; Obiakor & Grant, 2005). Others looked at labeling and stereotypes (Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003), hurdles that hamper integration (Tettey & Puplampu, 2005), and challenges of accent and language (Yesufu, 2005).

### **Nature of the Study**

One qualitative approach that is applicable to studying the challenges facing African couples is the case study approach. Creswell (2013) maintained that scholars use the case study design to explore an individual phenomenon or group experience at a

given setting and to analyze multiple sources to determine a cause of action or a phenomenon. The case study design is used to analyze a phenomenon and how it could be improved (Yin, 2017). Researchers use a case study to find the elements of an occurrence by deducing all the distinctive parts of the experience (Creswell, 2009; Crowe et al., 2011).

Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) further maintained that the case study is a descriptive, exhaustive inquiry of dynamics in a particular setting. It may be an occurrence involving a unique person, phenomena, or a unit that is under study. For example, in a case study, researchers may look at the experiences of a group of people, such as immigrants, the homeless, children with autism, and similar clusters. In a case study, an empirical inquiry may be done to capture a contemporary occurrence in its natural setting (Yin, 2017). If the researcher uses an ethnographic design, then the scholar would define the trajectory and navigation of the research (Hancock & Algozinne, 2016).

Because a case study is used to view the human experience from the participants' viewpoint, a researcher is able to understand the practices and the practical experiences from the participants' point of view (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016; Creswell, 2009). In a case study, the researcher is able to immerse him or herself in the setting of the participants and give all the data an equal analysis. This allows different themes to emerge from the data (Hancock & Algozinne, 2016; Patton, 2015). Punch (2013) theorized that case study design is a process that allows the researcher to capture models, such as examining true-to-life experience; enlightenment of occurrence; examining and explaining experiences

people undertake; and highlighting the outcomes they achieve through the experience, human reality, and storylines.

Shirpak, Maticka-Tyndale, and Chinichian (2011) used a case study to analyze the postmigration relationship and acculturation challenges that Iranian couples in Canada faced. The case study approach allowed Shirpak et al. to discover issues such as couples embracing Canadian gender roles, principles that run public life, conflict, uselessness of previous education, changing women's role, disruption of other prevailing and competing cultures, and separation and breakups of their families.

In this study, I focused on how African immigrant couples manage with the relationship challenges they face in the host country of the United States and how they cope with the challenges. I explored how they relate to the social, economic, and societal norms that plague their relationships. By using the case study approach that might be informed by SET, I used interviews to understand African immigrant couples' experiences in Central Massachusetts.

### **Operational Definitions**

In this section I provide operations definitions of terms that are applicable in this study.

*Acculturation Process:* General term that describes the contact between groups of individuals with cultures that results in changes in either the original culture or both the original culture and new culture (Berry, 1997; Teske & Nelson, 1974).

*Assimilation:* A type of acculturation that refers to when individuals have little or no interest in combining both cultures or maintaining the ethnic culture but adopt the new culture (Berry, 1997; Flannery, Reise, & Yu, 2001).

*Integration:* Refers to a process when individuals maintain the ethnic culture while engaging the cultural norms of the new society (Berry, 2013; Ward, 2013)

*Marginalization:* Acculturation process describing how the individuals do not maintain the traditional culture nor embrace the new culture (Berry, 2003).

*Separation:* Acculturation pathway that describes how individuals maintain the ethnic culture and do not seek involvement with the new culture (Berry 2013).

*Unidirectional Models of Acculturation:* Description of a process in which, the individual or group adopts a continuing absorption approach in becoming more assimilated into the social culture of the new country, thereby losing the old culture (Gans, 1979; Gordon, 1964, 1978).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations**

I assumed that participants responded to interview questions with honest and accurate answers that reflect the challenges they face during acculturation. The results of this study were limited to African immigrant couples. Immigrant couples from other countries did not fall within the scope of this study. I focused on the postimmigration acculturation challenges that African immigrant couples face in their relationships. Although postimmigration relationship challenges that face other ethnic immigrants may be similar, results of this study may not be generalized to other ethnic immigrants.

Case study inquiry may not capture trends that could emerge from quantitative analysis done on similar participants. Quantitative scholars are able to identify psychological and physiological challenges associated with acculturation. The results of this study were limited to construal description of the challenges of African immigrant couples' relationships.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study may add to the scholarly body of knowledge and provide a foundation for future research. Limited research has been done on African immigrant couples; therefore, this study may provide a conceptual framework for further development, offer service providers with resources for program design, and provide an understanding of how African immigrants cope with the acculturative challenges they face in the new country. Based on the results of the study, theorists may find resources to develop social theories that would allow therapists, counselors, and psychologists to develop treatment plans to help this community, subsequently leading to positive social change.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I outlined a research plan to explore postimmigrant acculturative challenges that African immigrant couples in Central Massachusetts experience and how they deal with the challenges. I presented the research problem, theoretical framework, design, and the nature of study. I also described the importance of the study. In Chapter 2, I present the literature review.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Immigration to the United States provides an opportunity for many African individuals to have better lives. For some, it may improve their status of living or provide improved education opportunities for their children. Some African individuals who immigrate are subject to acculturation challenges. Many African couples face relationship challenges in their host country. The African immigrants and their family cultural interchange with the new standards and norms in the United States deserves as a study and few researchers have looked at the challenges that African couples face, specifically in the area of African couple relationships.

In this literature review, I discuss acculturation, its impact on immigrant couple relationships, and other challenges, including: (a) adopting new norms in order to integrate into the new system; (b) pursuing further education for different types of employment in the new country; (c) altering couple roles to include dual couple employment to be able to live comfortably; (d) learning new ways of financial management, learning to drive, and engaging in formal employment as opposed to informal trades they had before migration; and (e) modifying cultural and traditional understanding of couple relationships. I also will outline the factors that impact African immigrant couples: conditions that cause migration, definitions of traditional African marriage, and acculturation processes. Additionally, I will present models on the different paths of acculturation and how they affect African immigrant couples. Finally, I will examine the challenges that African immigrant couples face due to conflicts related to



acculturation.

### **Research Strategies**

In this review of literature, I used a variety of sources. These sources included the Walden University online library, Google Scholar, Questia, the James White Library System of Andrews University, and the Worcester State University Library system. Specific terms and phrases including *African*, *immigrants*, *acculturation*, *postimmigration challenges*, *African immigrant couples*, and *immigrant couple relationships* were used to narrow the search. There was a dearth of literature on postimmigration challenges that impact African immigrant couple relationships. Consequently, the literature for the review was limited to studies regarding postimmigration African immigrant couple relationships.

### **Review of Literature**

Immigration has a significant impact on African couples as they negotiate their new social strata through postimmigration challenges. In this review of the literature, I discuss the impact of acculturation on African immigrant couples' relationships. There is a need to examine the impact of acculturation on couple relationships of African immigrants in the United States (Akinsulure-Smith, Chu, Keatley, & Rasmussen, 2013).

#### **African Immigrant Migration**

There is a paucity of research on the postimmigration challenges of African immigrant couples' relationships. Scholars have focused on the trajectories and trends of European and Asian immigrants, noting that African migrations is recent and among the fastest growing immigrants in the United States (Akinsulure-Smith et al., 2013;

Takougang & Tidjani, 2009; Takyi, 2002; Thomas, 2011; Vaughn & Holloway, 2010). Many African immigrants migrate to other parts of the world due to unfavorable life conditions in their countries (Takougang & Tidjani, 2009; Thomas, 2011). These challenges include limited educational opportunities, poor economic conditions, and political instability in many parts of the continent (Gordon, 1978; Kanya, 1997; Lindert, von Ehrenstein, Priebe, Mielck, & Brähler, 2009; Takyi, 2002). There are diverse levels of education, social status, and aspirations among African immigrants (Takyi, 2002). For example, for those who migrate for educational reasons, their levels of education range from teacher training diplomas, technical training diplomas and certificate programs, and undergraduate and graduate degrees. For this group, advanced and better education in the United States provides a path for higher social and economic mobility (Rasmussen, Chu, Akinsulure-Smith, & Keatley, 2013; Thomas, 2011). Some African immigrants migrate to the United States with no formal education or elementary school education (Takyi, 2002). The Diversity Lottery Program, referred to as the Green Card Lottery, has provided an opportunity for many Africans to migrate (Diversity Visa Process, 2015). With this program, many Africans have had the opportunity to immigrate into the United States with or without formal education. Immigration has provided opportunities for individuals to grow and develop.

### **Nature of Traditional African Marriage**

Traditional African marriage is a broad term used to encompass many different cultures with varied cultural prescriptions of what constitute a marital union (Foster, 2000; Mawere & Mawere, 2010). According to Mawere and Mawere (2010), there may

be different rituals in the formation of the traditional marriages; however, four main types emerge: religious marriage, traditional customary marriage, civil marriage, and the mutually consented marriage, which is least accepted by the African general public. However, Foster (2000) claimed that all types of marriages constitute a traditional marriage. In all four types of marriage, the groom pays a dowry to the family of the bride, except the mutually consented union, which is the union of two large families and not necessarily two individuals. Hofstede (1984) examined individualistic and collectivistic cultures and argued that in collectivist societies, the desires and goals of the larger family are more important than that of the individual. As a result, the individual develops a sense of loyalty to the group and obtains protection in return (Hofstede, 1984). African cultures are mostly collectivistic; therefore, traditional African marriages include loyalty and protection from the extended family (Musyoka, 2014). Other researchers (Chodorow, 1978; Musyoka, 2014; Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2009) claimed that within the collectivistic culture, the wishes and desires of the husband, who is deemed superior, overshadows the wife's privacy, independence, and identity. Numerous African cultures were historically designed to permit patrilineal structures of descent and tradition that endorsed males to control family decision making and to subsequently control resources (Caldwell, Caldwell, & Orubuloye, 1992; Conroy, 2013).

### **Acculturation Pathways and Impact**

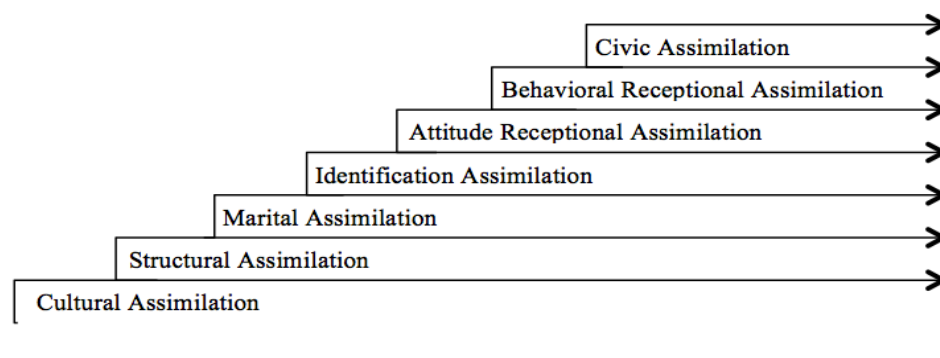
**Acculturation process.** Postimmigrant couple challenges may be best explained through acculturation theory. Acculturation is different for every immigrant and one description may not capture the phenomenon. In one of the earliest definitions of

acculturation, Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) described the acculturation phenomena as contact between groups of individuals with cultures that results in changes in either the original culture or both the original culture and new culture. Although social scientists began to study acculturation in the early 1930s (Barnett, 1954), researchers have continued to focus on the subject because of increased level of international migration (Berry, 2013). After Redfield et al.'s definition, other researchers have extended the description to capture later developments in the process. Berry (1978, 1980, 2013) and others (Berry et al., 2006) described acculturation as social and cultural changes that emerge from the sustained interchange of individuals and groups of different cultures. Teske and Nelson (1974) and Domingo (1996) noted that the phenomenon may be an individual experience, a group phenomenon, or both. Cortés, Rogler, and Malgady (1994) described acculturation as centering on how immigrants adapt to the expectations and requirements of the new culture, how they cope with the resulting strain, and how they navigate into the new sociocultural systems that are different from their native culture. Scholars have explored the correlation between acculturation and mental health challenges including depression, suicidal ideation, alcohol abuse, low self-esteem, and emotional distress (Venters et al., 2011; Venters & Gany, 2011). To this end, the discussion has focused on acculturation process.

**Acculturation models.** Two clusters of acculturation processes that are included in literature are the unidirectional (UDB) or linear bipolar model (Gans, 1979; Gordon, 1964) and the two dimensional or bidirectional (BDM) model (Berry, 1980; Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989). Although they may be divergent models in description,

they both describe acculturation as a dominant culture absorbing a subordinate culture. Accordingly, an individual or a group adopts a new culture.

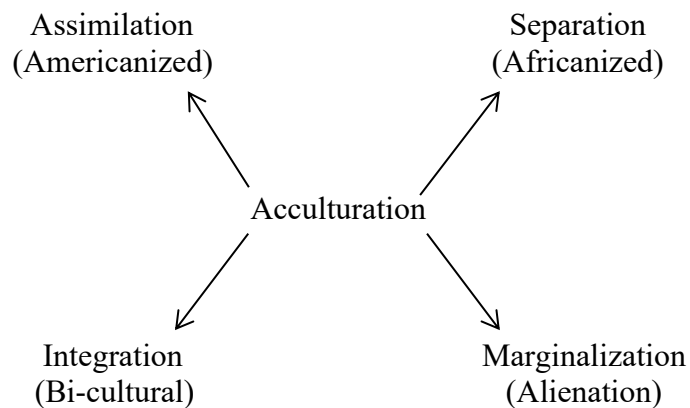
**Unidirectional models.** According to the linear bipolar models of acculturation, the individual or group adopts a continuing absorption approach in becoming more assimilated into the social culture of the new country, thereby losing the old culture (Gans, 1979; Gordon, 1964, 1978). In this approach, Gordon (1978) envisioned the immigrant going through incremental changes of cultural patterns, social structures, and emotional structures that span generations. In Gordon's (1978) unidirectional assimilation approach, the individual or group goes through stages such as (a) cultural assimilation where there is slow attainment of cultural patterns of the host culture, (b) structural assimilation where the individual or group enters into the social institutions and normative networks of the new society, (c) marital assimilation where interethnic marriages take place, (d) identification assimilation in which the individual or group identifies as a member of the new culture, (e) attitude receptional assimilation where there is no perception of prejudice, (f) behavioral receptional assimilation that eliminates discrimination, and (g) civic assimilation where there is no power conflict. In this model, it is assumed that, with time, the dominant culture will overshadow the immigrant culture. Figure 1 shows the unidirectional version of assimilation.



*Figure 1.* Unidirectional version of assimilation. Adapted from “An Empirical Comparison of Acculturation Models,” by W. P. Flannery, S. P. Reise, and J. Yu, 2001, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27(8), p.1035-1045.

**Bidirectional model of acculturation.** In the bidirectional model of acculturation, Berry (1974, 1980) hypothesized that when a new immigrant comes into contact with the new culture, the individual or the group develops links to both the ethnic culture and the new culture. The immigrant appreciates the positive elements in both cultures and this creates two autonomous elements in the acculturation process (Berry, 1980, 1997). According to Berry et al. (1989), the individual would first develop preferences in engaging both cultures, and social scientists refer to this as acculturation attitudes or the quadri-modal acculturation model (Berry, 1980; Berry et al., 1989). The second dimension includes a focus on learning and using the language and social relationships of the new culture. The confluence of the two dimensions creates a tension, causing the individual to have to adopt one of four possible outcomes or paths of acculturation: assimilation, integration, marginalization, or separation (Ward, 2013). Berry (1997) and Berry et al. (1989) referred to this as the acculturation attitudes. Phinney (1990) further postulated that although immigrants may maintain independent

personalities from their ethnic cultures, they also develop other identities from the new society. Assimilation refers to when individuals have little or no interest in combining both cultures or maintaining the ethnic culture but adopt the new culture (Berry, 2013; Teske & Nelson, 1974). When individuals maintain the ethnic culture while engaging the cultural norms of the new society, it is referred to as integration (Ward, 2013). In marginalization, the individuals do not maintain the traditional culture nor embrace the new culture. Separation is the path when individuals maintain the ethnic culture and do not seek involvement with the new culture (Berry, 1997; Berry et al., 2006). Figure 2 shows the bidirectional model of acculturation.



*Figure 2.* Bidirectional model of acculturation. Adapted from “Immigration, Acculturation and Adaptation,” by J. W. Berry, 1997, *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46, pp. 5-68.

Kunst, Thomsen, Sam, and Berry (2015) and Bourhis, Montreuil, Barrette, and Montaruli (2009) proposed integrationism transformation, which means that maintaining individuals’ ethnic heritage or getting involved with the new culture has little

significance; rather, the host culture should transform certain characteristics of their culture to allow the integration of the immigrants' culture. Consequently, acculturation is not fixed or static, but an ongoing negotiation contingent upon the individual preference, context, setting, and receptivity of the new sociocultural environment in which the immigrant lives (Cruz, 2010; Flannery et al., 2001; Ibrahim, 2008; Killian & Johnson, 2006; Sargent & Larchanche-Kim, 2006).

**Impact of acculturation on African couple relationships.** In the last 2 decades, scholars have not explored the relationship challenges that are occurring among African immigrant families (Arthur, 2016; Hyman, Guruge, & Mason, 2008; Kanya, 1997; Venters et al., 2011; Venters & Gany, 2011). Immigrants experience postimmigration acculturative pressures, conflict, and challenges for families, couples, and individuals (Cruz, 2010; Curran & Saguy, 2013; Ibrahim, 2008; Khawaja & Milner, 2012; Killian & Johnson, 2006; Nilsson, Brown, Russell, & Khamphakdy-Brown, 2008). Other scholars have looked at the impact of acculturation on immigrants' identities and how they negotiate their identities at the meeting place of the dominant and subdominant cultures (Amoah, 2014; Ibrahim, 2008; Nwachukwu, 2015; Phinney, 1990; Sargent & Larchanche-Kim, 2006). A number of the researchers have focused on intimate partner violence among African immigrants (Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2009). With the exception of Ataca and Berry (2002) and Hyman et al. (2008), the research on African couple challenges is limited and studies are needed to develop an understanding of postimmigration acculturative challenges among African immigrant couples.



Thomas (2011) discovered that African immigrant couples face postimmigration challenges because the males may sense that the freedom and what they consider as the liberal standards of the Western culture and dual income opportunities provide women more power and independence. The males may feel threatened by the independence of the African women in the new country, thereby leading to couple conflicts (Thomas, 2011). Thomas and Akinsulure-Smith et al. (2013) asserted that African immigrant couple conflicts result from adapting to the different sociocultural setting; learning a new language; adopting new couple roles due to the economic and financial needs and demands of the extended family; attaining new jobs, professions, and job skills; and adjusting to the altering family dynamics. Akinsulure-Smith et al. and Rees et al. (2011) posited that the traditional couple and family structures are rooted in the African traditional marriage; therefore, the new structures in the host social environment pose difficulty for the couple. Some men may find it difficult to accept the new, independent, progressive lifestyle of their female counterparts (Okafor, Carter-Pokras, Picot, & Zhan, 2013).

Nilsson et al. (2008) identified the challenges that African immigrant couples face when traditional culture collides with the Western sociocultural standards through acculturation. The participants of the study consisted of 62 married refugee women from Somalia. Among the 62 participants, their education levels varied, showing 25 of them with 8 to 12 years of education, 14 had between 2 and 7 years of education, and 15 had between 0 and 1 years of formal education (Nilsson et al., 2008). They all had an average of 5 years of stay in United States. Nilsson et al. found that attainment of independence

posed marital problems for women in that the more fluent they became in speaking English, the more their spouses abused them verbally, psychologically, and physically.

Hyman et al. (2008) studied Ethiopian newcomers in Toronto who were married, separated, or divorced and focused on the effects of acculturation and the resulting impact on marital relationships. Hyman et al. employed a qualitative approach, using interviews to conduct an in-depth exploration of acculturative challenges among the subjects. The study involved pretest and posttest approaches interviewing participants for 1.5 to 2.5 hours. The study consisted of 25 participants including eight Ethiopian couples with a length of marriages ranging from 3 to 42 years, age ranges between 27 to 71, and length of stay in Canada between 3 and 20 years. Hyman et al. indicated that the Ethiopian immigrants experienced both positive and negative postimmigration acculturative changes. These changes included a loss of extended family support, increased marital conflicts, increased autonomy among women (which was positive but posed problems for their spouses), roles challenges, and communication and intimacy challenges. Further, Hyman et al. outlined the fundamental transformations in the family system and the precursor to gender role modifications.

In a study of postimmigration challenges, Akinsulure-Smith et al. (2013) postulated that West African immigrant couples face different realities and challenges that result in frustration and incidents of abuse among their women. Akinsulure-Smith et al. used individual interviews and focus groups to investigate postimmigration challenges and related intimate partner violence among African immigrants. Akinsulure-Smith et al. employed a purposive recruitment of participants from West African immigrant

communities in the Northeast region of the United States. The study consisted of 32 married adults who took part in seven sessions of focus group meetings. The groups ranged from two to 12 participants in the focus groups, with individual interviews of eight participants. Topics of discussion and interviews included challenges between couples, immigration status, conflict between the U.S. and the native traditional cultures, poverty, and the anxiety about the child welfare system in United States. Akinsulure-Smith et al. study identified challenges including traditional gender hierarchy, couple role conflicts, coping strategies, and roadblocks to resolutions to partner violence.

Different previous experience and background may cause couples to see acculturation challenges differently (Connor et al., 2016). Connor et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative, exploratory study to examine modifications in gender dynamics prevailing among Somali refugees who relocated into the United States. In this study, Connor et al. employed a community-based preparatory research (CBPR) approach in recruiting participants and interviewed 30 participants through a bilingual interviewer. The CBPR is a process in which researchers recruit members of a particular community to be a part of the methodology of the research. This includes design, data collection, and interpretation of the results of the study (Connor et al., 2016). Connor et al. used a combination of snowball and convenience sampling techniques because the community was interconnected. The participants included community advisory boards members who were a part of the study, couples from the Immigrant Women and Children Development Center, friends of participants, and college student organization (Connor et al., 2016). Connor et al. indicated that Somali women, in particular, enjoyed increased demands,

power, and freedoms within the family, which heightened their value in the community. This was because, in Somalia, women were relegated to childbearing and home maintenance while their partners were seen as the breadwinners and worked outside the home. Although the participants expressed and enjoyed freedom in the new country, they desired to maintain traditional gender roles, cultural traditions, and religion (Connor et al., 2016). After immigration, the traditional gender roles shifted to allow women the opportunity to work outside the home and women had increased access to education, exposure to gender role norms in United States, financial stability, and bargaining power. This created couple relationship challenges as their male counterparts saw female freedom and increased financial and educational access as a threat to the male's power and control (Connor et al., 2016).

Acculturative challenges and stress are not restricted to one particular group of immigrants (Akinsulure-Smith et al., 2013; Connor et al., 2016; West, 2016). Other immigrants may experience acculturative stress and challenges in different ways. West (2016) examined articles that were written between 2005 and 2015 on intimate partner violence among African immigrants. West included (a) articles with surveys or interviews in examining victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), (b) articles that appeared in academic journals, and (c) articles that included a definition of IPV. Out of the 15 articles West identified, eight did not meet the criteria; therefore, West used seven articles to gather the themes that emerged. West indicated that the participants reported violence according to their level of English language proficiencies, as well as acculturation level of the participant. West revealed that African immigrant women

experienced IPV and abuse including, physical, emotional, and verbal abuse; intimidation; coercion and threats; denial of access to family finance; austere obedience to traditional gender roles and norms; prevention from learning English; associating with community members or leaving home; and husbands threatening to have immigration and naturalization services deport their spouses. Further, West showed that IPV among the African immigrant couples resulted in increased levels of emotional, physical, mental, psycho-social, and psychological stress that negatively impacted the couples' relationships.

**Acculturation challenges among other immigrants.** Using inductive thematic analysis, Madanian, Mansor, and bin Omar (2013) examined marital satisfaction among Iranian students in Malaysia. Madanian et al. employed snowballing and purposive sampling to enroll the participants. The participants included ten married female students who were studying with their husbands at the University Technology Malaysia (Madanian et al., 2013). Madanian et al. used semistructured interviews, written in Persian (the native language of the participants) to collect data. Madanian et al. interviewed participants and tape-recorded, transcribed, and manually analyzed the data using inductive thematic analysis approach. Madanian et al. indicated that four major issues of finance, intimacy, commitment, and children education impacted and affected the marital satisfaction of the participants. As individuals from Iran, which is a collectivistic society, the participants generally prioritized the relationships with extended family members, including siblings and parents, as more important than their spouses (Madanian et al., 2013). However, as immigrants in another country, the priorities shifted

from extended families to spouses; nevertheless, Madanian et al. indicated that due to the presence of the financial, intimacy, commitment, and children education issues, the participants were not satisfied with their marriages. Academic stress, a lack of time with each other, communication, financial burdens contributing to an increase in relationship conflicts, and a lack of social support from the environment fueled negative marital satisfaction among the participants of the study (Madianian et al., 2013).

In a study of Mexican immigrant couples, Helms et al. (2014) explored economic pressure, cultural adaptation stress, and marital quality among Mexican couples. Helms et al. hypothesized that there is a direct link between cultural adjustment stressors and economic and marital satisfaction during acculturation. The participants of the study consisted of 120 immigrant couples of Mexican origins who resided in North Carolina. Out of the 120 couples, a majority were first-generation immigrants, and 89% were immigrants from Mexico. Helms et al. employed multiple instruments for data collection and that included a Relationship Questionnaire that Braiker and Kelley (1979) developed to measure marital negativity and the Multidimensional Acculturative Stress Inventory (MASI; Rodriguez, Myers, Mira, Flores, & Garcia-Hernandez, 2002) to measure levels of stress that relate to cultural adaptation. Helms et al. also used the Domains of Satisfaction Scale (Wheeler, Updegraff, & Thayer, 2010) and the 12-item form of the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977) to measure depression that results from acculturation challenges. Helms et al. observed that cultural adjustment and economic difficulties that immigrant couples face during acculturation increases depressive symptoms. Further, they cause couple relationship changes that left their

relationships vulnerable. Due to acculturative demands such as cultural adaptation, economic pressures, lower levels of education, limited resources, and social support, Mexican immigrant couples experienced high levels of couple relationship stress (Helms et al., 2014).

### **Understanding of African Couple Conflicts**

The theories of status inconsistency, in addition to SET, provide a platform to understand the nature of couple conflicts among African immigrant couples. The theory of status inconsistency emerged from the resource theory of power (Mogford, 2011) that maintains that a spousal resource deficiency in relation to his or her partner would resort to using force to compensate the deficiency. The deficiency could include profession, status, prestige, age, or education (Lenski, 1954; Mogford, 2011). A member who senses discrepancy in the allocation of resources or feels threatened because of limited resources may resort to using force or violence to offset his or her lack of power because of the status inconsistency with the societal values and norms (Yick, 2001).

The presence of status inconsistency among marital couples may subject a partner to negative spousal treatment or abuse and violence. For example, gender inequity and male dominance, as Hyman et al. (2008) observed among African immigrant couples, may lead to couple conflicts and abuse against women (Mogford, 2011; Yick, 2001). The power system of a couple may tilt depending on the distribution of varied resources. The fluidity of postimmigration traditional norms that promotes independence and gives power to a wife or husband threatens the status of the other in terms of power sharing among the couple (Mogford, 2011). Further, a spouse's perception of inconsistency of

status may result in threats and force that may lead to conflicts and violence or divorce (Yick, 2001).

Tang and Oatley (2002), in their study among Chinese immigrants, discovered that an increase in a wife's financial status and independence posed a significant threat to the husband's status and power; therefore, the husband would resort to using psychological and physical manipulation and abuse. In the context of African immigrant couples, Ting and Panchanadeswaran (2009) and Ting (2010) posited that the presence of gender inequality among African immigrant couples, combined with postimmigration challenges, may provoke conflicts within the couple's relationships.

### **Analysis and Summary**

In the literature review, I examined the acculturation process among immigrants and the related challenges with a discussion on the limited literature on African immigrants in North America. I also discussed postimmigration acculturative trajectories with the resulting challenges that African immigrant couples face. The traditional cultural values of African immigrants that evoke native country veneration, colliding with the progressive, and U.S. sociocultural values, yield a variety of outcomes.

Although a majority of the research is on immigrants in general, there are conceptual gaps on immigrant couples, and there is limited literature on the challenges of African immigrant couple relationships. Nonetheless, research about other immigrants and their related acculturative challenges provided an understanding of the nature of the postimmigration challenges that African immigrant couple face. The overall understanding of acculturation, a phenomenon that emerges when groups or individuals



with distinct cultures come into contact with new culture, is related to the experience of every immigrant (West, 2016).

I also outlined the two main models (unidirectional and bidirectional) to apply to the African immigrant couples' relationships. No experience in the process of acculturation is the same for everyone. The different models, with their varied paths, may be relevant to different ethnic groups and individuals, and although a person may assimilate into the new culture, others may integrate, separate, or marginalize depending on the circumstances.

The postimmigration challenges that threaten ethnic African immigrant couple relationships in the United States is played out in varied sociocultural prescriptions: how do African immigrant couples maintain what they venerate in their native cultures while embracing what they welcome in the Western culture and maintain cordial couple relationships? African immigrants couples may not restructure mutual prototypes of the ethnic culture because the milieus are incongruent. They may not totally sacrifice their cultural principles to Western ways. It is important for the African immigrants to forge modifications from both their culture and the prevailing culture to be able to maintain core principles from both cultures that continue to give lucidity and significance to everyday life.

The intent of this study was to describe the nature of African couple relationships as they are impacted by the postimmigration acculturative challenges. In Chapter 3, I will present the methodology for the study, identify the participants and interview questionnaire, and outline how I will organize the information and analysis.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

An important element in scientific research is the research design. Although the design may render the research rigid, it will depend on the practicality of the research. Because research often deals with human experience, it is crucial to consider the roles of process, timing, situational constraints, and uncertain conditions because there is the possibility of errors, regardless of the chosen design (Mertens, 2014). In this chapter, I describe the methodology that I used in this study.

### **Research Methodology**

Researchers use varied research designs or methods for different studies. A research design or method is the philosophical or theoretical framework that provides a foundation for a study. Further, it provides the parameters, processes, and measures that will guide the study (Creswell, 2013).

In this study, I employed a qualitative methodology to explore the postimmigration relationship challenges that African couples face in Central Massachusetts. Qualitative research methodology involves nonstatistical approaches of inquiry and analysis of human experience (Creswell, 2013). It includes techniques such as observation, interviews, case studies, video recording, and document analysis for data gathering through inductive analysis to bring out categories and themes (Schwandt, 2015). Further, qualitative researchers draw on detailed accounts from participants' perspectives in analyzing a social phenomenon in a given study. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to be in the natural setting of the participants, offering access and

flexibility (Patton, 2015). I employed a qualitative case study to explore why and how African immigrant couples in Central Massachusetts experience postmigration relationship challenges.

### **Approach**

There are several research designs to consider for a given study. I used a case study approach grounded in the qualitative tradition. The case study best fit my research questions and focus. A case study refers to an analysis of a case of individuals', group's, or couples' cultures, institutions, activities, events, communities, cultures, or territories (Patton, 2015). For example, a case study may take a form of critical analysis of phases in a person's life or a program. Further, a case is confined to a time and context and, therefore, it may lead to units of analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). For example, although a researcher may be looking at how employers recruit employees, the analysis may lead to a further inquiry into the types of employees who eventually get recruited (Patton, 2015). A typical case study could include a focus on why there is spousal abuse among a group of people or why certain groups of people have problems with communication. In the study, researchers could employ observation, interviews, field studies, and any combination to gather data for the analysis (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). In certain instances, researchers may collect documents, poems, and art that may yield some meaning to the observed phenomenon for analysis. At the end of the studies, the researchers would put together a final report reflecting the study with findings and recommendations (Creswell, 2009, 2013). Immigrant families face challenges with couple role adjustment and relationships (Obiakor & Afoláyan, 2007; Vesely, Goodman,

Ewaida, & Kearney, 2015), and a case study was the best approach to study this phenomenon.

### **Research Design**

Scientific research requires a scholar to implement certain measures and principles to ensure that the researcher achieves proper outcomes (Miles et al., 2014). Some of the most-used data collection techniques in the qualitative approach are interviews and observation, audio, and document analysis (Creswell, 2009, 2013). Although researchers employ other techniques, the most commonly used technique is interviews (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008; Miles et al., 2014). The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the cause of postimmigration relationship challenges among African immigrant couples; therefore, it involved interviews for data collection; I used HyperResearch Qualitative Analysis software to analyze the themes and categories (see Booth, Sundstrom, DeMaria, & Dempsey, 2018).

### **Participants of the Study**

My plan was to explore why African immigrant couples in Central Massachusetts face postimmigration challenges in their relationships, and the participants came from this population. All of the participants in the study were couples of African descent who had lived in the United States for more than 5 years. The participants were married in their country of origin before migrating to the United States. This was necessary because I wished to explore why African immigrant couples experience postimmigration acculturative challenges and how they cope with the challenges. Recent immigrant

couples experience greater challenges than those who have lived in the United States for longer (Frank & Hou, 2015; Rasmussen et al., 2013).

### **Sampling**

One element of scientific research that serves as a necessary component to help in the research process is sampling and sample size. Related to the population, the researcher needs to consider the type of sample and method to make meaningful data gathering (Creswell, 2009). Sampling refers to the approach a researcher uses to collect information about a segment within a population (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). A few qualitative sampling strategies allow a researcher to narrow the direction of sampling, method, and size and, thereby, allow the researcher to be more specific when gathering data for the study (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2006). Because the goal of this study was not to generalize, a nonrandom sampling strategy was appropriate. The nonrandom sampling strategy for the study was purposeful sampling. Creswell (2009) posited that the underlying premise of a qualitative study is to allow the researcher to purposefully choose sites and participants that will provide an understanding of the research problem and as well as the research questions. In purposive sampling, it is important to look at settings, groups, and individuals who would provide the needed information for the study (Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015).

I chose to look at African immigrant couples who experience relationship challenges due to different structures, social strata, standards, and setups they encounter in the new host country. Within the purposive sampling strategies, I used a homogeneous sampling strategy (see Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) to focus on African immigrants.

**Homogeneous sampling.** To understand the African immigrant postimmigration couple relationship challenges, I selected a homogeneous sample because African immigrants have similar cultural traditions, living conditions, education systems, and household settings (see Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Homogeneous sampling involves taking a sample in which the group or individuals in the study have similar characteristics. For example, subjects may share common traditions or belong to a subgroup, such as people who work at a certain organization, people within the same age, or a group who live in a community and have common features of identification (Palinkas et al., 2015). According to Patton (2015), a homogeneous sample is better for interviews because the participants share common values, traditions, and cultural norms.

**Sample size.** The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the challenges facing immigrant couples from Africa in their acculturative paths regarding how they relate to each other. The sample size, therefore, for the study was 5 couples. Data saturation in terms of themes, analysis of rich and thick data, and absence of new themes determined whether to stop at five couples or continue to seven couples (see Fusch & Ness, 2015; Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). This allowed enough time and resources to do exhaustive interviews, transcription, coding, and analysis. The strategy included criterion sampling to provide me with the opportunity to pick from African immigrant couples who have couple relationship challenges after migration (see Konady-Agyemang, 2016; Patton, 2015).

Because qualitative research does not necessarily operate on the notion of generalization, sample size has been an issue of debate in research literature. Depending

on the sampling methods, different authors have suggested different numbers for interviewing. For a researcher, narrowing a research focus would require proper sample size and measures (Sandelowski et al., 2006). To determine sample size, the researcher needs to decide on certain outcomes and concerns, one of which is whether the outcome will be generalizable or not. This will guide the researcher in choosing a sampling strategy and size (Sandelowski et al., 2006). Creswell (2013) argued that although a researcher may consider the issues of generalizability in qualitative research, the overarching goal of qualitative research is not necessarily to have findings that are generalizable. This position has been debated in the literature (Hibberts, Johnson, & Hudson, 2012; Marshall, & Rossman, 2016). Hibberts et al. (2011) suggested that for a qualitative focus group study, a scholar would need between six and 12 people to provide the researcher with proper documentation and analysis. For the same group, Krueger (2014) recommended six to nine participants to allow the researcher time for transcription and analysis. On the other hand, Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora, (2016) maintained that two main issues that drive sample size for qualitative research are strategies and purpose. Fusch and Ness (2015) noted that in qualitative research, no rules are set for sample size. The rationale for choosing the sample size depends on the purpose of the research, what the researcher wants to find out, what time and resources are available, and what would have credibility (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, Creswell (2013) suggested that in qualitative studies, a researcher might look at one individual for a narrative study, three to five cases for case study, 15 to 20 persons in a grounded theory study, and 10 individuals for phenomenological study.

### **Research Questions**

Some African immigrant couples in Central Massachusetts have experienced problems in their relationships, and few researchers have focused on family relationship problems among immigrants from West Africa (Akinsulure-Smith, Chu, Keatley, & Rasmussen, 2013; Obiakor & Afoláyan, 2007; West, 2016). The following research question guided this study: How do African immigrant couples manage or deal with challenges and difficulties in their relationships in the new host country?

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Why do African immigrant couples face relationship challenges with each other through the acculturation process?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do transitional problems affect couples of African descent?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How do African immigrant couples manage or deal with challenges and difficulties in their relationships in the new host country?

### **Procedures**

The following procedures guided recruiting participants, collecting data, and data analyses. I made a contact, through telephone and personal visit, to local African shops and cultural and community centers to share information about study and scheduled a meeting. After the initial visit, I sent a letter describing the nature and purpose of the study to local African leaders, African community centers, and African cultural organizations and shops to seek permission to distribute flyers to African couples who visit their facility. Subsequent to the initial contact, I designed and posted copies of posters describing the study at African shops, community and cultural centers, with my



phone, inviting interested participants to contact me. After interested couples contacted me, I scheduled a meeting with African couples from African community and cultural centers to share information about the study for the purpose of recruiting. Further, I set a date with participants who contacted me to discuss and sign the consent form and go through the first interview.

In the first interview, I sought to build rapport with the participants, describe the purpose of the study, and have the participants sign the consent form and discuss their background information. The criteria for the initial interview were that, participating couples were married to each other before coming to the United States, they were in the United States for at least 5 years, they were available to be interviewed, and Couples would be interviewed individually or singly.

The second interview included a discussion on the questions in Appendix A. I audiotaped the interviews and transcribed and analyzed the data. Transcription was verbatim and then coded according to emerging themes from the interview.

### **Data Collection**

To determine how immigrant couples relate to each other in the new country, I designed interview protocol as a data collection tool. Maxwell (2013) distinguished between observation and interviewing in that a researcher uses observation as a data collection tool when the goal is to describe actions, settings, and behavior to understand the phenomena. On the other hand, a scholar chooses an interview when seeking to understand perspectives and situations and experience. Further, Patton (2015) argued that a researcher uses observation as a data collection tool when there is ample time to spend

in the setting of the participants in order to capture behavior patterns and experience of the subjects under study. To gain an understanding of how African immigrant couples deal with the relationship, social, and economic challenges they face in the new country, an interview afforded me the opportunity to achieve that goal.

### **Interviews**

To create a logical link between the research question and the data collection tools, it is important to guide the type of questions that are asked so that they can be used to answer the research question (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). First, interviewing was the best option given the time constraint for the research. Second, a face-to-face interview provided with me the opportunity and quick access to the participants and to ensure that they answer the questions in a timely manner. Third, an observation would require a lot of time, and given the time limitation of the study, interviewing was a better tool for data gathering.

There were two sequential interviews for this study. In the first interview, I sought to build rapport with the participants, describing the purpose of the study and having the participants sign the consent form. To have a good interview, the researcher must develop an understanding with the participant, and although this will ensure openness on the part of the participant, it will also promote trust in the relationship to afford a favorable atmosphere for the interview (Seidman, 2013). Further, I sought to gather background information on the participants, confirming whether the participants were married in the native country before migration or not and their length of years in the United States. The second interview included seven questions. In the first four questions, I addressed the

main research question to explore the acculturative challenges that the African immigrant couples face and how the challenges impact their relationships. In the last three questions of the interviews, I addressed the other three research questions. I discussed how the participants dealt with the challenges they faced in the United States.

Questions and responses were tape-recorded and then transcribed verbatim before the analysis of the data. It was important to record the actual interview. Because this was not the main means of notes taking, it allowed me to later play and gather the information and compare it with the written notes for accuracy and consistency regarding responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2016). Although there are advantages to audio and video recording, problems arise when the equipment breaks down or stops in the middle of the interview. For the best results and more accurate information, the interviewer should have backup batteries, test the recording device before the interview, record a test prior to the interview, and ask for permission to record the interview before beginning the interview (Seidman, 2013). As the most commonly used approach in qualitative study, interviews may be carried out when doing a study about an individual or a group. Between the two, the person-to-person to individual is the most preferred (Creswell, 2009; Turner, 2010). To foster a free sharing of information I used open-ended questions in the interviewing. This approach allowed the participants to provide responses that can lead to other topics to enhance the study (see Seidman, 2013).

The interviews may be structured to include predetermined questions that may require simple answers, open-ended style that can take any direction or bring in certain elements of the researched subject (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014). One technique that is

important in interviews is to ask questions in a way that will promote openness and allow the respondent to talk freely without inhibition (Miles et al., 2014). For an interview to be effective, a researcher has to think about the setting, time of interview, and the person or group to be interviewed because the interviewer should do prior preparation, looking at how to make the interview as convenient as possible (Gill et al., 2008; Miles et al., 2014). The choice of words for the interview plays a role in the process. Although the interviewer and the respondent may speak the same language, it is important for the interviewer to use words that are clear and easy to understand. This will help the respondent to provide clear answers and to stay focused (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Although an interviewer may want to have specific information, depending on the type of questions he or she designed for the interview, there is the possibility for the respondent to give information through various means (Edwards & Holland, 2013). For example, a respondent may give nonverbal information that may be pertinent for the interviewer to follow to elicit other information about the subject area. It is, therefore, important for the interviewer to listen and observe both verbal and nonverbal cues from the respondent (Creswell, 2013, 2009). Further, verbal and nonverbal cues are important to note because there may be situations and circumstances where the views of the respondent and that of the interviewer are different. As such, the verbal and nonverbal cues would help fill in the missing links (Gill et al., 2008).

### **Effectiveness of Data Collection Tool**

The interviewing strategy is important for data collection. First, it allows the researcher to stay on topic during the process because the questions are prepared in

advance and are rehearsed; although a participant may not answer the questions because they are open-ended, the interviewer can always bring the participant back to the topic (Bassett, Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepcevic, & Chapman, 2008; Maxwell, 2013). Second, interviews allow the participant to elaborate and not just answer with yes or no responses (Patton, 2015; Polkinghorne, 2005). One challenge with interviewing is that the interviewer may be seen as a naïve outsider. When participants do not know or trust the interviewer, their responses may not reflect what is actually happening, which would also affect the validity and trustworthiness of the results (Bassett et al., 2008).

### **Data Analysis Strategies**

Due to the large amount of data that can be generated in qualitative research, a data reduction process must be used to aid analysis. The data reduction procedure requires a researcher to categorize the data, recognize emerging themes, classifications, and patterns and testing the assumptions against the data (Gumbo & Williams, 2014). This approach may be constructed through indigenous or analyst-constructed (Edwards & Holland, 2013; Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013; Gumbo & Williams, 2014). In this case study, I explored challenges among immigrant African couples. I, therefore, used indigenous categories where the language of the respondents was used to label types of processes.

Prior to the interview, each participant received an informed consent form to read and then indicate his or her willingness to participate. During each interview, I made notes and filed each interview response so there were interviews and notes from the interviews.

There are various methods of qualitative data analysis including categorizing, memos, and connecting strategies (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Maxwell, 2013). Categorizing provided a viable option for the study to answer the research question. Categories represent the themes and patterns that directly emerge from the responses provided by the participants during the interview (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Through analysis, the researcher sorts the different themes of ideas and determines which categories have a relationship with each other. From the categories, the researcher engages in an analysis of the content to identify codes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

To align the data collection and strategies of analysis, I designed a matrix to input information as it becomes available (see Maxwell, 2013). Another matrix provided the map for the responses of the different participants. I designed a five- to eight-column matrix with Column 1 for the interview questions and next columns for each of the responses of the participants. The eighth column was used to summarize the themes, patterns, and concepts that emerged from the responses. I entered the responses in the appropriate column to allow a comparison of the responses and to allow the development of themes and issues. Maxwell (2013) posited that a matrix provides a researcher an opportunity to link research questions with data, as well as the method. Further, it allows a scholar to design a research plan that is effective and offers dynamic study (Creswell, 2013). For example, a matrix provides an arena for the researcher to input the different components of the research, such as the research question, rationale for the research, data collection methods, type of sampling, where to get permission to access participants, and data analysis on the same place for analysis (Temple & Thompson, 2013).

### **Quality, Trustworthiness, and Credibility**

Data collection, process of interpretation, and analysis in qualitative research requires acceptable and standard methods and procedures to ensure trustworthiness, quality, and credibility. According to Patton (2015), the issue of trustworthiness relates to how a person can depend on the data gathering process and method used. Furthermore, the process must have a way of capturing different viewpoints from the data. Marshall and Rossman (2014) postulated that qualitative research requires the lens of a principle of inquiry that evaluates the results to ensure credibility, veracity, and quality. They have to do with the principle of quality and the level of discipline as they pertain to the relationship between what is being measured and something external to it (Baumgarten, 2013).

One of the ways to achieve trustworthiness, quality, and credibility in qualitative research is to have multiple data sources to allow internal value and credibility. For instance, in interviewing, it is important to have multiple participants respond to the same sets of questions in the same setting to ensure trustworthiness and quality (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). To ensure quality, trustworthiness, and credibility, it is important to devote enough time on the setting of the study, participants, and the information they provide and make sure that the information is consistent with the observed phenomena (Baumgarten, 2013). To achieve this, I immersed myself in the setting to situate the research in the context and culture of the participants. Further, I made sure that I did not read meanings and biases into the interpretation of the data analysis (see Patton, 2015). This required objectivity to allow me to suppress subjectivity in both transcription and

interpretation of text (see Marshall & Rossman, 2014). To ensure quality, trustworthiness, and credibility, the researcher should make sure that the notes from the interviews are compared with the responses to make sure that they reflect the views of the participants. The open-ended questions would provide an opportunity for other positions and views. Patton (2015) maintained that to ensure validity, credibility, and trustworthiness, the researcher must ensure that the data collection tool is standard and captures other perspectives.

Researcher bias can impede validity, credibility, and trustworthiness; therefore, the scholar should read and reread the participants' responses, make notes, and compare notes with the original responses to eliminate personal interpretation and minimize bias. Creswell (2013) argued that a researcher must make sure that the method of data collection is consistent with standard principles that are generally accepted and can be applied in other studies. Another way that a researcher can ensure validity, credibility, and trustworthiness in qualitative research is to integrate the principle of isomorphism to allow the possibility of comparing the study with something external (Baumgarten, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Further, the ability to represent multiple data sources contributes to the credibility, quality, and trustworthiness of the study. Although participants are entitled to the responses they provide, it is important to make sure that there is consistency in the information by comparing information with what is actually happening or observed (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

African immigrants do experience couple relationship problems. Although this may be the perceived notion of the phenomenon, there need to be research conducted to



validate the existence of the phenomenon. The research was done in Central Massachusetts, focusing on African immigrant couples. Time and location may limit the extent of the study. I chose to limit the scope of the study to African immigrant couples.

### **Ethical Concerns**

Ethical concerns in qualitative research may be presented in different forms. Examples of these concerns include, but are not limited to, access to participants, collection interpretation and collection of data, confidentiality, and researcher bias (Wright, Wahoush, Ballantyne, Gabel, & Jack, 2016). Other ethical concerns may be how the researcher accesses the participants, collection of data, interpretation of data, researcher bias, and confidentiality (Wright et al., 2016).

Because the qualitative approach focuses on examining, exploring, and describing human experience in the natural setting, one ethical issue revolves around what relationship the researcher(s) develop with the participants and their willingness to participate in exposing themselves to scrutiny (Patton, 2015). To guard against this, I designed a consent form to explain to the participants the voluntary nature of the study, helping each participant to understand the risks, nature of the study, and the outcomes of the study. The form ensured confidentiality and anonymity (see Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2015).

### **Ethical Protection of Participants**

A qualitative researcher needs to consider the ethical issues regarding the permission to conduct the research and obtaining participants' consent. The institutional review board (IRB) is set up to review the study and grant permission before the research

can take place. It is important to work with the IRB because there may be some rules and regulations regarding who can or cannot be researched and what material may be appropriate for the population. Another issue of importance is the consent of the participants. For ethical reasons, I had each participant voluntarily sign a consent form and agree to participate in the study. Conducting a study among a group of people requires that the individuals or the group give proper consent to participate in the research. The participants should want to be a part of the study voluntarily and not be coerced into doing something they do not want to take part in. Not only should the individuals agree voluntarily to be part of the study, but they should understand the purpose of the study, what it entails, who would do the study, and how it will benefit the individuals as well as the community (Creswell, 2013).

A researcher should deal with these concerns to ensure that there is ethical protection of the participants and that he or she has provided adequate information to the participants to promote understanding and to ensure that they are willing to participate.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I discussed the research methodology, approach, and design that will guide the research. I described the process of data gathering, analysis, trustworthiness, quality, credibility, and ethical concerns.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore the postimmigration, acculturative challenges that impact African immigrant couples in their relationships. The exploration included how couples relate to the different social, economic, and societal norms that affect their couple relationships.

In this chapter, I discuss the results of the study. The discussion will include the demographics, setting, collection of data, data analysis, trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and the interview results.

I used the following research questions to explore African immigrant couple relationships as they are impacted by the post immigration acculturative challenges:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Why do African immigrant couples face relationship challenges with each other through the acculturation process?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do transitional problems affect couples of African descent?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How do African immigrant couples manage or deal with challenges and difficulties in their relationships in the new host country?

### **Demographics**

The couples who participated in the data collection and study were all prescreened with the first interview protocol as stated in the Chapter 3. They were all African immigrant couples who were married in their native country in Africa before migrating to

the United States. They had lived in the United States for more than 5 years and agreed to have face-to-face interviews separate from their spouses.

### **Setting**

The criteria for the initial interview was that (a) participants were married to each other before migrating to the United States, (b) participants had lived in the United States for at least five years, (c) participants were available to be interviewed on an agreed date, and (d) couples were interviewed one spouse at a time. After I determined the couples who met the criteria, I set up dates for the interview with each couple on an individual basis. Although I made provisions to have interviews at the Worcester Public library, interviews took place at the chosen location of each spouse. I conducted the interviews individually, one spouse at a time. I did not observe any personal challenges that influenced the couples in their participation of the data collection through the interviews that will affect the interpretation of data and the outcome of the study. Although there were five couples who participated in the study, because I interviewed couples individually, the interviews were void of feeling of intimidation by either spouse. Further, I assured each spouse that the interview was confidential and would not be shared with the husband or wife. This fostered an environment of freedom of expression and sharing of incidents that may not have been possible if either husband or wife was present during the interview. The spouses were able to share personal couple relationship challenges resulting from the acculturative challenges each couple face.

### **Data Collection**

The sample of data for the study emerged from the one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with five couples from different parts of Central Massachusetts. I placed flyers at supermarkets and store fronts advertising the study. After couples indicated interest, I contacted them for a follow-up and screening interview to determine if they met the criteria for the study. I scheduled and conducted the interviews on dates and locations that were amenable to the participants. The interview times ranged between 19 minutes to 29 minutes depending on the length of responses and the follow-up questions. There were no noticeable distractions or unexpected circumstances that cut short any of the interviews. With permission from participants, I recorded all interviews with Voice Recorder App on my iPhone, in addition to handwritten notes, and saved them in MP3 formats for maintenance and preservation. Data collection followed the protocol outlined in Chapter 3.

### **Data Analysis**

After I completed the interviews and transcribed all the interviews, I grouped the responses to the interview questions under the three research questions to make sure that the responses corresponded with the research question from which the interview question was developed. The research questions (RQs) and the interview questions (IQs) that I developed were:

RQ1: Why do African immigrant couples face relationship challenges as they go through the acculturation process?

IQ1 What do you consider as lifestyle differences between your native country and the United States?

IQ2 What do you consider as the most challenging aspects of the social norms in the United States?

RQ2: How do transitional problems affect couples of African descent?

IQ3 How has your couple relationship changed since migrating to the United States?

IQ4 What challenges do you and your partner face in adapting to the societal changes in United States?

IQ5 What creates conflict for you and your partner?

RQ3: How do African immigrant couples manage or deal with challenges and difficulties in their relationships in the new host country?

IQ6 How do you deal with the changes in responsibilities and roles that might have contributed to your conflicts

IQ7 How do you and your partner resolve arguments?

I entered the transcriptions of the interviews into HyperResearch Qualitative Analysis software (see Booth, Sundstrom, DeMaria, & Dempsey, 2018) for detailed analysis. Entering the transcripts of the interviews into the software allowed certain themes and words to emerge. Themes and words included responsibilities and roles, societal norms in America, conflicts, communication, financial challenges and management, challenging aspects, cultural differences, lifestyle differences, challenges facing the couple, extended family members, women in charge of cooking, different

social norms, husband as head of the family, and chores. To integrate the data, I grouped all the responses under the major themes that emerged.

### **Quality, Trustworthiness, and Credibility**

To ensure quality, trustworthiness, and credibility in qualitative research, it is important to make sure that there are multiple data sources (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). During the interviewing phase, 10 participants answered the sets of questions in similar settings to preserve data quality, dependability, trustworthiness and credibility, transferability, and confirmability. Further, during data entry into the HyperResearch Qualitative Analysis software and identification of themes and words from the data, I made sure not to be biased or to read meanings into the interpretation of the data as that would compromise the quality, trustworthiness, and credibility of the results. Additionally, the participants of the study met the criteria described in Chapter 3 to ensure quality, trustworthiness, and credibility (see Marshall, & Rossman, 2014; Patton, 2015). For example, the participants were African immigrant couples who were married in their native countries, lived in the United States for 5 years or more, and agreed to participate in the study at the time and location of their choice.

### **Ethical Concerns**

Ethical concerns in qualitative research include recruiting participants, collection, interpretation, and analysis of data (Wright et al., 2016). To ensure proper ethical practice in the study, I designed a consent form that described the scope of the study, expectation, role, and benefits to the participants as well as its contribution to the body of knowledge and research. Further, participants signed consent forms that also described participation

of the study as voluntary to remove any compromise that may result from the relationship of the researcher and the participants. Additionally, the consent form ensured participants of the confidentiality and anonymity of the information each participant shared during the study (see Wright et al, 2016). To adhere to ethical practice, I followed the requirements and guidelines of the IRB as described in Chapter 3 as well as in the approved IRB application #01-17-18-0309684.

### **Credibility**

One of the ways to achieve trustworthiness, quality, and credibility in qualitative research is to ensure that the researcher gathers the data from multiple sources to allow internal value and credibility (Marshall, & Rossman, 2014). For instance, in interviewing, it would be important to have multiple participants to respond to the same sets of questions in similar settings to ensure trustworthiness and quality (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). To achieve credibility, five couples responded to the same interview questions on an agreed date and location of their choice to safeguard quality and credibility. Consequently, this removed pressure or discomfort that may have hampered participants' freedom to share.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is the extent to which the outcomes and conclusions can be applied to other people and context (Cope, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2014). This is achieved by analyzing the data through rich narratives or accounts of respondents' descriptions, direct quotations of participants' responses, vivid experiences and phrases, and reporting participants' own impressions as indicated in their responses. Further, transferability can



allow a foundation for possible application to other people, settings, and contexts (Cope, 2014). Other researchers will be able to apply transferability to the study as it presents accurate findings and rich descriptions of participants perspectives and perceptions.

### **Dependability**

Dependability refers to using best practice in the data collection and analysis (ie., (asking suitable questions, having an understanding of the topic, being able to attentively listen to participants, eliminating ethical concerns, adopting a flexible plan, and removing biases; Cope, 2014). To ensure dependability, I applied the method described in Chapter 3 by choosing settings that were appropriate, did repeated review of journal notes and transcripts, and systematically and accurately coded the themes.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is the degree to which the findings of the study can be consistent, confirmed, neutral, and repeated by another researcher (Polit & Beck, 2014). Reflexively, I reviewed personal notes and reflections, and I analyzed any phenomenon displayed by participants during the interviews. I placed particular emphasis on the data interpretation to eliminate bias and error (see Cope, 2014).

## **Results**

I developed seven interview questions from the three main research questions. From the analysis of the data, five main themes emerged from the responses: cultural differences, transitional difficulties, challenges, roles, and responsibilities.

## **Cultural Differences**

The responses to RQ1 indicated that all 10 participants experienced mutable social norms from that of their various native countries in Africa into the norms of the society in the United States. Although they all admitted undergoing changes in social norms, they did not all describe one norm, but different aspects of social norms experienced at different times and situations. For example, one male participant expressed a dismay at how there is no deference of women to men, as well as of children to adults in certain situations in the new host country:

All people are considered equal. The equality of both the sexes and the ages, different ages is not that pronounced here. And sometimes, as I was saying I've been here long enough to get used to it, but earlier on I had a hard time if a child called me by my first name. .... It was something, I couldn't take it initially. But later on I just accepted it as part of the society. Something that society accepts, so I got used to it.

Participants expressed a clash of cultural norms because in their native cultures, certain functions and norms are reserved for one gender. Talking about societal differences between native country and the United States, one female participant shared:

We always work. If he's out, he works. He has regular work hours, 8:00 to 4:30. I don't. I work 7:00 to 3:00. Sometimes I stay over, I'll do sixteen hours, so you come home and it's midnight so all you do is go straight to bed. The next day you have to go. You have the kids to worry about. You have to make sure they are off to school, they have all they need, there's food in the house. As a mother, I feel

like I'm always giving, and you give a lot, so it makes it harder. And you don't have time for yourself" .... I don't think it does help very much. I realize that somehow it doesn't help, but then we have to find a way to fix it. I don't know how. I personally realize that we don't have time for each other. It's like even when I'm home, I'm so tired or I'm doing something else or I'm occupied with something else. So we don't have that personal time that we used to have.

Commenting on the work shift in the United States, one male participant described,

Work shift is also not helping. At the moment as I speak, we're all working for the different shifts. And then mostly because I work within Worcester, I do come home early. But when I come over to do some things on the computer and so before she could come in, I'll always be waiting sometimes we stay up over 2:00 a.m. while I am not sleeping and I will be here sitting watching movie or printing something on the computer. It's not helping. And health wise too, I don't think this is helping.

The participants expressed frustration that in their native countries, extended family members played major roles in their lives in areas such as babysitting and helping in household chores, and this was not necessarily true in the United States. One female participant described,

Well, I would feel that cultural differences is one of the major impact as we migrated from Ghana to the United States, because of, um-- When we came here the first- when we came here, we saw that things were different from our home back in Ghana.... The difference, I will say back home you get people to help you

when you need their help. Over here, at first, when we came, we couldn't, like, find family members to help us so mostly we depended on other people who weren't family members .... So, it's, like, life was very difficult because my husband was the only breadwinner in the house. I was pregnant when we were coming, so it wasn't that easy for us when we came, things were very difficult.

Similarly, another male participant shared:

Back home you live within your extended houses, big house where your cousins, nephews, nieces, your aunties and your uncles sometimes live together. You help each other, even when you give birth, your grandma or your auntie can take care of the child for you instead of here sometimes you need to go look for a babysitter to take care of your kid, paying money. There, there's no ... you don't have to pay anything, that family member will take care of that person for you. So that one too is also a different aspect of it besides working. Most of the times the woman needs to be at home, sometimes take care of the kids while the man is in charge, working, taking care of the whole family. Here too the way the kids are brought up is different. We were disciplined back home. However, back here, you apply that kind of discipline, it's considered to be abuse, or sometimes it's a little bit tougher as to how to bring up our kids.

Participants noted frustration on how children appeared to control certain situations in social relations. For example, in the native country, adults received deferential treatment and certain privileges in social gathering: “Back home whenever a young guy is sitting on a chair, and you see an adult, you need to get up as a sign of

respect and give the chair to the adult. Here your own kids even when they get up from a chair, you sit and they will come and tell you to get up,” responded one male participant.

It was noted in the responses that expression of affection in public places was a cultural shock to the participants. A female participant stated,

Growing up, when I was growing up, it wasn't socially open to be hugging and kissing and all those things back home. We didn't grow up like that. Couples normally did that privately with their love ones, unlike here. It's open and they can express their affection for each other openly and not feel ashamed or penalized by the elders.

Another female participant stated,

Back home, it's different, over here you see people, couples, trying to kiss.... Back home, you can't do that. They will just say I wasn't trained to do that. When we came over here, he can't do it because he thinks, because back home he wasn't trained... Yes, can't hold hands, kiss, hug or something, that's what, when we were growing up, you can't do it.... When you come over here still he can't, because we wouldn't do it at home, so he thinks he wasn't trained to do that. You can't do it publicly, but you can do it privately.

According to the participants, there were distinct cultural and social differences that posed varied challenges for the couples as they transitioned into the new country. Although some experienced differences in social norms in their couple relationships, loss of extended family support system at native country, and different work shift system in the United States, others experienced challenges in acceptable social behavior of children

in the new country, public couple expression of affection, and lack of couple time together.

### **Transitional Difficulties**

Responding to the three interview questions under Research Question 2, nine out of 10 participants indicated that as couples they faced and continued to endure other transitional difficulties and challenges. The challenges included communication, finances, and relationship conflicts resulting from the acculturative challenges.

**Communication.** Five out of 10 participants indicated varied communication challenges that relate to differences in cultural norms, dissimilarity in work shift, changing roles, and expectations. Four out of five male participants stated that women's emboldened freedom to challenge their decision making posed challenges. Commenting on how the empowerment of the new social norm allows women to be inclusive in decision making among couples, one male participant stated,

sometimes you see your wife put out some challenges and insist on certain rights.

You tend to think that it looks like they push too much. Whereas back home, most of the time, by default the man takes most of the decisions.

His wife's input in a decision making or discussion is perceived as demands, which is different from how women talked to their spouses in their native country. He continued, "sometimes when your wife relates to you like people here, they start making some demands, and some rights, they insist on certain rights." One female participant reported,

When it comes to communication, we have a communication barrier. For my husband he's the type who is always on ... Should I say he's like a computer or a phone addict. Even when he closes from work like 11:30 pm. He comes home first before I do because he work within Worcester but I work Westborough so even when I come he's still on the phone or even on the computer and when you wake up in the morning too, the first thing, he'll be in the computer, so everything, even if there is a communication I have to initiate. If I don't then there is no communication. We used to sit down, chat, laugh, even sometimes in the evening if we're not doing anything, when he's back from work. ...Arguments are the challenges we were having and then when he's leaving out from work, like my husband's leaving from the house, sometimes he won't even tell me that he's leaving, I'll just wake up and he's not there, I have to pick the phone, call him, 'Where are you?' Then he will tell me, I'm here and I say, 'But when you were leaving, you didn't tell me anything'. He says 'Oh because you were sleeping'. And I said, 'But you could just text for me to know'. Now my husband is doing that, so that even if we are not talking even texting to let you know that I'm here, is also working as a form of communication. So I would say communication helps a lot, reported one female participant.

The participants indicated that men sensed that, in the new U.S. society, their wives have a say in decision making and are dogged on their desires and wishes to be considered by their husbands. The men, in particular, appeared challenged that their spouses are more desirous of sharing input in the management of their resources. To

some of the men, this new norm was surprising while to others it was a threat to their authority. Although there were noted communication challenges facing the African immigrant couples in their relationships, participants reported on challenges in financial decisions.

**Financial challenges.** Six out of 10 participants expressed challenges in their couple financial management mainly because, first, in their native country men were in charge of managing their finances and second, they did not have joint bank accounts and if they did, the men controlled its management. One female participant described,

I was the one who worked throughout the year because he came back just December, there was nothing like a document that he can use to file, so I would basically base on the filing issue, because when I filed the money that came out, I just showed him the money that I got. And I told him I want to put this money somewhere because he hasn't even opened an account. He hasn't even started working or anything. So if everything starts working well, then we'll know what to do. But let's put this aside in case something happens then we can use that money. It seems the way I said it, he didn't like the idea but I didn't know he didn't like the idea until he explained to a friend. So when the friend contacted me, then I said, 'To me, I don't have any bad idea for doing that. This is the reason why I did that'. So I sat him down. Then I explained everything to him that this is the reason why I did this, because you just returned, you haven't got a job. So I have to put this aside in case something happens then we could lean on that. But still I could sense he still doesn't get it because he thinks he's the head of the house, he



was expecting me to give him the money for him to use it to open an account or something of that sort.

Another male participant expressed that his wife switched back and forth between the native culture and the new American way of doing things when it is convenient for her. He stated,

Some of the challenges are that sometimes when it is convenient for the spouse to be American, she'll be an American. But when it's convenient for her to be an African, she's an African. Sometimes when she wants me to help and all those things she says; 'Oh we are in America, things are different so come and help.'

But sometimes when it comes to money, giving out money, 'Oh you are the man.'

Another female participant stated,

Financial is one factor. Because when we were in Ghana, actually, we're not doing this ... We were not putting our monies together because we got married three months then I moved here, so when he came here, he worked for about three months then he went back to Ghana, so when he came and we decided to like sit down and have one joint account, it wasn't working.

For another female participant, she had to manage the affairs of the home because the husband was laid off and was not bringing income. This posed a challenge for the couple. She described,

My husband is currently out of work and I've become the main provider. That doesn't make him less of a man, or whatever it is. It's a temporary situation. So taking that role and doing my best that I can, and at the same time trying to not

step over his toes or make him feel like he's not doing anything, becomes a little challenging.

Although financial challenges plagued the immigrant African couples who participated in this study as they transitioned into the new U.S. society, they also reported couple conflicts that relate to the new social norms.

**Couple conflicts.** As with other postimmigration challenges, nine out of 10 participants reported having conflicts in their relationships. The conflicts were a result of the new social norms, couple role alterations, financial management, extended family demands, and the compounded life demands that are different from those in their native countries. For example, going to school, working, taking care of children and discharging spousal responsibilities at home was challenging and sometimes difficult for the couples. To the participants, limited individuals went to school and worked at the same time in their native countries. Further, extended family members helped in childcare and babysitting.

Describing how work, cooking, and other responsibilities in the house result in lack of interest in sex, which further created conflict, one female participant noted:

I don't want to and-and he's like, 'Oh.' And he wants it and I don't want it. So sometimes this is one of the things I can think about because it's like, it always brings confusion between us and sometimes, um-- because of that, he'll go to bed very mad. So, this is one, one thing I can think of is that it always creates problems for us because I always-- sometimes I'm, I'll be tired and he'll say, 'Can I?' I'm like, 'No, I'm tired.'.... And sometimes we'll be in bed, I will say, 'Okay

I'm ready.' But, but by the time, the thing will start, I'll be fast asleep, so he couldn't make what he wanted to do. So, that's the one thing that creates confusion in our marriage. Sometimes I make sure, uh, I-I give it to him the next day if he's not mad. The only time you see my husband mad is when I don't, uh, fulfill my duty as a woman on bed.

One male participant reported,

Everybody feels that he or she is right, so, like I was saying, when we were back home I was the one making the major decisions. Now it's not like that again. It's always like, 'No. I don't think this is the right thing.' And I say, 'Oh, this is the right thing to do. I don't think that's the right thing to do.' Then we leave it out there without coming up with a decision.

Three out of 10 participants reported that some of their conflicts stem from the demands of their extended family members who still live in the native country. A male participant described:

The larger family intrusion. Sometimes they come, and I say alright because she's a family member. Sometimes to the neglect of you, they don't recognize you as a family member. And they will be dealing with her in their own way. But your spouse try to bring you in to the advantage of the family. But when it's yours, they tend to slow down. When it's related to your family. Mostly because they may be coming to make some demands of her. Assuming that you are not part of that, dealing with her. But when there's a problem, and she doesn't have enough, you will have to step in but then it gets too much. But at times, even I volunteer to

help. But there are times I see that they are taking too much advantage of her. It's more for sympathizing with her that make me angry, because I know she's so sometimes emotional about her extended family and she will try to do the best for them, but at certain times I see her as having done more than enough. It's too demanding. In certain situations, in my sympathy for her, I wouldn't say angry, but I get a bit uncomfortable the way that she's allowing herself to be manipulated by them.

For another female participant,

It depends on how he will understand it, but I think it shouldn't be any misunderstanding if he really agrees with what I'm saying, like assuming when they call from Ghana they need money or something and maybe I sent, and he's not around, so when he comes, even though I know he's the husband and he's supposed to be aware of it before I even send the money.

Responding to what creates conflict for the couple in the new country, an interview question under Research Question 2, another female participant stated:

If I refuse to cook, he's so understanding that he will find out why. Either I was sick, I was so busy I couldn't do all those, then he will try to find something to eat. But if there's nothing like that, I'm not sick, I wasn't so busy, but I just refuse to do it, then he thinks otherwise and asks me why.... Yeah, it impacted my relationship with my husband in terms of happiness, because we used to have time for each other. I changed my schedule because I was going to school and have to work overnight. So I work five days overnight. Meaning I have only two nights to

sleep at home. And my two nights, only one night I'm able to have sexual relationship with him. So once a week. And I know sexual relationship makes the relationship more happier and so comfortable and it also helps in conflict resolution, but that isn't there. So we are not that happy like we used to when we're back home, because there wasn't anything like that. Because I use my daytime to go to school, take care of the kids. So the only time I can do something to assist him financially, is to take some overnight job to help.

As shown in above discussion, postimmigration acculturative challenges created conflicts for the African immigrant couples who participated in the study.

**Challenges, roles, and responsibilities.** The participants' responses to Research Question indicated that migration from the native country to the United States was met with acculturative challenges. These challenges altered the distinct couple roles and responsibilities and further affected how couples relate to each other. Four out of five men described experiencing challenges in lifestyle in the host country. Responding to challenges about lifestyle differences between the native country and the host country, a husband stated,

Men, we take charge, we do everything. We decide, we have the final say, but here is not like that. Women, they have a say, they have more leverage than men. That's some of the differences that I found when I came here.... that's what the challenges that most people are talking about and most men lament on.

Another male participant described:

The woman's right becomes a bit pronounced. And that is one obvious way that I can see the difference between the African marriage and the, for lack of better word, I would say the supremacy of the husband is not as pronounced as it is back home. And when the woman gets their rights, sometimes it's a bit challenging, especially coming all the way from Africa to here. You'll see much difference. They start insisting on their rights, and sometimes the way they serve in the house too is a bit changed .... I couldn't take it initially. But later on I just accepted it as part of the society. Something that society accepts, so I got used to it. But even that, there were times where I could tell that after becoming part of the system, sometimes you see your wife put out some challenges, and insist on certain rights, you tend to think that it looks like they push too much. Whereas back home, most of the time, by default the man takes most of the decisions. And even though sometimes the woman put in some inputs, they don't demand as much as what they get here.

Expressing initial frustration regarding how his wife would respond to his desires as they transitioned in the new social norm, a husband reported:

Well, back in Ghana we had male dominance in the family. Over there, whatever the man says is the final way. Compared to here, that is not always like that. Sometimes our life change, and also .... Power. Power struggles or role struggles can also be a challenge when we come to this, because when we were in Ghana, most females were dependent on their husbands. Mostly, they just abide by what the husband says, or the husband would say the final word. Here it's not like

that...it took me a time for the cultural change because when we were in Ghana, it's like a male dominant role. Here we don't have dominance over here. We work together. Initially, it was a challenge, because that was something new. How come I say something and you say 'No, I won't do that'? But when we were in Ghana, it wasn't like that.

In most African cultures, male dominance is emphasized in the notion that the husband is the head of the family (Ogunsiji et al., 2016). Men played major roles such as controlling the finances, seeing their wives as the ones in charge of cooking and doing laundry, and while men take charge of decision making in the family. To understand the concept of roles and functions between African couples, I asked, "So to summarize the differences, back home typically men take charge and they work, and the women cook. But in your case you helped in the cooking?" "Yes, I did that," a male participant responded.

Although a majority of the men felt dissatisfied with the changing dynamic in terms of roles and responsibilities, all five of the female counterparts were satisfied with the ability to express themselves and share their desires and wishes in the roles and responsibilities they have. One female participant noted,

I feel like it's not necessary because whoever is good at in the marriage should work. I might not be good with the kids, he would be good with the kids. I might be good with finances, he might not be good with finances. If we can pick out the good in each other and mend it, I think it would be great. But sometimes because

of culture it tends to go the opposite way.... So I do the best I can. I do the best I can.

Another female participant explained:

Lifestyle differences, it's like in our country, the woman is not allowed...When the man or the husband says something, the woman is not allowed to talk back or speak up her mind.... But, over here, when you come over here, you know that it helps to at least, explain something. Not talking back in an angry way, but just want the man to know that whatever he is saying, you don't agree.... But, back home, we don't have to. Over here, it's like you have the freedom to not talk back but explain what is going on what is your mind", described another female participant.

Some of the culturally defined roles have been altered as couples go through the acculturation process due to lifestyle differences. One female participant stated,

Well, I would feel that cultural differences is one of the major impact as we migrated from Ghana to the United States, because of, um-- when we came here the first- when we came here, we saw that things were different from our home back in Ghana....Back home was like, um, most of the time I'll cook every day. It wasn't like I'll cook and leave some in the fridge....Over here, even though I cook, it's not every day, but most of the time some of the food I keep in the fridge and use it the- for two or three days, even though my husband doesn't like it.

Four out of the five women who responded to the Research Question 3 admitted that the new host country afforded them liberty and freedom to express their desires in



how things should be managed in their relationship. However, they also maintained basic culturally prescriptive roles such as housekeeping, cooking, and acceding some financial decisions to their husbands. Although these roles were culturally mandated as roles for women, they continue to engage in them for the upkeep of the couple relationship, to ensure peace and not out of compulsion. One female participant reported,

Whatever my husband wants, I feel like if I ...even if I'm not interested, I don't want to do it, I'll give in so that there will be peace ....“The house chores like if I'm the one who went to the market, or to the grocery to buy all the stuff, if he's in the house, normally I call him that I'm back and I have some stuff which is heavy, I want him to help me bring it up stairs. If he's only in the house, he will help me do that. But if he's not in the house, I have to do it by myself. But I'm normally I always go to the market to do the grocery.

All participants experienced the impact of postimmigration acculturation challenges in their couple relationships either positively or negatively. For instance, some of the men felt a loss of control in their couple relationship, misinterpreted their spouses' ability to express their desires, and take part in the decision making as opposing their authority; therefore, they felt not satisfied with their couple relationship after migration. All the women participants, on the other hand, experience freethinking, autonomy, progressive, and satisfied with their new life in the host country.

**Conflict resolution.** All 10 participants indicated that they try to find a way to resolve their conflicts. A male participant stated,

Usually in the heat of things I just keep quiet for some time and let this cool down. That's when I try to talk. When it looks like all reason goes away, it's difficult to talk about it, so you just have to allow some time to elapse before. But it's mostly by talking.

Responding to how they resolve conflict, a female participant stated,

It's a good question. My husband tells me I'm a good pretender. I'm able to pretend, since we have our in-laws here. And even before they came, I used to pretend to make my kids know that everything is fine. I fight in the bedroom, I fight him so, so bad, but anytime the kids are here, or people are around, we just ... especially me. I can be so mad, my facial expression will prove that this is not in good condition, but when I calm down, I just put on very beautiful smile and stay as if everything is okay because of the kids or because of the in-laws.

Everything is fine. We talk and laugh, but upstairs there in our room, we don't talk to each other. We can just not talk to each other for three days, four days, I don't care. I'm able to do that. He is not able to do that. He will try all his best to make me at least talk to him, but I will just stay until I am okay. Sometimes he'll also surprise ... one time he surprised me. He arranged accommodation outside the home, a hotel. And then he just asked me to come with him to a friend's place. And I said, because we were not in good terms at that time, I refused to do, but he just asked someone to call me, a friend of his to call me. It's a colleague at workplace call me and said, 'will you please meet me at this place? I have something for you for your husband.' I went there and it was my husband who has

made the arrangement just to resolve the situation. So I'm always the trouble one. I always tell myself I'm the trouble one. He's easy to deal with conflict. He's easy. He'll tell you, 'I don't even think there is a conflict.' He's very accommodative, but I'm the issue.

The couples used different approaches in resolving their couple conflicts. One female described,

I think communicating helps when it comes to marriage because based on the counseling we had, now if I come back from work even if it is late, we can even chat about five minutes before I even go to bed. And at first, we didn't use to do that. So I would say that one is working a little bit.

One out of 10 participants sought professional help and noted, "we went for professional counseling. It has helped a lot and things are improving. But I will say still we need the small room for improvement."

As African immigrant couples transitioned into the new U.S. culture, the culturally prescriptive roles and responsibilities for genders shifted. The men felt that their spouses gained more freedom because they also engaged in the workforce and made financial contributions to the running of the family and, therefore, had a role in decision making which was normally reserved for the men. On the other hand, the women were satisfied that they are able to work and support the family but also have the ability to make decisions or at least contribute to how they manage the resources of their respective families. The roles and responsibility alterations brought conflicts to the couples. However, they managed to have ways to deal with the conflicts.

## Summary

In Chapter 4, I offered a comprehensive account of the research questions of the study. I sought to understand the postimmigration acculturation challenges that African immigrant couples face in the new host country. When immigrants come into contact with new or host culture, they engage in a comparison of the native culture and the new culture to identify commonalities but then realize that there is a degree of incongruities. As described above in the results section, acculturative challenges, such as cultural differences, transitional difficulties, and roles and responsibilities plagued the couples in their relationships. The acculturation and the immigrant couple adjustment process into the new cultural norms are multifarious processes for many individuals as well as couples. All of the couples who participated in the study identified differences between their native cultures and that of the new culture.

All couples in the study admitted that the new culture, void of extended family support and community nature as in native cultures, caused them to endure hardship. For example, in the native cultures, extended family members provided support in babysitting and childcare; mostly, men engaged in labor force and women did not have to juggle between work, school, and childcare while at the same time taking care of household needs. Although the husbands did not complain about their spouses engaging in the labor force in the new country, they still expected their spouses to work and financially contribute to the couple and family needs. For the five women in the study, working, taking care of childcare, kids' schooling, and their own education in addition to the expected chores in the house negatively affected their couple relationships.

Four out the five men had challenges related to the liberty and freedom that allowed their spouses the leverage to participate in decision making together. For instance, the men found it undesirable that women did not take a back seat in financial matters, did not relegate decision making to their husbands, but rather played a coterminous role in managing their resources. All five women in the study appreciated that they had the ability to express their thoughts and opinions in their couple relationships, especially, in decision making, although they admitted that their male counterparts found that as threat to their authority and it further brought conflicts in their relationships.

All 10 of the participants reported different forms of transitional difficulties. Different work shifts in the United States did not permit them to spend quality time together as couples. Adding work to the mix of childcare, schooling of themselves and children, and demands in the house, participants had limited time for each other. For example, two couples indicated that as a couple, they are not able to be at home and sleep together except two nights on the weekly cycle. This did not allow quality and intimate times together. Additionally, a lack of time together impacted their communication because they were always tired and, therefore, vented on each other.

The couple transitional changes in roles and responsibilities posed challenges for the couples as indicated in the responses to Research Question 3. Three out five women reported that they had taken the role of managing the couple finance due to reasons such as the husband being laid off, going back to the native country for a prolonged period of time, or some unforeseen circumstances. To their husbands, this was an alteration to their

culturally prescriptive roles and expectations and the resulting impact was shown in disagreements, conflicts, and estrangement. In Chapter 5, I will offer a look at the results and understanding and a general synopsis of concepts relevant to the limitations, recommendations, implications, and the conclusion of the study.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore postimmigration challenges that face African immigrant couples related to how they relate to each other. In the research about postimmigration challenges that face immigrants of African descent, scholars have concentrated on the trends and trajectories of Asian and European immigrants, observing that migration from Africa to the United States, although fast growing, is recent (Akinsulure-Smith et al., 2013; Johnson, Neyer, & Anderson, 2019; Rania, Migliorini, & Rebora, 2018; Takougang & Tidjani, 2009; Takyi, 2002; Thomas, 2011; Vaughn & Holloway, 2010). This exploration of the postimmigration acculturative challenges that impact African immigrant couples in their relationships provided a further element of knowledge, previously unexplored, to the prevailing acculturation research.

In this study, I conducted interviews with five couples of African descent who were married in their home countries before migrating to United States and are currently living in Massachusetts. I prescreened all the participants using the research protocol described in Chapter 3, after they had responded to an invitation through posters that were placed at African stores. I used a qualitative case study because the purpose was to explore, identify, and understand an experience to gain intimate knowledge (see Patton, 2015; Schwandt, 2015).

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings and outline the themes that emerged from the data collection and analysis. I will also present a review of the limitations of the study, recommendations of the study, implications, and a final conclusion.

## **Interpretations of the Findings**

The lack of research about the postimmigration challenges facing African immigrant couples allowed the findings of this qualitative study to make unique expansion to the knowledge in the subject matter. In this section, I recount the research questions as they relate to the findings from the data analysis. The interpretation of the findings echoes the postimmigration acculturative challenges and experiences as expressed by the participants.

### **Research Question 1 (RQ1)**

**Cultural differences.** A majority of African immigrant couples experience postimmigration transitional challenges due to the cultural, economic systems, and social differences between their native cultures and the cultures of the western societies (Caarls, & Mazzucato, 2016; Sam, 2018). Thrusted into the new social norms of the United States, the African immigrant couples have to renegotiate and adjust to cultural norms that are progressively different from what they are used to in their home countries (Brako, 2013; Musyoka, 2014). The majority of African cultures are prescriptive when it comes to certain societal systems, norms, functions, and roles. The participants in this study indicated that in most African traditional cultures, couples relate to each other along age and gender lines. Consequently, division of labor follows the same traditionally prescriptive roles and ages. Further, the participants indicated that in their native countries, limited professions and corporations such as police departments, hospitals, and security companies have work shifts system, especially night shifts. A high percentage of



corporations and educational systems use only morning work shifts system, which allows couples to spend time together at home in the evening.

This finding is analogous to other conclusions in studies about acculturative challenges that immigrant couples face. Barker and Cornwell (2019) and Wojnar (2015) identified that Somali immigrant couples faced cultural challenges as they assimilated into the culture of the United States. Specifically, there was a lack of understanding of the U.S. healthcare system due to a language barrier, requirements, and access.

The new cultural and social milieu in the United States did not allow couples in the study to spend time with each other because of their varied work shifts. All five couples who participated in the study admitted a lack of time for each other because they were not able to be at home together at the same time most of the days of the week. This challenge was due in part to their adherence to their common traditional system of work and leisure time in their native countries. This experience was consistent with findings of other studies. Connor et al. (2016) documented that Somali women working out of home, in their new country of the United States, caused their husbands to complain about lack of couple time together, limited time for children, and increased tension and quarrels among couples.

The participants experienced stress-related challenges due to a lack of extended family support system that was readily available in their native countries. The presence of extended family support system in their native countries aided them with childcare, financial support when out of work, and elderly and community support when their marriage was going through crisis. In the host country, they had to resort to paying for

childcare, borrowing from financial organizations through credit cards to support one income when the other spouse was not working, and paying for professional counseling when their marriage was in crisis. Further, a lack of extended family support system rendered them with the burden of juggling with work, childcare, and schooling; the frustration of it all had a negative impact on the participants' relationship with their spouses. This finding was consistent with other results on immigrant couple challenges. Musyoka (2014) noted that a lack of extended family support among Kenyan immigrant families impacted their ability to work and to take care of their children and fulfill their wifely expectations at home.

### **Research Question 2 (RQ2)**

**Transitional Difficulties.** A prevailing perspective that was shared by participants was that the distinct traditional couple roles as known and embedded in their native cultures were experiencing a shift at the confluence of the native culture and the social norms in the United States. Male dominance in the couple relationship was challenged by the social norms of the host society. For example, commenting on decision making, one male participant noted:

I didn't expect that she will come and tell me 'I want you to do this.' Most of the time, I am stepping out of my own good senses, because I knew it was something, from my good senses I knew she was doing so much that I have to help. But when it comes to the level of demanding, I just can't.... Usually in the heat of things I just keep quiet for some time and let this cool down. That's when I try to talk.

When it looks like all reason goes away, it's difficult to talk about it, so you just have to allow some time to elapse before ... But it's mostly by talking.

Barker and Cornwell (2019) maintained that alteration in couple roles in a new host country poses threat to the stability of their couple relationships because the immigrant couples usually straddle between two roles of the native culture and the host culture. Brako (2013) maintained that the shifting gender roles among Ghanaian couples and the resulting regular conflicts impacted their couple relationships. Further, Accordini, Giuliani, and Gennari (2018) reported that, confronted by the new social context, immigrant couples are challenged with reconstructing their traditional social, prescriptive marital, and gender duties and roles as they stand in contrast to the secular and postmodern values and norms of the Western society. The acculturative challenges affect couple communication regarding roles and expectations (Barker & Cornwell, (2019), and this study expanded on that observation.

The participants claimed that couples are plagued by financial challenges resulting from the changing gender roles foisted on them by the social norms of the new context. Examples of this perspective were revealed in statements such as,

When it comes to making decisions in the house, I make the decisions. My wife ... one of the things my wife will do is that she will never cross the boundary because she believes that the man is the head of the family. Even though she does these things, nothing that she does she won't tell me.... So, she knows that men make decisions of the house when to comes to ... when it's our children's education, she has to ask me, 'What are we going to do'? If it's in schooling, if it's

buying items for them. Even though she does that, she will ask me, 'Can we do this'? 'Is it appropriate for them'?

So anything she will ask, even though she knows the answer she will ask me for me to say okay before she does it. So he takes care of everything, even I don't go to bank to take money for myself. He gives me money. He gives me money. Our money, everything about our money, he takes care of it.

West (2016) reported that male control of finance, limited access to employment, and economic abuse contributed to higher rates of intimate partner violence that was prevalent among Ethiopian immigrant couples. Further, West identified that the traditional view of male dominance in domestic affairs encourages African immigrant men to continue to control decision making, of which financial decision is paramount, and this is may be the major cause of domestic conflicts and divorces. This account was consistent with the findings that financial challenges pose a threat to African immigrant couple relationships in the new host country.

**Couple conflicts.** Couple conflicts resulting from financial management, time management, and gender role alteration was an issue recognized by the participants. All participants experienced couple relationship conflicts that stemmed from their inability to manage the stress of acculturation. For each of the couples, the men took financial responsibilities of their parents, nieces, and nephews, and the women took similar responsibilities of their extended family. Consequently, four out of the five couples who participated in the study did not readily agree to have joint bank accounts when they migrated to the United States. The participants reported that extended family demands

caused them to save their own income individually to meet the demands. For this reason, couples divided their financial responsibilities for each to be responsible for certain expectations in their home. For example, if the husband took the responsibility of paying for utilities, auto insurances, and auto loans, the wife would then be responsible for mortgage, food, and health insurance. With these arrangements, when a spouse is not able to fulfill the expected responsibility due to illness, unemployment, or an extended travel to home country without income, it results in conflicts. One female participant reported,

And it plays a big role in our relationship because they expect more from him and more from me. And I used to do it in the beginning, but then I put a stop to it because it became too much for me. And because of that, it always creates this family conflict. Because of culture, that is expected of a wife.

Second, participants experienced couple conflicts from spousal demands in addition to the nuanced demands in the new host country. Female participants reported putting similar hours of work as their male spouses; yet, they were expected to cook almost every day after long hours of work. Inability to prepare meals because of being tired from a long day's work resulted in conflict.

Researchers identified couple conflicts as an element of acculturation challenges. (Accordini et al., 2018; Okeke-Ihejirika, Salami, & Karimi, 2018; Umubyeyi & Mtapuri, 2019). Umubyeyi and Mtapuri (2019) reported that income-earning capacity of African women in the Western society caused a power shift in negotiation, decision making, and financial management, which results in couple conflict because their male partners are experiencing loss of power and seeking to reclaim it.

### Research Question 3 (RQ3)

**Challenges, roles, and responsibilities.** The participants indicated experiencing challenges that relate to role modification. In their native countries, cultural traditions prescribe distinct roles for husbands and wives. For example, the father or the husband is usually the family head. Consequently, the head is responsible for financial support and to provide shelter. On the other hand, the wife or the mother takes responsibility of the basic household needs such as caring for the children, cleaning, cooking, and laundry. In the new host country, these distinct roles are modified, and both husbands and wives engage in the labor force to support the family. Therefore, unemployment, illness, and inability to find employment in an area previously trained in the native country may warrant that a wife or mother becomes the main financial provider in the family. One female participant explained:

My income comes straight into our checking account. It's a joint checking account, so my income comes straight in, my husband's income. So the money always goes to the joint account, so I don't control it. What I can say is because I love to budget, I'm kind of conscious of what needs to be paid, what we can do and what we cannot do. And I feel like sometimes my husband feels like it becomes a little bit controlling...For instance, my husband is currently out of work and I've become the main provider. That doesn't make him less of a man, or whatever it is. It's a temporary situation. So taking that role and doing my best that I can, and at the same time trying to not step over his toes or make him feel like he's not doing anything, becomes a little challenging.

Scholars have supported the perspective of role modification that impacts immigrant couple relationships (Patel, Clarke, Eltareb, Macciomei, & Wickham, 2016; Rania et al., 2018). Okeke-Ihejirika and Salami (2018) determined that scarcity of a reliable job and stable income placed financial anxieties on African men. Their failure to cope with the situation can influence other essential aspects of life, including triggering disagreements and frustrations in family life, conflict between wife and husband, and sometimes ending in separation or divorce (Okeke-Ihejirika & Salami, 2018).

**Conflict resolution.** Participants reported experiencing couple conflicts through their acculturation into the new social milieu. They also reported, however, that adopting certain measures such as improved communication, spending time with each other and use of silence, and seeking pastoral counseling from church pastors provided avenues for resolving their conflicts. This perspective bolsters the findings of Umubyeyi and Mtapuri (2019) regarding the need of church leaders to provide support in resolving marital conflict but also to provide emotional and psychological support to couples. The perspective of spending time together as a means of reducing stress and helping to resolve couple conflicts added another level of conflict resolution approach that has not been reported in the literature.

### **Theoretical Framework**

SET, which developed from three studies of social behavior as exchange (Homans, 1958), the social psychology of groups (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), and exchange and power in social life (Blau, 1964) was the conceptual framework for the study. Researchers have expounded on SET as an exchange development that promotes

the advantages and lessens the costs of the social relationship and governs the social interactions between people (Blau, 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Liu, Min, & Stafford, 2017; Zhai & Smyth, 2016). To gain a healthier understanding of the acculturation challenges facing African immigrant couples in their relationships, I used the precepts of SET to guide the focus of the study. Using the principles of SET, I was able to analyze the relationships involving compromises, modifications, partnership, and shared living among the couples. The findings from this study supported the principles of SET, where benefits of interactions reframe couple exchanges, roles, and relationships as evidenced by the results of the study discussed in Chapter 4. Further, this study provided a confirmation on the use of SET in studying couple relationships and offered efficacy of the frameworks in the study of the immigrant couple relationships.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The focus of this qualitative research was to understand the postimmigration challenges facing African immigrant couples as they relate to each other in the new host country. There were limitations to the study in spite of the collection and interpretation of the essential themes that emerged from the data (see Amankwaa, 2016; Morgado, Meireles, Neves, Amaral, & Ferreira, 2018).

One limitation was the location of the study. I recruited the participants from Central Massachusetts, thus making generalizability of the study to other African immigrant couples limited as the findings may not be generalizable to African immigrants in a different demographic area.



Another limitation was the sample of participants included in the study. The sample of participants included couples from parts of Africa but did not come from all countries in Africa (see Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). A future study involving participants of all countries in Africa could yield an in-depth understanding.

Another limitation of the study related to the level of knowledge of the participants on the subject. Patton (2015) suggested that participants would provide rich information if they have a good understanding of the subject under study. Open-ended question format posed reasonable challenges for two participants. Thus, I had to repeat the questions and provide more exploratory information and data from the literature to obtain commensurate responses.

An additional limitation was that the findings of the study were not further tested or strengthened by quantitative analysis (see Abbuhl, 2018). A future quantitative research using this study as the basis could provide supplementary understanding.

Lastly, the unstructured nature of case-study approach presented a risk and possibility of researcher bias (see Adu, 2019). Nevertheless, during the interview, coding, analysis and interpretations of the data, I made sure to identify, minimize, manage, or eliminate any potential researcher bias that could alter participants experience (see Peterson, 2019).

### **Recommendations**

A future study is needed to analyze how African husbands could learn to cope with female empowerment and autonomy. In this study, I identified the challenge that

wife empowerment and autonomy posed for husbands due their inability to embrace gender role modification in the new country. This study provided a foundation for future study. Also, it may be advantageous for studies to be done on providing family orientation on acculturation paths to enhance couple transitional strategies.

The delimitation of the geographical setting of this study requires more qualitative studies in other parts of the Western society to shed light on how African immigrant couples acculturate into the host social settings. Such a study would strengthen generalizability. This study included a sample of five couples in the Central Massachusetts, and a future exploration would be vital to gain further understanding of African immigrant couple relationship challenges from other settings.

Finally, it would be interesting for future research to explore whether collectivistic cultural traditions where the entire family needs are emphasized over the individual needs (Hofstede, 1980; Matsumoto, 2001) enhance couple relationships in individualistic societies where individual priorities are prioritized over the family needs (McCrae, 2002). In this study, it was evident that extended family needs from both husbands' and wives' families created reasonable conflicts among couples who were in the study. Understanding of the impact of extended family demands on couple relationships would provide valuable perspective.

### **Implications for Social Change**

In this study, I identified and expounded on the postimmigration challenges that African immigrant couples face as they acculturate into the new host country of the United States. The implications for progressive social change go beyond mere

understanding of the challenges of the participants to the larger African immigrant population. All the participants admitted that the circumstances altered their couple situations, and they further experienced varied kinds of change as they acculturated into the U.S. society. The females gained autonomy and negotiating power through economic capacity while men felt they were losing power and control. Subsequently, the findings could provide resources for policy makers as well as social services providers to develop tools to improve couple relationship skills for the African immigrant population (see Umubyeyi & Mtapuri, 2019). The findings yielded an understanding that acculturation challenges societal norms of the new host country and economic power that can alter traditional cultural roles, expectations, and couple relations. The themes that emerged from the study provide a foundation for service providers to understand the challenges facing African immigrant couples. Additionally, the study could serve as a resource in designing programs tailored to meeting the challenges of the growing African immigrant population (see Umubyeyi & Mtapuri, 2019). The findings of this study might be used by experts, educators, and community leaders to improve acculturation strategies for the African immigrant population by integrating the findings into practical approaches and policies.

### **Conclusion**

The case study inquiry was designed to explore the postimmigration acculturation challenges that African immigrant couples face as they relate to each other. The themes from this study signified instances of challenges the participants faced as they acculturated into the new social norms in the host country. I found that receiving education,

preparation, and awareness could lessen or eliminate some of the challenges that impede smooth acculturation. Exploring these alternatives could reinforce positive social change. The dearth of resources tailored to the challenges facing African immigrant couples in their couple relationships motivates the need for further study and development of resources to ease postimmigration transitional challenges for couples. The findings of the study, therefore, show the varied challenges facing African immigrant couples and further provide resource for development of education material to aide new immigrant couples in their acculturation challenges.

Oliphant and Bennett (2019) maintained that the value of qualitative research is determined by how the study impacts the participants of the study. This is achieved by looking at the perspective of the insider or the emic view (Oliphant & Bennett 2019). The findings of this study could offer understanding to African immigrant couples as they journey through postimmigration acculturation challenges.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

## Interview Protocol

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Number: 1

1. Were you married in our home country before immigration to the United States?

2. How many years have you been and lived in the United States?



7. How do you and your partner resolve arguments?