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PRE- AND POST-MIGRATION ATTITUDES AMONG GHANAIAN INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES:
A STUDY OF ACCULTURATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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Abstract

PRE- AND POST-MIGRATION ATTITUDES AMONG GHANAIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES: A STUDY OF ACCULTURATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Nicole L. Fischer, Ph.D.

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This qualitative study investigated attitudes among international students prior to their departure and following their arrival in the United States through a phenomenological research approach. Eight participants completed individual interviews in Accra, Ghana, and four participants completed follow-up email correspondence. The purpose of the study was to explain pre-migration expectations, post-migration experiences, and compare similarities and differences between perceptions and actual encounters. The researcher investigated five principle components of pre-migration: satisfaction with life prior to departure from the country of origin, impressions and expectations of the host country and predominate

influences, awareness of discrimination in the host country, and culture-specific coping strategies used to overcome challenges related to acculturation. The researcher also investigated similar components of post-migration.

The results of this study are consistent with those of prior acculturation research. Regarding pre-migration, participants acknowledged the following: the importance of preparation prior to departure, the likelihood of an adjustment period upon arrival, specific goals to strive for during the time abroad, and the emotional impact of discrimination and racism. Regarding post-migration, participants acknowledged the following: stress related to unfamiliar experiences with discrimination, stress related to overwhelming academic responsibilities, and the importance of culture-specific coping strategies, (e.g. family support and religiosity). The results of this study also identified new information regarding pre- and post-migration. Participants discussed a yearning to meet new people and gain exposure to foreign perspectives and viewpoints; however, they also expressed a strong desire to return home afterward and impart knowledge to others. Upon their arrival, participants recalled unanticipated causes of stress including transportation, time management, and communication with foreign counterparts.

This study draws attention to the steadily increasing population of international students from Ghana living in the United States. The findings indicate that mental health professionals and academic advisors must consider the geographic and cultural context from which international students arrive and gather insight to enhance social, emotional, and academic resources prior to departure and immediately following arrival. This study also makes the case that current resources do not adequately account for the array of cultural differences between the United States and West African countries.

Pre- and post-migration attitudes among Ghanaian international students living in the United States: A study of acculturation and psychological well-being

In spite of the marked presence of immigrants and international students from West African countries living in the United States, this cultural group is vastly underrepresented in the empirical literature related to pre-migration attitudes and expectations pertaining to those who come to live in this country. There are several reasons why individuals or families choose to migrate to the United States from their country of origin including political unrest, insufficient resources, or in pursuit of a higher quality of life. Between 1990 and 2000 alone, the total immigrant population in the United States had increased by 57% (United States Census Bureau 2000, 2004). Immigrants from West African countries, in particular, have been steadily relocating to the United States for more than 20 years. Over 31,000 immigrants from West African countries are currently living in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2005). This is a noteworthy population, which further validates the need to investigate their experiences.

According to the United States Census Bureau, by 2050 approximately 63% of the national population will have been born outside of the country (Camarota, 2009). This forecast will certainly change the social dynamics of the country for the next 40 years, and is of particular importance among public health and mental health professionals. These are the experts who will implement policy changes, (or prevent unnecessary changes); facilitate and organize local community resources and prevention campaigns; and provide first-hand interventions and support for the social and emotional challenges known to occur during the immediate and long-term adjustment period known as acculturation. Due to the significance and complexity of these roles, it is important that researchers and clinicians maintain a

sufficient level of understanding about the context and environment from which immigrants arrive and are sensitive to the unique characteristics that exist among different regions of the world. Adequate awareness and consideration will facilitate a healthier transition, more effective communication, and mutual trust among professionals and the individuals and communities they serve (Tran, Lee, & Burgess, 2010).

People from all over the world live in the United States and their decision to migrate is often based on the idea that life will be better in the United States. Consequently, they bring with them both realistic and unrealistic attitudes, expectations and perceptions of what their life will become upon arrival. Prospective immigrants may be positively influenced by the media, first-hand encounters, or experiences gathered from others. Individuals who have already come to live in the United States may convey messages to family and friends back home that life is better here. They may even create the illusion that they have become more successful than they really are, in terms of career fulfillment, financial stability and social integration (Negy, Schwartz, & Reig-Ferrer, 2009). As a result, those who have not yet arrived in the United States expect that their lives will be as satisfying as others who came before them. The media also has a tendency to portray both unrealistic and predominately positive features of American lifestyle to the international public (Bhattacharya & Schoppelrey, 2004).

In addition to the stories heard from others and the positive media publicity, immigrants often create their own idealized impression of the United States prior to their arrival. This country has a global reputation for being a place for improved opportunities, relative economic and political stability, and a self-governing society that encourages social freedoms and independent opinions that are often stifled in other countries (Hirschman,

2005). People who live in impoverished or socially distraught societies, and are dissatisfied with their current quality of life, are especially intrigued by the potential opportunities available here. However, it seems that immigrants place more emphasis on idealized expectations rather than realistic outcomes. They fail to acknowledge the potential setbacks of relocating to a new society including unfulfilled expectations, or exceeded expectations. In either case, individuals must know how to cope with challenging or unforeseen outcomes.

Contemporary authors (Padilla & Perez, 2003) are consistent in acknowledging the fact that individuals can choose how much or how little they are willing to adapt to a new environment. These decisions facilitate the process – and determine the success – of acculturation. Acculturation has been defined as the process of learning how to interact and navigate an unfamiliar environment, in a manner that is consistent with the local social norms and culture (Berry, 1980). It describes the changes that individuals undergo when they come into contact with a different culture and learn to cope and settle into their new environment (Berry et. al., 1987; Williams & Berry, 1991). Padilla (1980; Padilla et. al., 1987) defines acculturation as the series of changes that occur within an individual with regards to cultural awareness and ethnic loyalty. Cultural awareness describes implicit knowledge of the native culture as well as the new culture in which the individual lives. Ethnic loyalty describes affinity toward a particular ethnicity or group – either the native culture or the new culture.

The process of acculturation will inevitably result in modifications in all aspects of an individual's life including physical, cognitive, and affective. Successful acculturation is contingent upon available resources both prior to departure and immediately upon arrival in the new culture. In addition, the needs of individuals will vary according to their country of origin, age, language skills, and social circumstances, (e.g. relocating alone or with other

family members). The acculturation process can be an extremely stressful period of adjustment that often places individuals, regardless of their country of origin, at increased risk for physical and mental health consequences (Berry et. al., 1987; Berry & Kim, 1987; Williams & Berry, 1991; Hovey, 2000). Although stress can be avoided, its impact is moderated by the disposition of the individual as well as applied, culture-specific coping strategies. Common stressors include communication barriers, interrupted social networks, limited financial resources, poor health care, minimal social resources, and unfamiliar experiences with discrimination (Bigby, 2003). In addition, a heightened awareness of differences and a projected minority status may be difficult for those who arrive unable to speak English, or who look distinctly different than others around them (e.g. immigrants with darker skin tones).

The stress that is experienced as a direct consequence of the process of acculturation, including the pre-migration period, is termed acculturative stress (Berry & Kim, 1988; Berry et. al., 1992; Sam & Berry, 1995; Berry, 1998). Symptoms can include increased anxiety, depressive symptoms, (i.e. loss of energy or lack of interest in previously enjoyed activities), identity confusion, feelings of isolation or alienation, hopelessness, and heightened psychosomatic symptoms, (i.e. headaches, stomach aches, etc.) (Berry & Annis, 1974; Berry et. al., 1987; Smart & Smart, 1995). In addition to the stress caused by the period of adjustment, racial and ethnic minority immigrant groups must worry about overt discrimination in social situations such as obtaining housing, applying for jobs, being harassed by police, receiving poor customer service, etc. (Tran, Lee, & Burgess, 2010). Most often, acculturative stress will simultaneously increase over time, while physical and emotional well-being will decrease (Berry & Kim, 1988).

The purpose of the current study was to explain pre-migration expectations, post-migration experiences, and compare similarities and differences between perceptions and actual encounters. The researcher took into consideration the significant impact that acculturative stress has on the acculturation process, and evaluated the awareness and preparation of international students from Ghana prior to their arrival in the United States. Likewise, the researcher evaluated how effectively students dealt with stress following their first six months living in the country. Previous literature has shown that insufficient preparation or lack of awareness about the acculturation process can result in a difficult adjustment period. Similarly, discrepancies between expectations and realities can exacerbate distress. In addition, individuals who are perceived as both ethnic and racial minorities will encounter further challenges, especially if they have never lived or traveled outside their country of origin. This is often the case among international students from West African countries.

The researcher investigated five principle components of pre-migration: satisfaction with life prior to departure from the country of origin, impressions and expectations of the host country and predominate influences, awareness of discrimination in the host country, and culture-specific coping strategies used to overcome challenges related to acculturation. This portion of the study was completed through individual, semi-structured interviews in Accra, Ghana. The researcher also investigated similar components of post-migration. The follow-up portion of the study was completed through email correspondence between each participant and the researcher. The researcher discusses a framework for how and why the aforementioned components of pre-migration have an impact on the psychological well-being of international students from this particular region of the world and how they impact

actual experiences. The researcher also makes the case that current resources for students are insufficient, and do not adequately account for the array of cultural differences between the United States and West African countries.

Literature Review

A review of the literature confirms that the amount of information related to pre- and post-migration among West African immigrants and students who live in the United States is very limited, especially in comparison to Asian and Latino international populations. The literature does; however, acknowledge the growing numbers among these groups and the necessity to investigate their experiences. The literature is also extensive in its explanation of acculturation and the impact that this process has on cultural adjustment and stress. In addition, expectations and beliefs about the United States significantly impact the ways in which individuals prepare for this emotional transition. The present review of the literature draws attention to the cross-cultural disparities between West African countries and the United States and demonstrates the comprehensive differences in worldview, understanding of mental health, treatment-seeking behavior, and coping strategies. Particular attention is given to adjustment issues specifically related to international students.

Africans are one of the fastest growing immigrant populations currently living in the United States. The present rate of arrival is more than quadruple the number of those who arrived in the 1960s and 1970s and several different religions, cultures, and ethnicities are represented (Vaughn & Holloway, 2010). Likewise, five percent of all international students in the United States are from Africa. Students from West African countries are among the most populated, including Ghana, Nigeria and Cameroon (Institute of International Education, 2010). Despite the marked presence, frequency of arrival, and complex heritage

of African immigrants and international students living in the United States, the needs and perspectives of these populations remain unknown or are poorly understood in acculturation research (Venters et. al., 2010). In addition, investigations specifically related to migration patterns, expectations prior to arrival, acculturation experiences, and stress upon arrival fail to address the African perspective.

The literature that does examine Africans living in the United States primarily investigates experiences among refugees, or those who fled their country of origin due to traumatic or unanticipated circumstances, (e.g. political exile, civil war, etc.). The experiences of immigrants and international students – people who willingly relocate to another country – are quite different from refugees, and the increasing number of West Africans who can relate to these circumstances further validates the need for this line of investigation. The current study investigated the attitudes and perceptions of international students specifically from Ghana, prior to their departure and following arrival in the United States.

Prior to 1960, the rate of migration between Africa and the United States was limited due to restrictive immigration laws, financial limitations, and heightened racial discord in this country (Ungar, 1995). During that time, Africans accounted for only 0.1% of immigrants living in the United States (Daniels & Graham, 2001). One of the most important immigration laws to pass was the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, (i.e. Hart-Cellar Act). The purpose of this law was to allow individuals with professional skills and knowledge that was of use in the United States, to enter the country under temporary work visas. This law also provided opportunities for students who had graduated from colleges and universities in the United States to remain in the country and pursue jobs related to their field

of study. After a certain number of years working, individuals could apply for permanent residency and eventually become naturalized citizens of the United States (Arthur, 2000). Because of the Hart-Cellar Act, the majority of African immigrants living in the United States between 1965 and 1980 were here either as students or professionals (Takougang, 1995). This act also established the Family Reunion Clause, which permitted family members of individuals who had applied and received either permanent residency or naturalized citizenship to join them under similar immigration status.

Following the Hart-Cellar Act, the Refugee Act was passed in 1980. This law benefitted refugees already living in the United States, as well as those seeking asylum here. Prior to 1980, the United States government identified refugees according to their country of origin, and only recognized people who came from countries classified as communist nations. The new law acknowledged citizens from any nation threatened by political persecution or other social unrest. Many citizens from African nations who were experiencing political challenges at the time were later allowed to resettle here as refugees (Venters & Gany, 2009).

Additional immigration laws include the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986; the Diversity Visa Lottery, which began in 1990; and the Temporary Protected Status program, which also began in 1990. The Immigration Reform and Control Act legalized the status of 31,000 Africans living in the United States at that time. The Diversity Visa Lottery continues to authorize citizens from under-represented countries to apply for visas. The Temporary Protected Status program continues to provide temporary refugee status for citizens of nations threatened by environmental disaster, armed conflict, or other

extraordinary or temporary conditions (Venters & Gany, 2009). West African countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone have recently benefitted from these sanctions.

As a result of the revised immigration laws, a number of African professionals and scholars have successfully established new lives and careers for themselves and their families here in the United States (Sowell, 1978; Dodoo, 1997; Takougang, 2005). This trend is in contrast to earlier generations of immigrants who came here with the intent to receive higher education and skills, and later returned home. Authors describe this more recent migration pattern as the “brain drain.” It characterizes the departure of skilled and educated citizens who have the capacity to improve the social circumstances in their country of origin, but instead remain in the United States to pursue advanced opportunities and upward mobility (Takougang, 2005).

Among the immigrants who have migrated to the United States from Africa, a considerable segment of them represent countries in the western region known as West Africa. This region is comprised of sixteen nations including Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Ivory Coast, and Cameroon. West Africa, as well as other parts of Africa, is a racially homogenous region. However, the sixteen countries represent an array of ethnicities, religions, customs, and traditions. In spite of the many within-group differences, the countries are often examined together due to their geographic proximity to one another. In addition, many of these countries have encountered similar social hardships within the same time period including economic instability, political unrest, and insufficient healthcare (Takougang, 2005).

All of the countries in West Africa were colonized by European nations, primarily France and Britain, during the early sixteenth century. European influences are markedly

reflected in local cultures, (e.g. language, food, and educational systems). Ghana was the first West African nation to declare its independence in 1957. Other countries followed and have encountered both triumphs and pitfalls as a result of their independence. Historically, this region is known for the transatlantic slave trade. Several of the countries served as points of departure for the men, women, and children who were captured and brought to the United States, Caribbean, South America, and Europe as slaves during the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries.

In addition to the increasing number of immigrants from Africa living in the United States, the number of international students who come to study continues to rise. Currently, more than 30,000 students from Africa are studying in this country (Institute of International Education, 2010). The opportunity to study in the United States is understandably exciting; however, it presents many challenges for students who arrive from another cultural background. International students must contend with unfamiliar academic systems and styles of teaching, unknown social behaviors and norms, financial worries, how to establish a new identity in an unfamiliar culture, and general adjustment problems common among all students, (e.g. homesickness, loneliness, etc.) (Komiya & Eells, 2001; Zhou et. al., 2008). Although international students are often accessible as research participants in cross-cultural studies, the amount of research completed about students from West African countries is very little. It is important to understand the cultural background of these students in particular, so that their unique encounters are acknowledged and recorded. Despite the many similarities among international students' experiences away from home, cultural background and social foundations also have a lasting impact on individual values, beliefs, and perceptions.

Cultural Worldview

Individualist and Collectivist distinctions. A fundamental difference between the United States and West African countries is the distinction in social values: the United States is an individualist culture and West African countries are collectivist cultures. An individualist culture is the type in which each person's identity is unique and independent of each another. Citizens are more often described separately and not in relation to others or among a particular group (Kim, et. al., 1994; Triandis, 1995). In contrast, a collectivist culture is the type in which each person's identity is contingent upon the character of the surrounding community, group, or family (Triandis, 1995; Triandis et. al., 1995). A collectivist culture is demonstrated by group affiliations including shared norms, social behaviors, and obligations; personal feelings or desires are considered secondary to family priorities or group goals (Triandis, 1994; Kitayama & Markus, 1995). While collectivist cultures value inter-dependence and social obligation for the well-being of the group, they de-value individual problems or concerns that could potentially burden the wellness of the group or jeopardize the collective harmony (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Suh et. al., 1998; Constantine et. al., 2004).

The distinction between individualist and collectivist cultures illustrates a major social challenge that immigrants and international students from West African countries encounter upon arrival in the United States. In an international meta-analysis of studies that compared individualist and collectivist traits among college student samples, American students were consistently lower in collectivist traits compared to other international student samples. Further, the greatest disparity existed between American and African populations (Oyserman et. al, 2002). Presumably, international students from traditional, collectivist cultures in which social relationships and interpersonal connections are vital to emotional

well-being, are at a disadvantage in the United States where autonomy, independence, and self-reliance are valued instead (Constantine et. al., 2004).

Viewpoints of mental health. Mental health treatment is also very different among West African countries and the United States. Among West African countries, stress is treated by either a traditional healer or a psychiatrist in a hospital or medical setting (Danquah, 1982). Traditional healers describe the cause of stress as acts of superstition, witchcraft, or wrongdoing by an enemy (Essandoh, 1998). Further, prescribed treatments often include avoidance strategies to prevent contact with bad omens or evil-doers, therapeutic rituals and sacrifices, and hypnosis (Essandoh, 1998). Alternatively, psychiatrists account for stress with medical jargon grounded in Freudian psychodynamic theory (Danquah, 1982; Essandoh, 1995). Both of these approaches conflict with western treatments of mental health including individual and group therapy.

The contrast in mental health treatment between the United States and West African countries raises awareness about how immigrants and international students have learned to recognize their own experience with stress and their impression of how it will be treated. The dissimilarity in cultural perspectives might be especially discomforting upon arrival in an unfamiliar place. Vontress (1991) found that most African students will retain their traditional beliefs while studying in the United States; this will certainly delay the acculturation process.

Help-seeking behavior. Self-concealment is a term used to describe a predisposed apprehension to share personally distressing information with another person, and especially when not surrounded by typical support systems, (i.e. family, friends, etc.) (Larson & Chastain, 1990). It makes sense that this type of help-seeking behavior is often displayed by

immigrants and international students who live far from their country of origin, particularly those from collectivist cultures.

Asian-American students who come from more collective cultures have shown that they are less willing to seek mental health treatment and have endorsed self-concealment behavior in numerous studies (Ying & Miller, 1992; Yamashiro & Matsuoka, 1997; Kim & Omizo, 2003; Zhang & Dixon, 2003). Likewise, one study found that African American students who maintain more Africentric cultural values, (e.g. shared norms, unity, harmony, and spirituality) are less likely to seek mental health support for any type of distress, compared to African American college students who maintain fewer Africentric cultural values (Wallace & Constantine, 2005). African immigrants will also more often seek guidance from religious leaders to deal with hardships, rather than a trained counselor or therapist (Kamya, 1997).

From a western perspective, self-concealment is considered a harmful help-seeking behavior that compromises positive mental health and can lead to ongoing depression, poor self-esteem, and lower levels of perceived social support (Larson & Chastain, 1990; Ichiyama et. al., 1993; Kelly & Achter, 1995; Cramer & Barry, 1999). However, from an Africentric perspective, self-concealment is considered a purposeful help-seeking behavior that preserves the well-being of the collective group and prevents the possibility of burdening others (Wallace & Constantine, 2005). In order to ease misconceptions about either cultural perspective, therapists in the United States should apply techniques that appear more familiar and less invasive to members of collectivist cultures including psychoeducation, motivational interviewing, and cognitive behavioral approaches (Komiya & Eells, 2001; Constantine et. al., 2005). Ongoing outreach is also necessary to rectify erroneous beliefs. Overall,

knowledge of contextual issues and cultural competence are most important, and lead to a discussion about the social and emotional challenges that individuals encounter during cross-cultural transitions. This is also referred to as acculturation.

Acculturation

Early approaches to acculturation regarded it as an isolated state, rather than an ongoing process (Cuéllar, Harris, & Jasso, 1980). However, according to contemporary viewpoints, acculturation is defined as the process of learning how to interact and navigate an unfamiliar environment, in a manner that is consistent with the local social norms and culture (Berry, 1980). It describes the changes that individuals undergo when they come into contact with a different culture and learn to cope in their new environment (Berry et. al., 1987; Williams & Berry, 1991). Learning how to adjust to new circumstances is a common occurrence; however, previous experiences and context can also impact the way that individuals respond (Berry, 1999). Disparities between cultures will impact the amount of stress or discomfort individuals encounter, and result in either positive or negative coping strategies. Acculturation is a particularly difficult experience when the differences between the native culture and the new culture are more significant than the similarities between them (Berry & Kim, 1988; Thomas, 1995).

Psychological and Sociocultural adjustment. Acculturation includes psychological, or affective adjustment, as well a sociocultural, or behavioral adjustment (Zhou et. al., 2008). Psychological adjustment refers to the emotional challenges that individuals encounter during the acculturation process (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward, 1996). Immigrants who have a positive outlook on the acculturation process are less likely to experience severe stress or anxiety, compared to those who have a negative or pessimistic outlook on the process

(Williams & Berry, 1991). Limited prior exposure to other cultures will further delay the ability to be open to change; however, a substantial amount of distress and aggravation is alleviated when host country nationals are welcoming and accommodating toward others.

Sociocultural adjustment refers to the behavioral challenges that individuals encounter during the acculturation process (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward, 1996). It describes the ability to engage, interact, and communicate with a new group of people within an unfamiliar social context. Behavioral changes, rather than emotional responses, are more adaptable during the acculturation process. This is because it is less difficult to modify mannerisms or actions according to a new situation, rather than to modify beliefs or attitudes. Any changes to attitudes could be seen as a profound threat to identity, because they have been shaped over time according to the culture and origin of the individual (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward, 1996; Van de Vijer & Phalet, 2004).

Acculturative Stress

Acculturative stress describes the stress that is a direct consequence of the acculturation process, including pre-migration and the period of time spent in preparation for departure (Berry & Kim, 1988; Berry et. al., 1992; Sam & Berry, 1995; Berry, 1998). Symptoms can include increased anxiety, depressive symptoms, (e.g. loss of energy or lack of interest in previously enjoyed activities), identity confusion, feelings of isolation or alienation, hopelessness, and heightened psychosomatic symptoms, (e.g. headaches, stomach aches, etc.) (Berry & Annis, 1974; Berry et. al., 1987; Smart & Smart, 1995). Most often, when acculturative stress increases, physical and emotional well-being will decrease (Berry & Kim, 1988). Among West African cultures, people more often endorse somatic ailments, (e.g. headaches, body aches, insomnia, etc.) in response to stress. Among western societies,

such as the United States, people more often express emotional reactions, (e.g. sadness, upset, fear, etc.) in response to stress (Dzokoto & Okazaki, 2006).

Prolonged stress can lead to serious health costs such as physical illness, chronic disease, or negative social behaviors, (e.g. smoking, alcohol or drug abuse, eating disorders, etc.). The occurrence of substance abuse and serious mental illness tends to increase with the amount of time spent living in a foreign country (Gee et. al., 2007). One study found that African immigrants who arrived in the United States as occasional smokers steadily increased their use of cigarettes over time. Eventually, they began to smoke as often – and as much – as their African American counterparts (Tran et. al., 2010).

Perceived discrimination. Acculturation is particularly challenging for members of racial and ethnic minority groups. For example, Black immigrants from around the world are more susceptible to prejudice, discrimination and increased stress in the United States, compared to non-racial or non-ethnic minority immigrants (Clark et. al., 1999). The adjustment process for African immigrants has even been termed a, “double burden” because they are recognized as both racial and ethnic minority group members (Dodoo, 1997). Both actual and perceived discrimination can lead to social isolation and weakened social status (Link & Phelan, 2006). Perceived discrimination is especially common among African immigrants in the United States because the media tends to portray negative stereotypes and characterize them as destitute and impoverished (Hawk, 1992; Mpanya, 1995).

While some studies emphasize the additional stress that discrimination causes for African immigrants in the United States, other studies address the different ways that African Americans and African immigrants are impacted by discrimination. Some authors suggest that African Americans are more attuned and sensitive to incidents of discrimination, while

African immigrants are preoccupied and less bothered. Rogler et. al. (1991) proposed that racial discrimination is a greater concern among African Americans rather than African immigrants in the United States because racial identity is more salient to the former, rather than the latter. The authors go on to say that whoever is among the majority race in a particular location is less socialized to link self-esteem with racial identity. Therefore, African immigrants – similar to White Americans – do not relate self-esteem to racial identity because both populations are among the racial majority in their respective country of origin. Essentially, it is a matter of social privilege.

In another study, Phinney and Onwughalu (1996) found that immigrants who come to the United States from poorer or less-advantaged countries are more captivated by the available resources and less troubled by issues such as overt discrimination. The authors go on to say that the common perspective among less-advantaged immigrants is that if they work hard and strive to do well in academic and professional pursuits, then they will succeed and achieve upward mobility. In contrast, members of racial and ethnic minority groups experience their environment as a place where they are repeatedly looked down upon, discriminated against, denied privileges, and treated poorly. The difference in perspectives is based on life experience, worldview, and social context.

Unique stressors for students. In addition to perceived discrimination, there are other exclusive factors that contribute to the occurrence of acculturative stress among international students living in the United States. One study found that Black African students express more difficulty adapting to their new environment than non-Black African students, and that their first experiences with racial discrimination are especially disconcerting (Adelegan & Parks, 1985; Bagley & Young, 1988). Further research is needed

to examine the impact of perceived discrimination among international students from West African countries in particular, and especially how it might impede academic success (Zhou et. al., 2008).

Constantine et. al. (2004) compared acculturation among international students from Asian, African and Hispanic populations and found that African students report lower social self efficacy, (i.e. the ability to initiate social contact with others) and higher levels of acculturative stress and depression compared to other students. The authors proposed several explanations for the discrepancy including adjustment to a cooler climate, challenges in communication with American counterparts, homesickness, depression, irritability, fatigue, and discomfort with American culture. Essandoh (1995) identified lack of camaraderie as another significant stressor among international students from West African countries. Due to the relatively small number of African students who come to study in the United States, opportunities to encounter individuals who speak the same or similar native languages are limited. This creates obstacles for social interactions outside an academic setting.

Culture-specific protective factors

Immigrants and international students must navigate the process of acculturation through the use of effective coping strategies. Spiritual well-being and social support are two culture-specific protective factors known to alleviate stress among West African communities. With an understanding of both factors, it becomes easier to conceptualize the context from which West African immigrants and international students arrive in the United States.

Spiritual well-being. Although empirical studies related to people from West African countries are limited, many researchers have evaluated the utility of spiritual well-being

among African American samples and found it to be an effective coping mechanism for stress. One study even attributed the importance of spiritual well-being among African Americans to their West African ancestry (Utsey et. al., 2005). Spirituality is characterized by three components: a sense of relatedness or connectedness to others, the development of well-being as a safeguard, and belief in a relationship with a power higher than the self (Hawks et. al., 1995). Spirituality has also been described as a factor of well-being similar to positive self-esteem, assertiveness and purposefulness (Koenig et. al., 1997). Overall, studies consistently support the notion that spiritual beliefs, along with religious practices, can lead to improved physical and mental health, as well as stable and consistent social support (Fitchett, Laurel & Sivan, 1997; Koenig, 2001; Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005).

Social support. Several studies have highlighted the benefits of social support among different ethnic groups and immigrant populations, particularly when trying to prevent acculturative stress (Hovey & King, 1996; Hovey, 1999; Hovey & Magana, 2000). Studies have consistently shown that individuals who receive less social support are more vulnerable to stress (Chataway & Berry, 1989). Due to collectivist values, social support is especially important to people from West African countries, and whenever they encounter difficulty they tend to seek advice from multiple perspectives (Nwadiora, 1996). Extended families include biological relatives as well as close friends and counterparts throughout the community; therefore, people are always nearby and readily available to provide assistance. Immigrants and international students who arrive from this type of environment must consider how they will fill the void of their extensive support network.

International students and social networks

According to Bochner's functional model of friendship networks (Bochner, McLeod & Lin, 1977; Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001), international students become members of three distinct social networks upon arrival in a new country: 1) long-distance relationships with friends in their country of origin and fellow nationals in the host country to whom they relate because of similar cultures, 2) host country nationals such as classmates, neighbors, professors, etc. from whom they receive local skills and input, and 3) fellow international students not from their country of origin but with whom they share similar encounters with relocating and coping in an unfamiliar environment. Additional research which supports the idea that international students should befriend host country nationals explains that they will experience fewer academic problems and social difficulties, will be better able to adapt to their surroundings, will encounter less stress, and will be more successful in their overall adjustment (Pruitt, 1978; Searle & Ward, 1990; Redmond & Bunyi, 1993; Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Zimmerman, 1995).

Pre-Migration Expectations

Prior to departure from their country of origin, immigrants and international students must become informed and knowledgeable about their host culture (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984), their attitudes toward host country nationals, known attitudes toward foreigners among host country nationals (Gudykunst, 1983a), and the degree of cultural similarity between the country of origin and the host country (Gudykunst, 1983b). Difficulties can either arise when the individual is aware of the cultural differences in advance, or when the individual is unaware and falsely assumes that the new society operates like their home country. Regardless, it is important to reflect and understand cross-cultural perspectives

beforehand, in order to overcome challenges that occur throughout the acculturation process (Zhou et. al., 2008).

In general, little is known with regards to how pre-migration factors affect mental health concerns and well-being (Ryan et. al., 2006). The impact of pre-migration experiences on the outcome of the acculturation process has been examined extensively among refugee populations who relocate to the United States; however, there is limited research that examines the impact of pre-migration experiences on the outcome of immigrants or international students (Silove et. al., 1997; Fenta, Hyman & Noh, 2004; Birman & Tran, 2008). To the author's knowledge, there is no research that investigates pre-migration experiences and attitudes among immigrants or international students from West African countries, prior to their arrival in the United States.

Unlike refugees, immigrants and international students have chosen to migrate to an unfamiliar country. More often than not, they arrive with a positive outlook and in hopeful anticipation that their life will be more satisfying than it was in their country of origin. Literature has shown that immigrants often enter the United States with an idealized view of the country and the opportunities that might be available to them (Sung, 1985; Portes & Rumbaut, 1990). This seems to be the case, regardless of the country from which they arrive or the culture they leave behind.

Importance of preparation. Few studies have investigated the impact of positive expectations prior to arrival in the United States, and the results of the studies are mixed. Several researchers suggest that positive and hopeful expectations serve as a coping mechanism and protective factor against depressive symptoms (McKelvey, Mao & Webb, 1993; McKelvey & Webb, 1996; Ryan et. al., 2006). However, another researcher found that

hopeful or unrealistic expectations can lead to increased disappointment and negative mental health outcomes (Williams & Berry, 1991). Ongoing investigations are necessary to examine how pre-migration attitudes are conceived, how much emphasis an individual should place on them, and how to cope with discrepancies and disappointment.

The studies in favor of a positive outlook suggest that hopeful expectations can result in beneficial outcomes and prevent the occurrence of anxious or nervous feelings. High expectations and optimism can also result in better adjustment and fewer depressive symptoms during the post-migration period (McKelvey, Mao & Webb, 1993; McKelvey & Webb, 1996). Likewise, immigrants who report high levels of optimism and a strong sense of control also report fewer incidents of depressive symptoms (Ryan et. al., 2006).

Another study found that a positive outlook and exceptionally hopeful expectations can result in disappointment or more serious mental health setbacks during the post-migration period, including depression and anxiety. This is especially true when expectations are unfulfilled or when individuals are inadequately prepared to cope with the social and emotional challenges of migration and acculturation (Williams & Berry, 1991). Nebedum-ezeh (1997) found that African international students experience more adjustment difficulties when they do not adequately prepare prior to departure, and do not receive adequate support or assistance upon arrival in the host country.

Awareness of differences between country of origin and host country. Other studies have investigated the impact of discrepancy between pre-migration expectations and post-migration realities, along with the incidence of distress, anxiety, and depression. Sellers and Neighbors (2008) found that the discrepancy between pre-migration expectations and post-migration realities can be especially detrimental to well-being and distress. The same is

true for goal-striving stress among poor, Black Americans who are less satisfied with their lives than higher-income Black Americans. Chou et. al. (2010) also investigated whether stress is positively or negatively influenced by pre-migration and post-migration discrepancies. The results of the study suggest that immigrants who experience unanticipated levels of stress caused by discrimination are more likely to result in prolonged symptoms of depression. In contrast, immigrants who anticipated that they would encounter discrimination, and prepared for how to cope prior to their arrival experienced less distress and were able to apply effective coping mechanisms. The outcome of this study highlights the importance of sufficient mental and emotional preparation prior to departure, as well as the importance of maintaining a realistic perspective about the potential challenges one might encounter while living in an unfamiliar place.

With an understanding of the importance of preparation prior to departure, other studies investigated the outcome of spontaneous migrations and inadequate preparation prior to departure (Ryan et. al., 2006; Leavey et. al., 2007; Chou, 2009). The authors in all three studies discussed the importance of planning sessions prior to departure to assist with social and emotional preparation, along with the importance of establishing social support networks for new immigrants immediately following their arrival. The common factor is a need to prepare for the social and emotional challenges that immigrants will encounter in an unfamiliar setting in order to reduce the incidence of acculturative stress or other mental health consequences.

Chou (2009) examined the relationship between inadequate planning prior to departure and the incidence of depression upon arrival, among immigrants who migrated from Mainland China to Hong Kong. Three important outcomes derived from this study: 1)

planning decrease the chance of depression during the immediate phase of acculturation, 2) social support is crucial upon arrival to alleviate depression, and 3) unrealistic or uninformed expectations increase chances for depression. Ryan et. al. (2006) conducted a similar investigation and found that among immigrants from Ireland who migrated to London, those who did not adequately prepare prior to their departure also experienced depression more often than others who did prepare.

Prior trauma. Pre-migration experiences, such as trauma, will exacerbate the likelihood of mental health concerns upon arrival in a new country (Beiser, 2006). However, regardless of the circumstances from which an immigrant or international student arrives, successful adaptation is strongly influenced by available social resources including informational, instrumental, and emotional support (Simich et. al., 2003). Informational support includes concrete facts and data about the host country. Instrumental support includes logistical and applied assistance with navigating the practical and daily aspects of life among a new environment. Emotional support includes interpersonal engagement and empathy toward the individual and their challenging circumstances.

One study examined differences in pre-migration distress among immigrants from high-income regions of the world (e.g. Western Europe, North America, or Australia) and low- to middle-income regions (e.g. Eastern Europe, Africa, Middle East, South America, South-East Asia and South Asia) (Thapa et. al., 2007). The results of the study suggest that immigrants from poorer countries encounter distressing events or circumstances prior to their arrival in a new country more often, compared to immigrants who arrive from wealthier countries. Therefore, the authors encourage the need for more resources for individuals who arrive from these countries, upon their arrival in host countries. The same could be said for

international students from West African countries – relatively poor and less developed societies.

Given the fact that there have been so few studies completed about the pre- and post-migration experiences of West African immigrants and international students living in the United States there is a substantial need to investigate this occurrence. As stated above, the population of West Africans living in the United States has continued to surge over the past several decades; however, the research remains inadequate. Focused inquiry is critical to understanding how this population experiences the acculturation process, with particular attention given to the cultural discrepancies between West Africa and the United States. These primary factors include worldview, collectivist and individualist social values, viewpoints on mental health, and help-seeking behavior.

There is also an understanding that the stress which occurs as a direct result of the acculturation process is handled differently, according to the cultural background, prior experiences, and expectations that individuals bring with them. The research is mixed on whether or not positive expectations are helpful; however, researchers have consistently noted the importance of preparation prior to departure and immediately following arrival in the host country. Africans are especially impacted by perceived discrimination in the United States because they are recognized as both racial and ethnic minority group members. They often encounter harsh discrimination for the first time in their lives, and this has the potential to create an additional level of distress. In addition, familiar support systems or other coping strategies might not be available in the same capacity, due to the change in environment. With all of this in mind, the chance to investigate the experiences of West African international students living in the United States becomes an irrefutable necessity.

Statement of the Problem and Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to explain pre-migration expectations, post-migration experiences, and to compare similarities and differences between perceptions and actual encounters. The researcher investigated five principle components of pre-migration: satisfaction with life prior to departure from the country of origin, impressions and expectations of the host country and predominate influences, awareness of discrimination in the host country, and culture-specific coping strategies used to overcome challenges related to acculturation. The researcher also investigated similar components of post-migration. This qualitative study investigated attitudes among international students specifically from Ghana prior to their departure – through individual interviews conducted in Ghana, and six months following their arrival in the United States – through email correspondence.

International students are a unique cross-cultural population because, despite their considerable vulnerability, they have chosen to expose themselves to an unknown culture, academic environment, and interpersonal experience. The acculturation process facilitates individuals' well-being during this period of adjustment, including the time spent preparing for departure in the country of origin. Acculturative stress is a noteworthy element of the acculturation process as well, which describes the inevitable stress that individuals will encounter upon arrival in the host country. One way of dealing with this stress is by using coping strategies grounded in the culture, heritage, and values of the individual. In addition to stress that is a direct result of the acculturation process, international students are confronted with stressors associated with academic responsibilities and the typical angst of being away from home for an extended period of time.

The way in which stress is traditionally described or displayed among West African culture is significantly different than American culture. People living among West African countries tend not to share personal problems with others, or rely solely on extended family members or religious leaders. In the United States, psychologists and other mental health professionals are sought after for emotional support and intervention. The difference in conceptualization and treatment of stress may cause international students to be especially apprehensive about seeking help in a foreign country.

Greater awareness and understanding about the differences which exist between the United States and West African countries will enhance treatment and interventions, facilitate communication, and nurture cross-cultural trust and engagement. In order to provide adequate services to international students from West African countries living in the United States, it is the responsibility of psychologists, educators, and other mental health professionals to acknowledge these differences and to intervene in culturally-appropriate ways.

The aim of this study was to investigate effectual ways to acknowledge the process of acculturation, the incidence of acculturative stress, relevant preparation ideas, and coping strategies among international students from Ghana living in the United States. The research question that facilitated this qualitative study, based on a phenomenological approach was: What is the experience of West African international students living in the United States, and how do pre-migration attitudes impact this experience? Issues that were of particular interest included the following:

- How does life satisfaction prior to departure from the country of origin influence perceptions of the United States?

- What are the predominate factors that influence individuals' perceptions of the United States prior to arrival? Are these impressions mostly positive, or negative?
- What are the predominate factors that influence individuals' expectations of the United States prior to arrival? Are these expectations sensible, or do they lack appropriate criticism?
- Are individuals well-informed about the incidence of discrimination in United States, (e.g. unfamiliar racism and negative treatment because of racial and ethnic minority membership)? Are they aware of culture-specific coping strategies to overcome discrimination?
- Upon arrival in the United States, are actual experiences consistent with pre-migration attitudes and expectations? How does the outcome positively or negatively impact the process of acculturation and the incidence of acculturative stress?

Method

To address the research question, a qualitative study was designed using a series of individual interviews as the primary mode of data collection, along with follow-up email correspondence. Qualitative methods are often used in exploratory studies when the research question or the population being investigated is relatively unfamiliar in the literature and a limited amount – if any – of previously collected data is available to support the hypothesis . The current study is unique given the fact that pre-migration attitudes were investigated prior to departure from the country of origin, instead of a retrospective account upon arrival in the host country. The current study investigated post-arrival attitudes upon arrival in the host

country as well, and compared pre- and post-migration outcomes among the participants. In addition, the current study examined a cross-cultural group that is not well researched among investigations related to acculturation, pre-, or post-migration. The presence of international students from West African countries living in the United States has recently become more common; therefore, their experience and perspective warrants investigation.

In the event that a research question or population is not well documented in previous investigations, comprehensive information is better obtained through qualitative methods, rather than quantitative methods – this creates an opportunity to collect thorough and precise data (Patton, 2002). Likewise, when pre-existing measures are insufficient or inappropriate to assess the research questions or a particular population, a phenomenological approach is more often used. The purpose of phenomenological research is to describe the underlying meaning of experiences and account for the consciousness of the individual, (i.e. the individual and their experiences are not separate) (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). In-depth interviews provide an opportunity for participants to provide authentic perspectives and responses to the research question, rather than be provoked by a series of statements found on a questionnaire or self-assessment (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Through this approach, it is particularly important that the researcher is aware of any personal biases or judgments to avoid inaccurate data analysis.

The Researcher

All of the data for the study – including individual interviews in Ghana and email correspondence in the United States – was collected by an American doctoral student in Counseling Psychology. The researcher is an African American female, born and raised in the suburban, northeast region of the United States. The researcher's preliminary

understanding about West African culture and viewpoints is based on her experience living in a rural village in the southern, Plateaux region of Togo – a small country located beside Ghana. For two years, she was employed as a secondary-school teacher and advocate of women’s education and health issues, but was not yet enrolled as a doctoral student. Also during that period, she spent time traveling to Ghana. The researcher is fluent in English and French; however, does not speak or understand any of the local languages or dialects spoken throughout West African countries.

The researcher does not deny the possibility that she endorses or exhibits inherent biases in favor of American culture and western viewpoints about stress and psychological well-being. To account for this, she was transparent with the participants about her cultural background. The researcher also discussed her previous experience living, working, and traveling in Togo and Ghana – this information was also used to establish rapport with the participants, and to create a common understanding between them and the researcher.

Recruitment

The researcher coordinated the recruitment process several months prior to her arrival in Ghana. Participants were recruited by an administrator in the Educational Advising Office at the United States Embassy in Accra, Ghana, via snowball sampling, (i.e. email communication and word-of-mouth). This mode of recruitment was used for several reasons. First, the administrator who was chosen to recruit participants is well-known and respected as a mentor among the international student community in Ghana and other West African countries. Second, because this is a cross-cultural study and the researcher does not live in Ghana, it was determined more appropriate to have a local colleague recruit participants. Third, due to the limited amount of time that the researcher had to spend in Ghana, it was

determined more efficient to recruit participants prior to her arrival, rather than to wait until she arrived in the country to try and recruit participants.

Potential participants were asked to consider speaking with an American researcher, (not affiliated with the United States Embassy) and respond to a series of questions related to their experiences and feelings about migrating to the United States, during a 30-45 minute individual interview. The requirements to participate in the study included the following: age 18 years or older, proficient in spoken English, native-born citizen of any West African country, current resident of any West African country, and confirmed plans to arrive in the United States within three months of the time of the interview. Potential participants were also told that the interviews would be digitally recorded, and that financial compensation would be available upon completion of the study: 10 cedis (~6.57 USD).

Sampling

The guidelines for determining sample size in qualitative studies are less concrete than for quantitative studies, and authors' recommendations often conflict with one another. Qualitative research is also unique because several factors directly influence the appropriate sample size for a study including the following: variability in context and character of the target population, availability of participants, and theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) describes the point at which no new information or additional themes are observed from the data. Therefore, once the information being gathered becomes redundant, the author can justify the termination of data collection. With regards to phenomenological studies – when the purpose is to explore the unique experience of a specific, relatively homogenous population – Morse (1994) recommends at least 6 interviews and Creswell (1998) recommends 5-25 interviews. Guest, et. al. (2006) investigated the

utility of 60 interviews that were completed in a study, and found that the first 12 interviews were sufficient to achieve theoretical saturation.

In the current study, the researcher recruited twelve participants to complete the study. This number is consistent with the recommendations mentioned by the authors above, and participants were intentionally recruited based on similar backgrounds and experiences. The researcher anticipated consistent responses among participants and that theoretical saturation could be achieved with as few participants as possible.

Participants: Pre-Migration

A total of twelve participants were recruited to participate in the pre-migration portion of the study. However, following the arrival of the researcher in Accra, Ghana, scheduling conflicts and illness prevented four participants from completing the study. Although the sample size was less than anticipated, the author suspects that this did not compromise theoretical saturation, which is later discussed. The participants included seven males and one female, ages 19 to 29. They were all Ghanaian, but represented five different ethnic groups including Akan, Ewe, Ga-Adangbe, Fanti, and Konkomba. Six of the participants were single, one participant reported that he had a girlfriend, and one participant was engaged to be married in a few weeks.

Seven of the participants had previously earned Bachelor's degrees from a university in Ghana, and were accepted into Master's degree programs in Economics, Mathematics, Physics, Biology, or Chemistry. The amount of time passed since they completed their Bachelor's degrees varied among participants. In Ghana, students must complete a one-year national service after they graduate from college. All of the participants held positions as graduate assistants at a university in Ghana; these positions are uncommon and reserved for

only the top graduates. At least one year had passed for each of the seven participants; however, some also spent additional years working before applying to graduate school. The eighth participant had recently graduated from high school and was accepted into a dual-Bachelor's degree program in Physics and Chemical Engineering. Six of the participants were accepted into large, research universities and two participants were accepted into HBCUs, (i.e. Historically Black College or University). All of the interviews were conducted in late May or early June 2010, and each of the participants was scheduled to depart sometime in August 2010.

Measure: Pre-Migration

A protocol was developed for the individual interviews and included ten, pre-screened questions similar to the ones used in a study completed by Black African international students (Mwaura, 2008). The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to gather information about pre-migration experiences, expectations of the United States, primary influences for preliminary impressions of the United States, awareness of potential challenges encountered in the United States, and coping strategies to consider or to prepare for adjustment living and studying in a foreign country. It was especially important to gather this information while participants were still living in their country of origin and surrounded by familiar people, places, and customs. On account of all the participants being Ghanaian, their responses cannot be used to describe the experiences of international students from other West African countries. However, their responses can be used to advocate for further awareness about students from this geographic and cultural region of the world.

The researcher used the questions to facilitate the semi-structured interviews and generate discussion. The questions in the protocol included inquiries about reasons for

migrating to the United States, whether or not family and friends were involved in the decision-making process and their level of support, consideration of positive and negative aspects about Ghana and the United States, importance of religion in the decision-making process and as a potential protective factor of stress, current quality of life in Ghana and anticipated quality of life in the United States, and the influence of the media on impressions of the United States. In the event that a participant responded to more than one question at a time, necessary adjustments were made or specific questions were eliminated from the interview. This is to say that all of the interviews were not identical; however, the same information was gathered from each participant.

Procedure: Pre-Migration

The researcher completed all of the interviews in Accra, Ghana at a public location during the daytime. Accra is the capital of Ghana; an urban setting populated by almost four million people. Accra is also the location of the United States Embassy, as well as other political and social leadership headquarters. Likewise, many international businesses and tourist attractions are situated there; American, European, Asian, and African expatriates and tourists are quite typical.

For reasons related to security, the interviews could not be completed inside in the United State Embassy. Instead, the researcher offered to meet participants outside the United States Embassy and transport them to another location with a private driver, or to meet participants at a pre-determined location. Such locations included hotel restaurants frequented by international tourists and expatriates. In Ghana, unlike in the United States, patrons are able to sit inside restaurants without ordering an entire meal. During each interview, the researcher ordered a complimentary glass of water for the participant and

herself. Afterward, she would order another item and pay before she left. The researcher selected unoccupied areas to sit at each restaurant, either inside or outside. This was to ensure privacy and confidentiality during the interviews and prevent overhead noise on the digital recorder.

At the start of each interview, the researcher introduced herself and thanked participants for their time and participation in the study. Afterward, the researcher briefly reiterated the purpose of the study, reminded participants that his or her answers would be digitally recorded, and explained that all responses and identifying information would be kept confidential. Later, the researcher informed participants that he or she may refuse to respond to any of the questions, and that he or she may withdraw from the study at any time without any risk or loss of financial compensation. In addition, the researcher gathered the following demographic information from each participant: age, nationality, ethnicity, marital status, previous universities attended, degrees earned and date(s) of completion, activities since date(s) of degree completion, approximate date of departure for the United States, name and location of the university that he or she will be attending, and the type of degree he or she will be pursuing.

After all of the preliminary information was gathered and discussed, the researcher began each interview by asking participants how they came about their decision to apply to study in the United States. This created a comfortable atmosphere in which to engage the participants and help them feel more relaxed and at ease. This initial inquiry also helped establish rapport between the researcher and participants, and to alleviate any anxiety or pressure they may have felt beforehand. One prior concern of the researcher was that participants might have an inaccurate impression about the study because they were recruited

by an employee of the United States Embassy; she wanted to prevent any uncertainty that their responses would be evaluated by embassy officials.

The length of each interview varied, (between 30 and 45 minutes) according to the depth of responses provided by participants and whether or not querying or follow-up questions were necessary. Also, in the event that a participant became preoccupied or sidetracked by a question, the researcher made sure to re-focus the conversation. All of the participants were friendly, engaged, and relaxed during the interviews. This was indicated by their attentive manner and eye contact, adherence to the protocol, patience and good-humor.

Several participants commented on the location of the interview, and indicated that they had never visited these types of hotels before. The researcher explained that she had planned for the interviews to take place inside the United States Embassy; however, due to the use of a digital recorder, her request was denied. The researcher inquired about participants' discomfort or nuisance with the locations, but they denied any bother. Most often, participants appeared indifferent but inquisitive about the circumstances. One participant asked the researcher if she was lodged at the hotel where they met, and she stated that she was not.

At the end of each interview, the researcher informed participants that they might be contacted again about follow-up questions related to their responses or to verify the accuracy of transcripts. For that reason, email information would be retained. Each of the participants agreed to this request. The researcher then debriefed participants and invited them to ask additional questions about the study. Several participants took an interest in knowing when and where the study would be published, and expressed that the research topic was both interesting and relevant to them.

A concern among almost all of the participants was the financial compensation they received at the end of the interview. Several participants initially refused to accept the payment, without additional reassurance and explanation. One participant was especially resistant to accept payment, but eventually accepted it with reservations. Overall, the participants were surprised, (even though they had been previously informed) that they would be paid to help a person in need. The participants felt no need to be compensated for their time, no matter how inconvenient or disruptive to their schedule the interview might have been.

The researcher explained that the approved research proposal included payment for participants, and that this was a common approach among research conducted in the United States and particularly among community samples. The researcher also expressed personal gratitude and appreciation toward each participant, given the fact that they would have participated even without payment. The researcher noted that participants' resistance to accepting compensation may have been for one or both of the following reasons: 1) collectivist society norms include selfless response to the needs of others without compensation, and 2) participants may have taken offense to receiving payment from a graduate student researcher due to their social status and relative wealth. The second explanation is based on the assumption that Ghanaian students who are able to pursue higher education both in Ghana and abroad come from wealthier households.

After each interview ended, the researcher listened to the digital recording of the interview. This act served several purposes. First, the researcher made sure that the interview was properly recorded and that no significant information was lost or misunderstood on the recording. Second, this provided an opportunity for the researcher to gather more detailed

impressions following each interview and the data that was collected; this knowledge helped facilitate subsequent interviews and ensure that appropriate questions were being asked to solicit relevant responses. Third, the researcher was able to determine whether or not any changes were necessary to the protocol. Fourth, the researcher was able to recognize when the data had fulfilled a level of saturation, or the point at which original data was no longer being gathered and participants' answers were consistent with one another.

While listening to each interview, the researcher wrote field notes to document her experience during each interview. The field notes included the following information: overall impressions of participants' attitudes, perspectives, and experiences; personal reactions toward statements or ideas expressed by participants; additional aspects to consider or be aware of for the next interview; and feelings toward particular participants, (i.e. anger, disbelief, admiration, sadness, concern, etc.). The field notes served two important purposes. First, they enabled the researcher to maintain insight about her own biases and prevent personal feelings or reactions from significantly influencing her interpretations of the data. Second, they provided an immediate opportunity to record any concerns or limitations, and to address necessary changes to the interview protocol.

Data Analysis: Pre-Migration

The researcher applied the seven-step procedure to data analysis for qualitative data according to Colaizzi (1978) for the pre-migration interviews. The seven steps include the following: 1) complete a verbatim transcript of each participant audio recording which includes a summary of statements that conveys the overall interpretation of personal experiences shared during the interviews, 2) analyze, (i.e. code) each transcript by using the ATLAS.ti® software program, 3) extract significant statements from each transcript to capture

themes and other information that is either consistent or inconsistent with the research questions, 4) formulate meanings from the statements and organize meanings into themes, 5) compare transcripts with extracted themes several times to validate the findings, 6) identify additional statements in the text of the original transcripts to support the primary themes and help validate the findings, 7) and validate the themes with a second reader.

Upon her return to the United States, the researcher downloaded the digitally recorded interviews onto the hard drives of two secure computers located in a locked office. She selected 3 undergraduate research assistants to transcribe all 8 of the interviews as Microsoft Word documents: two assistants transcribed three interviews and one assistant transcribed two interviews. The researcher requested that the assistants listen to each interview at least once before attempting to transcribe the material. This strategy allowed time for the assistants to become familiar with the content of the interviews as well as the accents of the participants; this also reduced the amount of time it took to transcribe each interview. The researcher instructed the assistants to complete verbatim transcripts. To ensure precision and accuracy, they were told to include superfluous speech such as “umm,” “ahh,” “hmm,” etc. and to record any pauses or breaks in speech. The assistants were also told to type any words that they could not understand with phonetic interpretations, (e.g. “ahhh-krah” instead of “Accra”). The assistants were given three weeks to finish transcribing all of the interviews. The researcher was readily available to respond to questions and concerns; she also consulted with each assistant during weekly meetings.

Once the assistants had transcribed all of the interviews, the researcher proofread each transcript to verify the accuracy of the assistants’ work. The researcher compared each transcript and the digital recording by simultaneously listening to the interview and reading

the corresponding transcript. Along the way, the researcher corrected any errors, (i.e. spelling, punctuation, superfluous speech, breaks, pauses, etc.). The researcher compared each transcript and digital recording at least three times before she confirmed completeness and accuracy. Most errors were related to sequence of speech, pauses, and spelling. Occasionally, the content of the transcript was incorrect due to difficulty interpreting accents. It took the researcher approximately three weeks to verify all of the transcripts.

After the transcripts were completed and verified, the next step was to analyze, or code, the transcripts using the ATLAS.ti® software program. Codes are considered labels for assigning units of meaning to descriptive information. Units of meaning can include single words, phrases, sentences, or entire paragraphs (Huberman & Miles, 1994). The researcher used a “blind coding” technique, which required her to differentiate and combine the data that was retrieved during the interviews with her own reflections and impressions. The researcher completed this task by inserting codes within the margin of the transcripts, (using the ATLAS.ti® software program). The ATLAS.ti® software program was used as a holding place for the transcripts and codes. Other than recording the frequency of use for each code, no additional functions were used. Eventually, codes began to repeat themselves and became easier to recognize between transcripts.

The researcher used what is known as an inductive, or grounded approach (Strauss, 1987) to create each code. This means that the codes were created after the data had been collected and each transcript had been thoroughly reviewed, line by line. Codes were assigned according to the significance of the statement within the context of the information, along with the conceptual framework that guided the research question (Huberman & Miles, 1994). It took the researcher approximately four weeks to finish coding all of the transcripts,

upon which she identified 26 supra codes. The codes were determined according to their frequency of occurrence among all eight transcripts and the amount of detail that was provided around similar ideas or concepts.

After the researcher identified the supra codes, she created a code book and operationalized each code. The code book was used as a guide to validate the codes during member checks completed by the research assistants. The researcher gathered the assistants during one meeting and explained the code book and each definition. The assistants were also told that the purpose of the member checks was to verify the interpretation of text, and make sure that data was appropriately and accurately coded. The researcher explained that the codes had been created by her, according to the information provided in each interview. Each assistant was assigned to validate codes for four transcripts. First, they reviewed the code book and gathered a thorough understanding of each code. Second, they reviewed each transcript, line by line, and applied the most appropriate codes to each line or chunk of text. Each assistant completed the coding by hand, rather than with the ATLAS.ti® software program. The assistants were given two weeks to complete this task.

Later, the researcher met with each assistant independently, to discuss and cross-reference the codes completed by the researcher with the codes completed by the assistant. During the meetings, the researcher also discussed with the assistants their overall impressions of the data, and any additional feedback about potential themes that emerged from the data.

After the 26 supra codes were verified with member checks, the researcher collapsed the codes into five major themes that could succinctly account for all of the information that was either consistent or inconsistent with the research questions. The themes were

determined according to how well the content of the previously-created codes related to one another and their relevance to the research question. The names for the themes were also pulled from the content of the original transcripts.

The researcher compared the transcripts with the extracted themes several times to validate the findings. The researcher later identified additional statements in the text of the original transcripts to support the primary themes and help validate the findings. Finally, the researcher validated the themes with the assistants.

Participants: Post-Migration

After all of the pre-migration interviews were completed, the researcher decided to facilitate post-migration email correspondence questions. Three months after their arrival in the United States, the researcher emailed all eight participants and asked if they would be willing to complete the post-migration portion of the study. The attrition rate was 50% and a total of four participants responded and completed the email correspondence questions. The participants included three males and one female. Each participant responded within six months of their arrival in the United States, following the end of their first semester of coursework in December 2010.

Measure: Post-Migration

A protocol was developed for the post-migration email correspondence questions, between the researcher and each participant. This mode of communication was chosen for several reasons. First, budgeting and logistics prevented the researcher from visiting each participant at their respective university. Second, additional contact information including phone number or mailing address was not provided during the initial consent process, and was not approved within the initial IRB research proposal. Third, email contact information

was already provided during the initial consent process and participants were notified at that time that they might be contacted again by the researcher. Furthermore, email correspondence is a reliable and efficient mode of communication for a student sample.

The purpose of the post-migration email correspondence questions was to gather information about the actual experiences of international students, following their arrival and initial six months of living and studying in the United States. The intention of the questions was to identify ways in which expectations were either fulfilled or unfulfilled, to compare life satisfaction prior to departure from the country of origin and upon arrival in the United States, to compare pre-conceived impressions of the United States with actual experiences, to identify ways in which stress was experienced and handled, to examine whether or not the students were adequately prepared in terms of knowledge and understanding about the challenges they will encounter in the United States, and to determine whether or not the coping strategies and protective factors discussed prior to departure were effectively applied.

Procedure: Post-Migration

The researcher sent an email message to each participant three months after their arrival in the United States, asking if they would be willing to participate in the post-migration portion of the study. If they agreed to participate, they were asked to reply to the email. Once the researcher received their response, she sent another email message with a list of five questions and instructions for how to respond. The researcher asked for thoughtful and detailed responses to each question, and at least three sentences in length. Initially, eight participants replied and said that they would like to participate in the follow-up portion of the study; however, only four of them actually responded to the questions. The researcher

attempted to get in contact with them again on two separate occasions, but participants did not reply to her messages.

After each participant responded with complete answers to the questions, the researcher sent another email message to thank him or her. The researcher also assured each participant that he or she would not be contacted again for any reason. Participants were encouraged to contact the researcher if they had any questions or concerns about their participation in the post-migration portion of the study.

After she read each participant's responses, the researcher wrote field notes to document her impressions and reactions. The field notes included the same information listed above for the pre-migration interviews: overall impressions of participants' attitudes, perspectives, and experiences; personal reactions toward statements or ideas expressed by participants; and feelings toward particular participants, (i.e. anger, disbelief, admiration, sadness, concern, etc.). The field notes for the post-migration responses also served two important purposes. First, they enabled the researcher to maintain insight about her own biases and prevent personal feelings or reactions from significantly influencing her interpretations of the data. Second, they provided an immediate opportunity to record any concerns or limitations. The post-migration protocol did not allow opportunity for any changes to occur to the protocol because the same set of five questions was emailed to each participant at the same time.

Data Analysis: Post-Migration

The researcher applied the same seven-step procedure to data analysis for qualitative data according to Colaizzi (1978) for the post-migration email correspondence, excluding transcription. Upon receiving all of the email correspondence questions and answers, the

researcher re-read each written response to verify the accuracy of each response. The purpose of this was to make sure that the participants had responded appropriately to each question. After all of the responses were verified, the next step was to analyze, or code, them using the ATLAS.ti® software program. The researcher used a “blind coding” technique, which required her to differentiate and combine the data that was retrieved from the email responses with her own reflections and impressions. The researcher completed this task by inserting codes within the margin of the transcripts, (using the ATLAS.ti® software program). The ATLAS.ti® software program was used as a holding place for the transcripts and codes. Other than recording the frequency of use for each code, no additional functions were used. Eventually, codes began to repeat themselves and became easier to recognize between transcripts.

Codes were assigned according to the significance of the statement within the context of the information, along with the conceptual framework that guided the research questions (Huberman & Miles, 1994). It took the researcher approximately two weeks to code all of the email correspondence, upon which she identified 16 supra codes. Identical to the pre-migration transcripts, the codes were determined according to their frequency of occurrence among all four email correspondence and the amount of detail that was provided around similar ideas or concepts.

After the researcher identified the supra codes, she created a code book and operationalized each code. The code book was used as a guide to validate the codes during member checks completed by the research assistants. The researcher gathered the assistants during one meeting and explained the code book and each definition. The assistants were

also told that the purpose of the member checks was to verify the interpretation of text, and make sure that data was appropriately and accurately coded. The researcher explained that the codes had been created by her, according to the information provided in each email correspondence. Each assistant was assigned to validate codes for two email correspondence. First, they reviewed the code book and gathered a thorough understanding of each code. Second, they reviewed each email correspondence, line by line, and applied the most appropriate codes to each line or chunk of text. Each assistant completed the coding by hand, rather than with the ATLAS.ti® software program. The assistants were given two weeks to complete this task.

Later, the researcher met with each assistant independently, to discuss and cross-reference the codes completed by the researcher with the codes completed by the assistant. During the meetings, the researcher also discussed with the assistants their overall impressions of the data, and any additional feedback about potential themes that emerged from the data.

After the 16 supra codes were verified with member checks, the researcher collapsed the codes into four major themes that could succinctly account for all of the information that was either consistent or inconsistent with the research questions. The themes were determined according to how well the content of the previously-created codes related to one another and their relevance to the research question. The names for the themes were also pulled from the content of the original email correspondence.

The researcher compared the email correspondence with the extracted themes several times to validate the findings. The researcher later identified additional statements in the text

of the email correspondence to support the primary themes and help validate the findings. Finally, the researcher validated the themes with the assistants.

Results

Several themes emerged from the individual interview data related to pre-migration including dissatisfaction with academic structure and resources in Ghana; uncertainty about the presence of racism, discrimination, and violence in the United States; specific goals upon arrival in the United States; values consistent with collectivist cultures; and concerns about lifestyle differences between Ghana and the United States, (e.g. pace, weather, food, transportation, etc.). Also, several themes emerged from the email correspondence data related to post-migration including stress related to adjustment, focus on academic responsibilities, and experiences with discrimination. This section describes the themes, using exemplar quotations that reflect the viewpoints of the participants and varying perspectives on pre- and post-migration experiences of international students from Ghana living in the United States.

Pre-Migration

Theme 1: I want to broaden my horizons.

The first theme was created from several supra codes including the following: *A dream come true, New experiences, Pride/Confidence, Take a chance, and Optimism*. These codes describe participants' hopeful anticipation about coming to live in the United States and pursuing new opportunities. In addition, some participants explained certain dissatisfactions with life in Ghana - in comparison to potential prospects in the United States. All of the participants discussed their desire to gain exposure to diverse people and perspectives from the United States and around the world – participants described how much

they looked forward to interacting with students from other countries and exchanging ideas about foreign cultures. The participants seemed particularly in awe of interacting with people who think and behave differently. The following are excerpts from interviews that illustrate this theme:

- *I think something I'm actually really excited about is that I'll get to know new people, people who think in a different kind of manner, people who do things in a different kind of manner.*
- *I think it's going to be exciting. And, of course, [I'm] going to be exposed to new people.*
- *It's going to be different and there will be different cultures, different people with different ideologies...and I'm bracing myself up to the possible changes.*
- *I think my life will be different there [in the United States] because this is a case whereby you are going to meet all different kinds of people and the environment will probably differ from here.*
- *I'm very happy that at least I'll have, you know, an environment where I'll meet the necessary people, coming from different backgrounds to live around and learn from each other.*

One participant mentioned that she looked forward to attending an HBCU because she suspected it would be an easier transition, compared to a predominately White university.

- *My school in an HBCU, so I expect to see more Blacks...more people who have stayed here [in Ghana] before and so I'll have a mixture of the African lifestyle...and then the American lifestyle.*

One participant expressed that no matter how difficult conditions might be in the United States, they will still be better than the conditions in Ghana:

- *...the United States is one of the developed countries and I believe everything is ok, so I don't really see much of a problem. Even if it's going to be a problem, I believe if you ask me and I'll tell you it won't be a problem in the United States. It would be sort of a blessing...like, let's say, in terms of infrastructure: the worst wood in the United States would be the best wood in Ghana...even though, I must say that the United States is not heaven.*

The participants spoke very highly of their desire to take advantage of new opportunities and unfamiliar experiences, in anticipation that these encounters would be readily available.

- *...the fact is [that] America is more developed than Ghana...so, I expect to see other advanced systems as a means of transport - things that you use around. I would like to take some time to really study how things go about.*
- *I expect to see that life will be more free-flowing with less obstacles in the way [in the United States].*
- *I'm going there to make sure that I make the best out of every opportunity that I'm given.*
- *I'm like, here's a society [United States] where, I mean, once you have a dream, just pursue it and focus.*
- *Everything is in high expectation, no matter how small it might be...*
- *I won't let anything try and, eh, be a hindrance to me or to my dreams.*

In contrast, other participants expressed dissatisfaction with Ghanaian society, including the standard of living and unfair obstacles that prevent upward mobility:

- *The weather, the people, our culture – that's good [in Ghana]. But when it comes to standard of living, it's not good [in Ghana].*
- *[In Ghana] it's difficult to be good and be successful, because you have to find your way to cheat around one point or another, at some level, because the system just doesn't work for people who are disciplined. It's just not easy to make it to the top.*

Theme 2: I'm going there with an open mind.

The second theme was also created from several supra codes including the following: *Preparation, Concerns about the U.S., Negative impressions of the U.S., Ambivalence, Missing home, Ghana is a nice place, Unable to predict the future, and Coping.* These codes describe participants' awareness of how life in the United States will be different than life in Ghana and that a period of adjustment will likely occur following their arrival. Participants

also discussed the importance of prior preparation, but maintained an appropriate level of confidence and assurance about the unknown future and the availability of coping strategies. Many participants acknowledged the likelihood of encountering unfamiliar or uncomfortable circumstances or social challenges following their arrival in the United States. They described this as a static event, and not a process or series of events that will take time to overcome. The following are excerpts from interviews that illustrate this theme:

- *...it's not going to be too new. It's like my normal life continuing in a new environment.*
- *Of course, it's a new environment, [so] I'll have to get familiar with the people...with how things go there...everything. Maybe the transport system, the weather conditions, maybe food, and that...the kind of people [and] how people relate to you.*
- *Probably in the initial stages – it might be quite slow and difficult. But I believe that as time goes on, I'll get used to the system, so it will be normal.*
- *I think I ought to accept the fact that I'm in a new setting and there are certain things I wouldn't be familiar with. So, I'll be ready to seek assistance.*

Participants discussed their ambivalent impressions of Americans, as portrayed in movies and the media. Their narratives indicated both envy and intimidation.

- *I've never traveled to the States, but my perception is that everybody's so independent...everybody's so busy, [and] if you're not independent enough you'll get left behind...so, everything will be very fast-paced – there will be nobody there to tell you, 'do this, do that' or to hold your hand.*
- *I have learned [that] people [in the United States] are, how should I say this – very critical...yeah, people want to attend to their own things [rather than help others].*

One participant expressed his concerns about American society and the social climate:

- *I try to live a very simple life: work, house, church, house...but I don't want any complicated life. And I'm really not sure about going to the United States...what we hear, and what we read about...what I read about the social madness and all kinds of people out there: homosexuality, excessive drinking,*

drug abuse...you know, all those things. It's much open and legal...I need to get the moral discipline right from here, [in Ghana, so I won't be distracted later].

In contrast, other participants recalled the characteristics which they enjoy about Ghana, and what they will miss about their home country.

- *I'll still miss home. The food especially...and the friendliness of home people.*
- *Most of all, they [Ghanaians] are friendly – very, very, very, very. I don't think you get that in different countries, but maybe. It will be very scarce...[In Ghana] they don't mind giving help or anything that you need. I think that distinguishes us from other people.*
- *Everybody [in Ghana] easily becomes a friend. Especially if the person speaks your language.*
- *Ghana is peaceful. If you have all you need, if you have your money, if you have your resources, if you have your plan for life – it's a good place to settle. And there is a lot that can be done here [in Ghana] so I love it also because of the opportunity in terms of what could be done...I just see it as a place where I can settle down and make an impact.*

Some participants discussed ways in which they planned for the upcoming transition, others decided not to preoccupy themselves until after they arrived in the United States, and some were unable to anticipate how they would respond to the circumstances because they had no prior experience with this type of transition. Overall, religion was a strong value shared among all the participants and they planned to use their faith as a guide.

- *I'll get people I can share my life with. Probably, I'll be just so focused on studies that everything, so that [missing family] might not even really affect me that much.*
- *Religion is the center of everything for me...it's kind of like my greatest driving force...I'm very committed to my God.*
- *My Christian belief [is most valuable to me]...I believe in the principles of Christ and I want to hold onto that, irrespectible [regardless] of where I find myself...I value the training I received [from my parents], and what the Bible says. I want to hold onto that.*

- *In my life, God comes first.*
- *I'm religious. I've been praying.*

Theme 3: [I'm] least looking forward to racism.

The third theme was created from two supra codes including the following: *Lack of awareness about negative aspects of the U.S., and People will like me.* This theme describes the notion that participants are relatively unaware of the variable racial climate which exists in the United States, and how greatly they will be impacted. In spite of their knowledge about discrimination, participants did not express any concerns or hesitations about establishing relationships, or friendships with others. Some participants even expressed skepticism about whether or not discrimination really did exist in the locations they would be living.

Several participants mentioned concerns about general violence portrayed in the media and movies. Although they acknowledged the occurrence of these events, they did not express symptoms of anxiety or major depression in response to their likelihood. One participant did mention that he would return home if another incident similar to September 11th or killings on college campuses such as Virginia Tech occurred nearby where he would be living. The following are excerpts from interviews that illustrate this theme:

- *Racism, I don't know. I've never met racism, so I don't know how it will be like and I how I will react to it.*
- *This racism problem, I don't think it's going to worry me.*
- *I know that people have a lot of ideas about me being Black...so, maybe people will judge [me] and be cold to [me] and all of that. But I believe that once people get to know [me] and they know what [I am] worth, they will respect [me] no matter what...so, I'm not really concerned about how they will treat me initially.*
- *I'm expecting it [people to treat me poorly because I am Black] but I'm not worried about it because I know it's there and something that happens.*

- *...I think they [Americans] will go both ways. I mean, some people will be serious, some people...I'm expecting some people to receive me warmly, I'm expecting some to be cold.*
- *It's not their fault. I mean, they have ideas that are not right...and they think that they should be better than you. I'm expecting all of that, but I don't really mind.*
- *I don't want racism to be at the university because I want to live comfortably and study in peace and I want everything to be fair.*

Two participants expressed a lack of concern for how others will treat them, and instead placed greater emphasis on how they will treat others in order to earn respect. Their belief was that they must prove themselves to others first, in order to be treated well afterward.

- *I don't have any, any fears. Of course, in every environment there will be instances where you don't expect what will happen, so I should be prepared for all those things. Yeah, but I'm not too afraid of the United States.*
- *I'm not looking forward to how people receive me. I'm more interested in how I'm gonna treat them. 'Cause I know people have a lot of ideas about probably me being Black. So many people can judge you by your stature and decide to be cold to you and all of that. I believe that once people get to know you, and they know what you are worth, they will respect you no matter what. So, I'm really not concerned about how they [Americans] will treat me initially.*

Only one participant acknowledged the specific incidence of discrimination between Black populations in the United States:

- *Probably even my fellow Black people will be difficult to approach. I mean we're all different, and sometimes you can even be moody.*

One participant explained his belief that because the United States voted for an African American man to be President, the likelihood of racial discrimination is no longer as bad as it was in the past. This speaks to the idea that participants have a very different impression of racism and how it is intertwined throughout American society.

- *The President [of the United States] is Black. Even though there might be a portion of people [in the United States] who still oppose the President because he*

is Black, the majority of Americans voted for him. Not just because of his skin color, but because he's competent. So, they have to accept him because he's Black...but if I get there and I am treated differently by White people and Black people it will be minimal because, after all, more people voted for the President in the election.

Theme 4: I just want to learn more.

The fourth theme was created from several supra codes including the following:

Unrealistic expectations, Admiration of the U.S., The U.S. is better than Ghana, The influence of others/hearsay, Frustration toward Ghana, and Values. This theme describes participants' experiences within in the context of school and education. All of the participants expressed a strong value for education and encountered disappointment with the level of training, resources and attention they received in Ghana. Likewise, they expressed very high expectations for their upcoming academic experience in the United States. Participants also discussed their impressions of peers who had studied in the United States and made note of how knowledgeable and confident their counterparts have become, as a result of their foreign education. Some participants even expressed frustration and regret for not completing their undergraduate degree in the United States or beginning their graduate degrees at an earlier age. The following are excerpts from interviews that illustrate this theme:

- *It's quite frustrating studying in Ghana [because] equipment, materials, everything is the hard way. [Resource] are not adequate, and those that are available are too outdated.*
- *The lecturers here [in Ghana] think that it was hard for them to get their Master's degree, so we [students] also have to go through some hell. Before you get it, [a degree] you have to suffer. They really want you to have it the hard way – so, it's too hard.*
- *You have to find your way to cheat around at one point or another, at some level, because the system just doesn't work for people who are disciplined.*

- *I know it's not right – the corruption in Ghana. It's, like, people who are for high status take advantage of those of the lowest status in Ghana...things aren't always fair.*
- *I can't wait to get there. I'm, like, I'm excited about it – and I'm, like, 'finally I'll also earn a degree from a U.S. institution.*
- *Some of my mates who have been to school in the United States...the way they approach things, the way they explain things to you, and when you look at the way they do things, I thought, "Why can't I be a part of this?"*

Several participants expressed disbelief, shock, and fulfillment after learning about their acceptance to schools in the United States, (e.g. “a dream come true”). All of the participants are looking forward to more comprehensive academic experiences, including theory and practical application. Participants also look forward to learning from knowledgeable, influential, and interesting professors and leaders in their field.

- *Quality teaching in the United States, that's what I'm looking for.*
- *I'm going there [the United States] as an empty disk which is going to be loaded up with information.*
- *One of the major reasons I want to go there [the United States] is because of the advancement in science.*
- *It's always been my dream to further my education after my undergraduate degree. I wanted to just gather some experiences and apply what I learned in school.*
- *It's just, like, the perfect opportunity. [To study in the U.S.]*
- *It's a dream come true [to study in the U.S.], and I think it is an opening for a greater step. I think now, I have no excuse not to be successful.*

The majority of participants mentioned how much they valued education, and did not anticipate that they would be easily distracted or persuaded away from their academic objectives or career goals. Several of them also mentioned that they were focused and

disciplined during their undergraduate studies, and anticipated that they would be able to maintain that same focus and stamina during their graduate studies.

- *I'm just going all out and learning as much as I can and applying as much as I can.*
- *I'm going for a serious program, and I want to [go to the United States] because I really mean business.*
- *Definitely, I might have fun for some time, but the main reason why I'm going there is to study.*
- *I don't like to combine fun with education.*
- *My main purpose is to study...to study and nothing else.*

Participants acknowledged that other social aspects of life might be compromised, (i.e. social or recreational activities) but that other activities would not be a primary concern during the time spent studying. All of the participants stated that they would also like to earn their Ph.D. degree in the United States, and become experts in their respective fields.

Theme 5: When I'm finished, I'll come back to help my country.

The fifth theme was also created from several supra codes including the following: *Specific Goals/Expectations, Responsibility, Expectations (general), and Good things will happen to me in the future.* This theme describes participants' interest in upward mobility and plans to succeed professionally and throughout life as a direct result of their education in the United States. The perception among participants was that they would achieve upward mobility because of their American diplomas and return home as well-recognized professionals and academics. The majority of participants mentioned that they would like to acquire as much education and experience as possible in the United States, prior to their return to Ghana. The following are excerpts from interviews that illustrate this theme:

- *I can't wait to be there [in the United States] ...in an advanced country, among people who have an advanced way of thinking. I want to learn those things [too] ...while I'm there, so that I can come back home and then impart in on our people.*
- *I don't intend to stay out there [in the United States] for long. I want to come back and give back to my country.*
- *[I'm looking forward to] a challenge and the opportunity, and the value that [experience] can add to me...I want to be a person who will definitely have a handle on what he's doing.*
- *Yeah, people kind of now are expecting you to really go and do something 'cause then they are like, if you were able to get this opportunity, then we are hoping a lot to come out of you...I like when people are expecting a lot out of me. That motivates me. That's one of my biggest motivations.*
- *To have a Master's or Ph.D. adds value to you and that, you know, broadens your job search and your future career development.*

One participant mentioned that not only does he want to learn a lot and do well in his academic program, he also wants to impress his colleagues:

- *You have to make a difference. You have to make a mark. You have to leave an indelible mark there [in the United States]. That's what I am trying to achieve.*

Participants also conveyed pride and responsibility for the opportunity to share the wisdom they gain from their experience abroad to enhance the livelihood of family, friends, and students back home in Ghana. Some participants also expressed an interest in becoming professors at the university they attended in Ghana.

- *I'm looking forward to the prospect of having my abilities and knowledge strengthened to their fullest potential so that by the time I come back to Ghana, I'll be an accomplished person...I can also give out what I have learned...give it out to people who are up and coming. Develop them.*
- *I'll come back to Ghana, but I wanna get enough experience. So that when I come back, I can really do something.*
- *I want to come home and have a lot to tell about the United States.*

- *Ghana is a place [where] I'd like to settle down.*
- *I see it [Ghana] as a place where I can settle down and make an impact.*
- *There is a lot than can be done here, so I love it also because of the opportunity in terms of what can be done.*

Many participants suggested that a degree from a university in the United States would have a substantial influence on their careers and opportunities for advancement either in Ghana, or on a global level.

- *I'll be highly competitive on the international market in terms of getting a job or employment after my program.*
- *Right now, a lot more people are getting to study outside [of Ghana] and getting exposed to connections outside, so when we [return] and get into the system [in Ghana] we can put things right because we've been exposed [elsewhere].*

All of the participants confirmed that their families and friends in Ghana are extremely proud of them and excited for their potential for upward mobility. This means that family members and friends have high expectations for participants, and expect them to achieve academic success and social advancement. In addition, several participants mentioned that they are satisfied with their lives in Ghana and that they have already been able to accomplish academic, social, and religious fulfillment; they hope to return to this stable lifestyle again.

Overall, during the pre-migration interviews the participants expressed a variety of opinions and expectations about their upcoming arrival in the United States. They seemed appropriately optimistic about the exciting opportunities and people they were about to encounter, but cautious about the social changes and uncertainties. Participants were less aware and understanding about the discrimination they would encounter in the United States.

Participants also seemed to have an exaggerated opinion about the academic experience in the United States and how significant of an impact their degree might have on their overall career and social mobility.

Post-Migration

Theme 1: Adjusting to the culture here is stressful.

The first theme was created from several supra codes including the following:

Stressors, America and Americans are different than what I know in Ghana, Initial period was most difficult, and I miss home. This theme describes participants' stressful experiences immediately following their arrival in the United States, primarily because of the unfamiliar environment and difficulty learning how to navigate their surroundings. In addition, cultural aspects such as communication, attention to time and pace, and individualist tendencies presented new challenges for participants. The following are excerpts from interviews that illustrate this theme:

- *This is my very first semester and its stressful because of the new people I meet everyday and their style of doing things. For example, adjusting to the culture here is stressful because many students here in the United States are very informal.*
- *[During] the first few weeks here [in the United States], things were very stressful because I had to figure out where to get stuff, (e.g. grocery, bank, etc.).*
- *My initial source of stress was not having a car.*
- *Life here is a bit fast-paced in all aspects. In Ghana, you can get help from almost anybody, but here [in the United States] it's kind of each one for him/herself.*
- *Here in the United States, I have realized that many people are time conscious. If classes are set to begin at 8am, it is 8am and nothing else. Adjusting to this was also stressful.*

- *The weather has made life a bit difficult because I had never been in a cold environment before.*

One participant also noted that no matter how helpful and accommodating people in the United States might be, the help of others still does not feel as comforting as the support he received back home:

- *You know that your home is home, and though people may be nice to you, it might not be as you get from your own people.*

Theme 2: People here are nice, and some definitely are not.

The second theme was also created from several supra codes including the following: *People are nice to me – no experiences with discrimination, Negative observations of the U.S., I am seen as something I am not, and Bad feelings.* This theme describes participants' encounters with discrimination or claims that they had not experienced any discrimination since their arrival in the United States. Half of the participants discussed their experience with discrimination – primarily discrete forms of racism and prejudice. The participants understood that they were not only discriminated against because they are international students from another country, but also because they are Black. Participants expressed feeling hurt, and described this experience as subtle but uncomfortable. The other half of participants denied that they had experienced any encounters with discrimination since their arrival in the United States. The following are excerpts from interviews that illustrate this theme:

- *I would say this country has the highest [rate of] discrimination. I say this because once you are Black, your privileges are limited. For example, I get into to the elevator going all the way up to my room, and another female student in the elevator holds her bag tightly – she thought that I might snatch her bag.*

- *They [White Americans] all term African-American and African as one people. I sometimes get home and get sad. It is sometimes painful. In Ghana, because we are all the same color, discrimination is lessened and not as big of a deal.*
- *A few Asians, especially the Chinese, tend to show/ behave funny when they see a Black person.*
- *I usually don't care about people and institutions who take part in discrimination because it takes me off focus on my life. I get angry when people discriminate by insults. I don't like it at all and I also don't want to involve in a fight. If I fight, I can end up back home with no degree. I just endue it because after all, I know why I came to the United States.*
- *I cannot remember an American discriminating against me personally. But there are times when you sit in a bus and no one wants to sit by you. It's sad, and it makes you feel unwanted.*

Theme 3: Overwhelming school responsibilities.

The third theme was created from several supra codes including the following: *No social participation, I enjoy what I do, and Focused/Specific goals and objectives*. This theme describes participants' preoccupation with schoolwork and obligations, and their sense of feeling overwhelmed by responsibilities. All of the participants described schoolwork as their most important responsibility and concern; however, they felt equally surprised by how much time and commitment it demanded of them. As a result, participants were unable to participate in other activities, social events, or engage in social relationships with peers. The following are excerpts from interviews that illustrate this theme:

- *Having to combine my studies with working as a teaching assistant has been the most cause of stress for me.*
- *I am not too involved with other university activities primarily because I am usually swamped with work. I have enjoyed my experience so far and hope to open up my life to other fun activities in the subsequent semester. In Ghana, I had more time for my friends and family than I do here.*
- *I am not so involved with activities because I am just not so interested. I enjoy being in my new environment as far as academic work is concerned.*

- *The coursework is pretty much demanding, so I have to take them [friends] as they come.*

Theme 4: Ways of coping.

The fourth theme was created from several supra codes including the following:

Coping strategies, Resources available, Support systems, and The U.S. is nice. This theme describes participants' strategies for dealing with stress caused by general adjustment, school responsibilities, or discrimination. Overall, participants have been able to manage their stress level and continue to be productive. They have accomplished this by applying effective coping strategies such as the following: taking advantage of resources available at their university, identifying Ghanaian peers and allies, maintaining spirituality and religious commitment, staying in contact with friends and family back home, and scheduling breaks for themselves. The following are excerpts from interviews that illustrate this theme:

- *I was fortunate to meet some students from Ghana, so that at least made me feel at home.*
- *Where I attend college, I have a Ghanaian professor. Anytime I am in difficulty, I address it to her. She really helps me.*
- *My primary support is my faith in God.*
- *Socially, I have a lot of support from family and friends back home in Ghana. I haven't made many friends [in the United States] yet.*
- *The university has done a good job in providing services that go the extra mile to make the transition as least stressful as possible. In fact, the support you get as an international student cannot be underestimated. Your first few weeks are very important and they go the extra mile to get to know you as a person, not just as another student starting from your department in grad school. In Ghana, the services may be there, but it's very difficult to get access to them.*
- *I tend to relegate [reserve] almost everything in the background during the week and get focused on my studies; during the weekend, especially on Saturday, I try to do something else apart from studying – no coursework.*

- *My strategy in coping with stress is similar to what I did in Ghana. I usually take a break on Sundays and do nothing related to academic work.*

The strategy most often used by participants when coping with discrimination was to ignore other people's negative attitudes:

- *I usually don't care about people and institutions who take part in discrimination because it takes me off focus on my life. I get angry. [But] I just endure it, because, after all, I know why I came to the United States.*
- *I'll just laugh and move on when I sense such attitudes...I guess it's a matter of ignorance/prejudice.*
- *On campus, it's difficult to pinpoint discrimination especially among people in places of authority. Among students, I'll ignore, move on and distance myself if possible.*

More than one participant noted that although he or she might become angry or upset, they are mindful of the fact that they are not citizens of the United States and they could easily be sent back home to Ghana if they caused any major trouble or antagonized anyone else.

- *Here, you want to avoid trouble in any form.*

Overall, during the post-migration email correspondence participants expressed viewpoints that were both consistent and inconsistent with their pre-migration perceptions. Participants described surprising encounters with stress, which is inconsistent with their prior awareness but lack of concern during the pre-migration interviews. Likewise, participants discussed overwhelming distress related to school responsibilities. In spite of the fact that they enjoy their new learning environment, they have encountered much more distress and responsibility than they had anticipated prior to their arrival. Participants also described hurtful encounters with discrimination in the United States, which they were skeptical about

during the pre-migration interviews. On the other hand, participants' descriptions of their coping strategies are consistent with those mentioned during the pre-migration interviews.

Discussion

The current study is important because it investigated the experience of a burgeoning population in the United States that has yet to be sufficiently recognized in empirical literature. This original study included a pre-migration investigation in the country of origin along with a follow-up, post-migration investigation in the host country. The results of this qualitative study are consistent with similar investigations of acculturation related to other immigrant and international student populations; however, they also provide new information to consider when working with international students from Ghana. Furthermore, the results of this study can be used to inform interactions with students from other West African countries and to advocate for additional studies that investigate the pre- and post-migration experiences of international students.

The following results were found, regarding pre-migration attitudes: participants acknowledged that a period of adjustment and stress will occur following arrival in the host country (Berry & Kim, 1988; Berry et al., 1992; Sam & Berry, 1995; Berry, 1998;), participants recognized the importance of preparation prior to departure (Ryan, 2006; Leavey et. al., 2007; Chou, 2009;), participants reported specific goals and aspirations related to academic achievement and upward mobility (Phinney & Onwughalu, 1996), and participants acknowledged discrimination and racism as emotionally upsetting aspects of the acculturation process (Dadoo, 1997).

Furthermore, new information was identified for pre-migration attitudes. First, participants expressed a strong desire to meet new people and gain exposure to new

perspectives and viewpoints not only from host country nationals but other foreign individuals living in the United States. Second, participants discussed a strong desire to return to Ghana and distribute knowledge, information and wisdom to others back home, rather than to remain in the United States and develop their careers after they complete their studies. This is in contrast to the current “brain drain” (Takougang, 2005) trend in which immigrants from Africa choose not to return to their country of origin after living in the United States for a period of time.

The following results were found, regarding post-migration attitudes: participants recalled first-time experiences with discrimination as both hurtful and undermining (Adelegan & Parks, 1985; Bagley & Young, 1988), participants recalled increased stress due to new and unfamiliar academic responsibilities and larger workloads (Komiya & Eells, 2001; Zhou et. al, 2008), participants acknowledged the importance of culture-specific coping strategies, and participants experienced the negative impact of limited access to traditional resources, (e.g. family support and religious community) (Fitchett et. al., 1997; Hovey, 1999; King, 1999; Hovey & Magana, 2000; Koenig, 2001; Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005). New information identified for post-migration attitudes included participants’ unanticipated general stress upon arrival including transportation and time management.

Implications

Several implications are derived from the results of the study. With regards to research, the current study assessed the claim that individuals who choose to migrate to another country – unlike the experience of refugees – are motivated by the assumption that life can be better somewhere else. Likewise, this assumption influences keen perceptions about the host country, with a greater emphasis on the positive aspects rather than the more

challenging aspects of cross-cultural interactions. The participants in this study were aware prior to their departure that they might encounter initial challenges following their arrival in the United States. However, the participants lacked understanding about the duration and substantial impact these challenges would have. For example, participants discussed unanticipated challenges such as completing daily tasks at a quicker pace than usual or attending classes on time. Therefore, the results of this study do support the notion that international students are more motivated by a hopeful outlook rather than the realistic challenges. This leads to the clinical implications of the study.

Prior to their departure, participants were unaware of the specific stressors and challenges they were about to encounter - not only negative challenges, but positive challenges can also result in some distress, (i.e. establishing new relationships with peers). This result suggests that participants were inadequately informed or prepared for the psychological impact of migrating to the United States. In spite of this outcome, participants did not display or communicate symptoms of stress during the pre-migration interviews or post-migration correspondence. Prior to their departure from Ghana, all of the participants were moderately satisfied with their lives in Ghana but hopeful of gaining additional expertise in their career field and enhanced social awareness. They objectively described their dissatisfaction with various aspects of Ghanaian culture, but none of the participants indicated that their physical or emotional well-being might be jeopardized. Following their arrival in the United States, the participants also did not indicate a clinical level of distress.

In addition to the actual stressors that they will encounter, students must understand that stress is an appropriate response to acculturation and that symptoms are displayed in a variety of ways. Acculturative stress characterizes the stress that occurs as a direct result of

the acculturation process, including pre- and post-migration. The stress described by participants in the current study was inconsistent with recorded symptoms of acculturative stress, (e.g. identity confusion, feelings of isolation or alienation, hopelessness, and heightened psychosomatic symptoms) (Berry & Annis, 1974; Berry et. al., 1987; Smart & Smart, 1995). However, this does not mean that participants did not experience any of these or related symptoms. Additional cultural factors may have prevented them from disclosing their complete experience, (i.e. self concealment).

Students must also understand the role of individuals who are able to support them during the acculturation process, including counseling psychologists, academic advisors, and other mental health professionals. A frequent misunderstanding among international or minority populations is that therapy is synonymous with weakness or a lack of self control. Likewise, the concept of sharing details about personal distress is incongruent with collectivist values and cultural norms. If international students are better informed about the ways in which mental health is conceptualized and treated by professionals in the United States, then they might be encouraged to pursue or seek help from nearby resources.

An important community implication of the study is to inform psychologists about how to effectively treat international students from Ghana living in the United States. Cross-cultural understanding and interactions between international students and mental health professionals are vital, to enhance mutual trust, familiarity and understanding. It is the responsibility of counseling psychologists to remain mindful about cultural discrepancies and to use this information to inform their work. It is also important for them to consider how students from West Africa have been misinformed or have made incorrect assumptions about the United States prior to their arrival. Similar to the participants in this study, students might

experience disappointment when they realize that media images or hearsay from others is not entirely true. For example, the participants in the current study were especially excited about meeting new people in the United States and encountering new perspectives; however, they were skeptical about the possibility of negative discrimination directed toward them.

Limitations

In spite of the various implications of this investigation, the current study also includes several limitations to consider. First, the sample size and variability among participants was less than the researcher had anticipated. The sample size for the pre-migration portion of the study was adequate and within the range recommended by authors (Morse, 1994; Creswell, 1998) to fulfill theoretical saturation in phenomenological studies. This is true because the extracted themes from the transcripts were sufficiently supported by the content provided by each participant. However, the sample size for the post-migration portion of the study was much less than anticipated. The extracted themes from the email correspondence were gathered from the content provided by the participants; however, in the event that additional data was collected the outcome of the themes may have been different. This suggests that theoretical saturation was not achieved in the post-migration portion of the study.

In addition to concerns about the overall number of participants included in the study, several specific characteristics among the 8 participants were unanticipated. First, all of the participants were Ghanaian; however, the original aim of the study was to describe the experiences of international students from all West African countries. If additional time and resources were available, participants from other countries would also have been recruited. Likewise, all but one participant were graduate students rather than undergraduate students.

This suggests that the older age range, maturity level, and insight displayed by the participants in the study are qualitatively different than student participants in most other investigations. For example, the substantial impact of school responsibilities on participants' ability to engage with peers is more influenced by the fact that graduate students are busier than undergraduate studies, but not necessarily less interested in socializing with others.

Finally, the overwhelming majority of participants were male – only one female participated in both the pre- and post-migration portions of the study. In general, the majority of students among West African countries are male and the presence of females tends to rapidly diminish with each grade level. This is largely influenced by the fact that males are encouraged from a young age to pursue advanced degrees and professional careers. On the other hand, females are less often supported, encouraged – or discouraged – to do well in school or to work outside the home. This cultural norm is seemingly reflected among the participants in this study.

A second limitation of the study is that recruitment for the pre-migration portion of the study was not completed by the researcher but instead by an in-country colleague. This created the possibility for participants to be incorrectly solicited or for the perception of coercion. Since participants were recruited by an employee of the United States Embassy this might have produced an unintentional element of obligation or intimidation. Recruitment for the pre-migration portion of the study also did not include notification that a post-migration portion would occur several months following arrival in the United States; the lack of information greatly impacted the attrition rate. In addition, data collection for the post-migration portion of the study occurred at the end of the first semester when participants might have been otherwise preoccupied, (e.g. final exams, etc.).

A third limitation of the study is that the questions used in the pre- and post-migration protocols were not piloted prior to either portion of the study. Both series of questions were based on previous qualitative studies completed by Black African international students; however, they were never piloted on groups identical to those used in the current study. Although the questions seem to have generated appropriate responses, a different line of questioning may have resulted in more explicit descriptions of stress, or somatic complaints. The best outcome would have been to test pilot each protocol with a focus group. The focus group for the pre-migration protocol would have occurred with students in Ghana. The focus group for the post-migration questions would have occurred with international students from Ghana already living in the United States.

A fourth limitation of the study is the procedure used for the individual interviews. If demographic information had been collected on paper prior to the start of the actual interview, this would have created more time to ask questions rather than to gather rudimentary information. The difference in how information was collected during the pre- and post-migration portions of the study is another limitation related to procedure. The post-migration portion was limited by fact that the correspondence was not interactive, (i.e. face-to-face or via telephone). Participant responses would likely have been more detailed if the researcher was able to probe or further explore answers, similar to how the individual interviews were conducted.

A second, post-migration investigation would also have provided more insight about each participant's experience. Another follow-up interview could occur one year after arrival in the United States. This would provide an in-depth examination of how each participant's attitudes and perceptions changed over time, while in the country of origin as well as the host

country. Furthermore, participants might be more willing to provide explicit incidents of stress if they have an ongoing relationship with the researcher – similar to an additional support system.

A fifth limitation of the study is the data analysis, or coding process used for the pre-migration interviews and post-migration email correspondence. This occurred after all data collection was complete, rather than during ongoing data collection. Some authors suggest that coding after data collection enhances chances for researcher fatigue, which could damage the robustness of the data and quality of analysis (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Also, the data analysis did not include a triangulation approach. Triangulation involves the use of three forms of data collection, to enhance the reliability of the data and strengthen the researcher's ideas (Guba, 1981). The current study used only two forms of data collection: individual interviews and email correspondence. A third form of data collection might have included a focus group with some of the participants prior to their departure, to compare experiences or exchange ideas among participants. This would be especially helpful, given the fact that this was a cross-cultural study and the researcher does not have the same cultural or language background as the participants. A focus group would allow an opportunity to clarify any cultural innuendos or misunderstandings that occurred during the individual interviews.

Future Research

Acculturation is a complex experience and is contingent upon different cultural and contextual elements (Sue & Chu, 2003). With this in mind, the researcher in the current study sought to understand five principle components of pre- and post-migration among an international student sample from Ghana: satisfaction with life prior to departure from the

country of origin, impressions of the United States prior to arrival and predominate influences, expectations of the United States and predominate influences, the amount and quality of information about discrimination in the United States prior to arrival, and awareness of culture-specific coping mechanisms to overcome challenges upon arrival in the United States.

The current study also investigated the claim that immigrants and international students act on the assumption that life can be better somewhere else, rather than in their country of origin. One drawback to this belief is that unfulfilled expectations can lead to disappointment, discouragement, or increased stress already embedded in the acculturation process. Another drawback to this belief is that exceeded expectations can lead to worry, confusion, or overwhelming feelings. The current study found that participants had relatively accurate and fair attitudes and perceptions about the United States and what their experiences would be. Perhaps, because the participants were highly-motivated, intelligent, and inquisitive students their expectations are consistent with their well-informed perspective.

The increasing presence of international students from Ghana living in the United States requires that counseling psychologists, academic advisors, and other mental health resources actively work to understand the experiences, perspective, and unique needs of this population. This includes ways in which to approach therapy, ways to maintain academic success, and ways to cultivate an academic and living environment that feels safe, secure, and comfortable. All of this requires professionals to be mindful of the culture and context from which students arrive, and to maintain an adequate level of cross-cultural competency.

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Appendix A

Pre-migration semi-structured interview protocol

1. Tell me about your decision to immigrate or relocate to the United States.
2. Do your family and close friends support your decision to immigrate or relocate to the United States?
3. How do you anticipate your life will be different upon arrival to the United States?
4. What do you like most about your native country and culture? What do you like least about your native country and culture?
5. What are you most looking forward to in the United States? What are you least looking forward to in the United States?
6. How involved are you in any religious group or denomination? Do you think this will change upon arrival to the United States?
7. What do you value most in life? Do you think this will change upon arrival to the United States?
8. Do you plan to return to live in your native country, after your time spent in the United States?
9. How would you describe your overall satisfaction with your life now?
10. How has the news and media influenced your perception of the United States?

Appendix B

Post-migration email correspondence protocol

Please respond to each question in at least 3-5 sentences:

1. Describe your experience with stress since your arrival to the United States. What things, (i.e. people, places, things, experiences, etc.) cause you the most stress and why?
2. Describe your experience with discrimination since your arrival to the United States. In what ways do you experience, (or perceive) that you are being discriminated against? How is this different than your prior experience(s) with discrimination in Ghana? Is there a particular place, situation, or type of person, (i.e. gender, race, ethnicity, age, status, etc.) who displays the most discrimination against you? Why do you think you are discriminated against in the United States? How does this make you feel, (i.e. threatened, angry, scared, confused, unhappy, sad, frustrated, etc.)?
3. What do you do to cope with stress and/or experiences with discrimination in the United States? Are these coping strategies helpful? Have you tried other strategies in addition to the strategies that you currently use? Are these the same coping strategies you would use if you were still living in Ghana? Why or why not?
4. Who or what are your primary support systems in the United States? Are these people or situations helpful to you? If they are unhelpful, why do you think that is? Do you ever wish that you had stronger support systems in the United States? Do you ever compare the social support available to you in the United States, with the support you had in Ghana?
5. Describe your community in the United States, (i.e. work, university, home, etc.). How involved are you with your new community? What prevents you from being more involved with your community? Do you enjoy your community? How does your new community compare to your prior community in Ghana?

Appendix C

Pre-migration code book

Each code is numbered and described below. Next to each statement made by the participant, write the number of the code that corresponds with the statement. Note: more than one code may apply to a single statement. If a series of consecutive statements are coded the same, you can bracket the entire sequence and write one number next to the entire text. Please feel free to write other notes in the margin as well. Don't over-analyze any of the statements – go with your first instinct. Remember, I have already reviewed each transcript multiple times – the objective is to make sure that your interpretation of each statement is the same, or similar to my original interpretations. If you get stuck on a certain part, make a note and we will discuss it later. Please do not make guess, or try to interpret anything the way that you think I would want you to interpret it – that will defeat the entire purpose.

I have included a Miscellaneous code number for statements you find that don't fit into any of the pre-determined codes. If you code a statement with this number, please indicate what your new interpretation is – otherwise, I will not understand what you mean.

1. Preparation

Description of ways participant plans prior to departure - i.e. read information materials, talk to others who have been there, arrange travel plans, spend time with people I won't see again in a long time, etc.

2. A dream come true

Description of aspirations, long-term motivation; something participant has been waiting a long time to accomplish/achieve, etc.

3. Values

Description of things that are important to participant - i.e. education, family, friends, religion/God, etc.

4. New Experiences

Description of things that participant thinks s/he will experience for the first time, excitement – i.e. things participant looks forward to doing/seeing; meeting new people, etc.

5. Frustration toward Ghana

Description of dissatisfaction – i.e. jobs, resources, education, etc.

6. Ambivalence

Description of uncertainty about going to the US

7. Responsibility

Description of obligation, discipline, etc. upon arrival in the US

8. Concerns about the US

Description of things participant worries about – i.e. food, weather, systems, people, etc.

9. Pride/Confidence

Description of confidence, independence, etc.

10. Negative impressions of the US

Description of things participant doesn't like about the US – i.e. negative perceptions

11. The influence of others/hearsay

Description of people/things who influence the way participant thinks about the US – i.e. media, friends, family

12. Coping

Description of ways that participant copes with stress or change – i.e. social support, religion/God, being assertive, etc.

13. Missing home

Description of how much participant will miss home

14. Unrealistic expectations

Description of things that participant wants to happen, but are really not possible

15. Specific Goals/Expectations

Description of specific reason or purpose for coming to the US

16. Lack of awareness about negative aspects of the US

Description of ignorance or denial that bad things occur in the US – i.e. discrimination, racism, etc.

17. Take a chance

Description of taking chances or taking a risk

18. Ghana is a nice place

Description of positive attributes about Ghana

19. Admiration of the US

Description of positive attributes about US

20. Optimism

Description of positive outlook on participant's upcoming travel and experiences

21. Expectations

Description of other people's expectations of participant, or the expectations participant has for him/herself

22. People will like me

Description that people will like participant and that participant will be treated well

23. Unable to predict the future

Description that participant is really unable to predict what will happen to him/her in the US

24. Good things will happen to me in the future

Description of anticipation that good things will happen in the future to the participant as a result of his/her time spent in the US

25. The US is better than Ghana

Description that the US is perfect, and actually better than Ghana

26. Miscellaneous

Appendix D

Post-migration code book

Each code is numbered and described below. Next to each statement made by the participant, write the number of the code that corresponds with the statement. Note: more than one code may apply to a single statement. If a series of consecutive statements are coded the same, you can bracket the entire sequence and write one number next to the entire text. Please feel free to write other notes in the margin as well. Don't over-analyze any of the statements – go with your first instinct. Remember, I have already reviewed each transcript multiple times – the objective is to make sure that your interpretation of each statement is the same, or similar to my original interpretations. If you get stuck on a certain part, make a note and we will discuss it later. Please do not make guess, or try to interpret anything the way that you think I would want you to interpret it – that will defeat the entire purpose.

I have included a Miscellaneous code number for statements you find that don't fit into any of the pre-determined codes. If you code a statement with this number, please indicate what your new interpretation is – otherwise, I will not understand what you mean.

1. Resources Available

I have access to things I need

2. I miss home

I miss home, family, friends, etc.

3. No social participation

I do not have friends here, I am not involved in social activities, etc.

4. I enjoy what I do

I am happy with how I spend my time

5. The US is nice

The US is a nice place, etc.

6. People are nice to me – no experience with discrimination

No experience with discrimination, I am treated well here

7. Stressors

Things that cause me stress

8. Support Systems

People who support me in my life in the US

9. Initial period was most difficult

The toughest time was the worst, but now I am used to it

10. Negative observations of the US

Things I have witnessed that I do not like about the US

11. America and Americans are different than what I know in Ghana

People and customs are really different here, compared to Ghana

12. I am seen as something I am not

People think of me in a way that I do not agree – i.e. I am African, not African American

13. Bad feelings

Sometimes I feel badly

14. Coping Strategies

Ways that I cope with stress

15. Focused/Specific Goal and objective

I have a specific reason for staying in the US

16. Miscellaneous

Vita

NICOLE L. FISCHER
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EDUCATION

Ph.D. Candidate, Counseling Psychology

Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
APA-approved program (August 2012 anticipated completion)

M.S., Counseling Psychology

Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
December 2009

B.A., Psychology

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA
May 2004

CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

Advanced Practicum Group Therapist

August 2010-Present

Virginia Commonwealth University, University Counseling Services
Richmond, VA

Serve as a group therapy leader at a university counseling center. Provide ongoing, (12 months) group therapy for a general process psychotherapy group along with a senior staff psychologist. Weekly sessions last 1.5 hours, and clients include undergraduate and graduate students. Utilize interpersonal and psychodynamic theory, as well as some cognitive behavioral approaches. Complete pre-group interviews, termination notes, transfer of clients, and other case management tasks. Receive ongoing instruction and support to enhance group leadership skills, awareness of diversity, and ability to apply group interventions/techniques based on theory and/or research. Maintain weekly session notes and case conceptualizations for clients, attend weekly group supervision with a team of psychology interns and senior staff psychologists, and receive weekly supervision from a licensed clinical psychologist.
Supervisor: Janice H. Altman, Ph.D.

Staff Therapist

July 2010-Present

University of Virginia Center for Addiction Research and Education (UVACARE)
University of Virginia, Department of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences

Charlottesville, VA

Serve as an individual and group therapist at an outpatient medical facility and research program. Provide brief, (8-12 weekly sessions) cognitive behavioral therapy utilizing a harm-reduction approach to substance abuse disorders, (e.g. alcohol, cocaine, or marijuana). Clients include adults and college-age students. Also conduct individual screening assessments to rule-out major psychological disturbance or co-morbidity. Assess adherence to research objectives, (i.e. medication and harm reduction). Maintain weekly session notes and case conceptualizations for each client, attend weekly multi-disciplinary team meetings, consult with medical staff, and receive weekly supervision from a licensed clinical psychologist.

Supervisor: J. Kim Penberthy, Ph.D.

Group Therapist

September 2010-December 2010

Body Acceptance Intervention

Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Psychology

Richmond, VA

Serve as a group therapy leader part of an independent research study. Provide a series of 3-week group interventions along with a co-leader. Clients include female, college-age students who display current, disordered eating behaviors. Dissonance-based body acceptance intervention consists of verbal, written, and behavioral exercises to encourage clients to critique thin, ideal body types for women. Maintain weekly session notes and receive weekly supervision from a licensed clinical psychologist.

Supervisor: Suzanne Mazzeo, Ph.D.

Assessment Clinician

April 2010-December 2010

Associated Behavioral Outcomes and Developmental Experts of Virginia, Inc. (VABODE)

Richmond, VA

Serve as an assessment clinician at a community mental health agency. Administer, score, and interpret assessment batteries, (i.e. personality, intellectual, and cognitive measures) for adolescents and adults from low-income, minority households. Write integrated assessment reports including clinical interview, conceptualization, diagnosis, and treatment plans. Consult with case manager or counselor for treatment updates and/or ongoing assessments for clients. Receive supervision from a licensed clinical psychologist.

Supervisor: Rebecca McCracken, Ph.D.

Behavior Specialist

January 2009-December 2010

Teaching, Encouragement, Exercise, Nutrition, and Support Program (TEENS)

Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Pediatrics

Richmond, VA

Serve as an individual therapist at an outpatient medical facility and research program. Provide long-term, (24 months) individual and family behavioral support for obese adolescents and parents. Clients are participants in a healthy weight management program from low-income, minority households. Utilize interpersonal theory and motivational interviewing techniques to assist clients with establishing nutrition, exercise, and family support goals during bi-weekly meetings. Also conduct initial intake assessments. Assess adherence to research objectives, (i.e. regular exercise and healthy diet). Maintain weekly session notes and case conceptualizations for each client, attend weekly multi-disciplinary team meetings, consult with medical staff and exercise specialists, and receive weekly supervision from a licensed clinical psychologist.

Supervisor: Marilyn Stern, Ph.D.

Practicum Therapist

August 2009-August 2010

Virginia Commonwealth University, University Counseling Services

Richmond, VA

Served as an individual therapist at a university counseling center. Provided brief, (6-12 sessions) and long-term, (12+sessions) individual therapy for undergraduate and graduate students on a weekly basis. Utilized interpersonal, psychodynamic, and cognitive behavioral theories and techniques focusing on axis I disorders, adjustment issues, and developmental issues. Also completed weekly intake assessments. Received ongoing training and instruction as a generalist in counseling psychology in applying a theoretical orientation, treatment planning, and awareness of diversity. Maintained weekly session notes and case conceptualizations for each client, attended weekly group supervision and multi-disciplinary case consultation meetings, and received weekly individual supervision from a psychology intern in conjunction with a licensed clinical psychologist.

Supervisor: Janice H. Altman, Ph.D.; Peter Battista, Psy.D.

Practicum Supervisor

January 2010-May 2010

Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Psychology

Richmond, VA

Served as a practicum supervisor for two, first-year doctoral students enrolled in a helping skills course. Provided knowledge and mentoring during weekly supervision meetings on basic therapeutic skills including active listening, reflecting, Socratic questioning, etc., and tasks including how to complete an intake assessment, how to establish a therapeutic alliance, and how to terminate with a client. Reviewed videotapes of therapy sessions and provided feedback on client conceptualization and interactions between student therapist and client. Received supervision from a licensed clinical psychologist.

Supervisor: Melanie K. Bean, Ph.D.

Process Observer

August 2009-May 2010

Virginia Commonwealth University, University Counseling Services

Richmond, VA

Served as a non-speaking group therapy leader at a university counseling center. Worked alongside a multi-disciplinary team including senior staff psychologist, psychology intern, and psychiatry resident. Attended weekly, 1.5 hour group therapy sessions for general process psychotherapy group for undergraduate and graduate students and completed process notes during each session. Received instruction and support for the task of observing, summarizing group dynamics, and identifying themes in a concise manner during group therapy sessions. Attended weekly group supervision with a team of psychology interns and senior staff psychologists, and received weekly individual supervision from a licensed clinical psychologist.

Supervisor: Alena C. Hampton, Ph.D.

Practicum Therapist

January 2009-May 2009

January 2010-May 2010

McShin Foundation

Richmond, VA

Served as an individual and group therapist at a non-profit, full service outpatient authentic recovery community organization. Provided brief, (6-10 sessions) individual and group therapy on a weekly basis. Clients included adult females only. Utilized interpersonal, psychodynamic,

and cognitive behavioral theories and techniques focusing on substance abuse disorders, (i.e. alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, heroine, etc.) co-morbid axis I and II diagnoses, and antisocial behaviors. Maintained weekly session notes and case conceptualizations for each client, and received weekly supervision from a licensed clinical psychologist.

Supervisor: Micah L. McCreary, Ph.D.

Staff Therapist

May 2008-August 2009

Center for Psychological Services and Development

Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Psychology

Richmond, VA

Served as an individual therapist and assessment clinician at a departmental training clinic. Provided brief, (6-12 sessions) and long-term, (12+sessions) individual therapy for adults and college-age students. Utilized interpersonal, psychodynamic, and cognitive behavioral theory and techniques focusing on axis I and axis II diagnoses, adjustment issues, developmental issues, family dynamics, and vocational counseling. Also completed intake assessments. Administered, scored, and interpreted assessment batteries, (i.e. personality, intellectual, cognitive, and career measures) for adults. Wrote integrated reports including clinical interview, conceptualization, diagnosis, and treatment plans. Maintained weekly session notes, case conceptualizations, and treatment update reports for each client. Attended weekly group supervision and multi-disciplinary meetings, and received weekly individual supervision from a licensed clinical psychologist.

Supervisors: Micah L. McCreary, Ph.D.; Marilyn Stern, Ph.D.; Jean E. Corcoran, Ph.D.; Jennifer M. Lumpkin, Psy.D.

TEACHING POSITIONS

Adjunct Lecturer

January 2011-May 2011

January 2010-May 2011

Introduction to African American Studies Course

Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of African American Studies

Richmond, VA

Course content included psychological, sociological, historical, and political perspectives and experiences of African Americans and people throughout the African Diaspora. Prepared all lectures, PowerPoint presentations, reading materials, (e.g. text and academic journals) and exams for weekly, 3-hour class lecture. Developed syllabus including multimedia materials, in-class activities, discussion topics, and graded assignments. Proctored all in-class exams. Graded all student assignments, including essays, term papers, exams, and formal presentations. Maintained online grade book for all course material. Provided weekly, 2-hour structured office hours to assist students with related coursework and exam preparation. Class enrollment included approximately 50 students.

Teaching Assistant

January 2011-May 2011

Health Psychology Course

Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Psychology

Richmond, VA

Course content included the integration of theoretical, research and applied issues related to the principles and techniques of psychology and the analysis of psychological/behavioral factors contributing to physical illness, injury, treatment and recovery. Assist with proctoring all exams. Assisted with small group activities and independent assignments during class meetings. Graded

all student assignments including in-class written activities, essays, term papers, and exams. Maintained online grade book for all course material. Provided weekly, 2-hour structured office hours to assist students with related coursework and exam preparation. Class enrollment included approximately 100 students.

Teaching Assistant

January 2011-May 2011

Personality Psychology Course

Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Psychology
Richmond, VA

Course content included personal development, growth, and the scientific study of personality. Assisted with proctoring all exams. Graded all student assignments including in-class written activities, essays, term papers, and exams. Maintained online grade book for all course material. Provided weekly, 2-hour structured office hours to assist students with related coursework and exam preparation. Class enrollment included approximately 100 students.

Teaching Assistant

January 2011-May 2011

Lifespan Development Course

Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Psychology
Richmond, VA

Course content included the science of human development, from infancy to death. Assisted with proctoring all exams. Assisted with small group activities and independent assignments during class meetings. Graded all student assignments including in-class written activities, essays, term papers, and exams. Maintained online grade book for all course material. Provided weekly, 2-hour structured office hours to assist students with related coursework and exam preparation. Class enrollment included approximately 100 students.

Teaching Assistant

August 2010-December 2010

Adolescent Development Course

Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Psychology
Richmond, VA

Course content included the science of adolescent development including basic concepts and principles of physical, cognitive, and social development at this stage of life and into emerging adulthood. Attended weekly, 3-hour class lecture. Assisted with proctoring all exams. Assisted with small group activities and independent assignments during class meetings. Graded all student assignments including in-class written activities, essays, term papers, and exams. Maintained online grade book for all course material. Provided weekly, 2-hour structured office hours to assist students with related coursework and exam preparation. Class enrollment included approximately 100 students.

Teaching Assistant

August 2010-December 2010

Psychology of the Abnormal Course

Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Psychology
Richmond, VA

Course content included terminology and basic concepts of the science and clinical field of abnormal psychology including the history of psychopathology, major theories, and behavior clusters and specific diagnoses. Attended weekly, 3-hour class lecture. Assisted with proctoring all exams. Assisted with small group activities and independent assignments during class meetings. Graded all student assignments including in-class written activities, term papers, and

exams. Maintained online grade book for all course material. Provided weekly, 2-hour structured office hours to assist students with related coursework and exam preparation. Class enrollment included approximately 200 students.

Teaching Assistant

August 2009-May 2010

Introduction to Psychology Course

Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Psychology

Richmond, VA

Course content included basic understanding of the science and practice of psychology including history, biology, human development, cognition, etc. Attended weekly, 3-hour class lecture.

Assisted with proctoring all exams. Graded all student assignments including essays and exams. Maintained online grade book for all course material. Provided weekly, 2-hour structured office hours to assist students with related coursework and exam preparation. Class enrollment included approximately 300 students.

Lab Instructor

May 2009-August 2009

Experimental Methods in Psychology Course

Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Psychology

Richmond, VA

Course content included research methods, experimental design, statistics, and formal research writing. Prepared all lectures, PowerPoint presentations, reading materials, and independent assignments for daily, 2-hour class lecture. Developed syllabus including in-class activities, discussion topics, and graded assignments. Graded all student assignments including daily written activities, term papers, and formal presentations. Supervised group projects including planning, online research, participant recruitment, and execution of original experiments; APA-formatted research papers; and formal presentations. Maintained online grade book for all course material. Provided scheduled appointments to assist students with related coursework. Course enrollment included approximately 25 students.

PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS

Program Assistant

August 2009-July 2010

Ghana Study Abroad Program

Virginia Commonwealth University, Departments of African American Studies & Psychology

Accra, Ghana (West Africa)

Coordinated academic curriculum, travel itinerary, budget, and recruitment for undergraduate international study and research program in Accra, Ghana. Developed and facilitated pre-departure meetings including brief lectures on basic research design, methods, and statistics in psychology; cross-cultural psychology; and multicultural awareness within a West African context. Supervised group projects including planning, online research, participant recruitment, and execution of original experiments; and formal presentations. Graded student assignments and maintained online grade book for all academic materials. Organized spending and travel budget upon return.

Academic Advisor

August 2008-May 2009

Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Psychology

Richmond, VA

Assisted and advised undergraduate Psychology majors, (traditional- and non-traditional-age students) with course scheduling, academic planning, and graduate school admissions process. Wrote recommendation letters for Financial Aid and other merit scholarships. Provided administrative assistance to Associate Director of Academic Operations with paper files, email correspondence, and telephone calls. Assisted with graduation applications and graduation ceremonies during the months of December, May, and August.

Lead Teacher

May 2008-August 2008

I Must Pause, Pray, Analyze, Chill, and Take Action Program (IMPPACT)

Spring Creek Baptist Church

Midlothian, VA

Planned and facilitated recreational activities and academic programs for summer enrichment program tailored to school-aged children with a variety of emotional and conduct disorders. Supervised classroom assistants with academic and emotional interventions. Assisted Youth Programs Coordinator with curriculum development, daily scheduling, and budget.

Community Intervention Specialist

September 2004-June 2006

Girls' Education and Empowerment Program (GEE)

United States Peace Corps

Kpalime, Togo (West Africa)

Developed and coordinated community programs in collaboration with Togolese Ministry of Education and local school administrators to encourage awareness of women and girls in leadership positions. Taught secondary school courses in Civic Education, (i.e. social policy), English language and grammar, Information Technology, (i.e. typing and Microsoft Office), reproductive health, and HIV/AIDS awareness. Adapted Life Skills curriculum for academic setting (i.e. helping skills, cooperative learning, social service, and community engagement). Facilitated parent-teacher alliances and student-teacher alliances to discuss girls and women in education. Developed and supervised summer enrichment program for school-aged children including a full academic curriculum. Organized gender equity and anti-domestic violence campaigns among community groups and school-aged children. Position required fluent command of French language.

LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE ACTIVITIES

Graduate Student Mentor

August 2008-May 2009

Graduate School Mentorship Program

Virginia Commonwealth University

Richmond, VA

Advised undergraduate student on academic performance and professional development during weekly, 2-hour meetings. Assisted with identifying academic interests, completing graduate school applications, and encouraging the development of skills that apply to both academic and professional settings. Purpose of the program was to expose undergraduate students to the graduate experience as they make decisions about post-baccalaureate study and transition from undergraduate to graduate student status. Program also provided opportunity to develop mentoring skills. Attended quarterly meetings on leadership development with Associate Dean of the Graduate School.

Group Facilitator

August 2008-December 2008

International Students' Support Group
Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, VA

Facilitated weekly, 1.5 hour meetings with undergraduate and graduate international students. Discussed cross-cultural concerns, (i.e. homesickness, coping strategies, and social isolation); current events and global news; and academic issues, (i.e. stress and time management).

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Graduate Research Assistant January 2010-May 2011
Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of African American Studies
Richmond, VA

Collaborate with faculty advisor to examine cultural differences in emotion-focused and somatic-focused awareness between American students and Ghanaian students. Identify culture-specific coping strategies among non-clinical populations. Complete comprehensive literature reviews and evaluation of scales used in cross-cultural research. Attend weekly lab meetings and supervise undergraduate students. Write and submit manuscripts for publication.
Supervisor: Vivian Dzokoto, Ph.D.

Graduate Research Assistant August 2008-May 2011
Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Psychology
Richmond, VA

Collaborate with faculty advisor to examine race-related stress and heart rate variability among African American undergraduate students and family members. Complete comprehensive literature reviews. Attend weekly lab meetings and supervise undergraduate students. Write and submit manuscripts for publication.
Supervisor: Shawn O. Utsey, Ph.D.

Research Coordinator August 2007-May 2008
Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Psychology
Richmond, VA

Collaborated with faculty advisor to examine race-related stress and heart rate variability among African American undergraduate students and family members. Coordinated administrative tasks including participant recruitment and scheduling, data collection with heart rate monitors, and data input. Attended weekly lab meetings and supervised undergraduate students. Wrote and submitted manuscripts for publication.
Supervisor: Shawn O. Utsey, Ph.D.

PUBLICATIONS

Utsey, S.O., Fischer, N.L., & Belvet, B. (2009). Assessing African-Centered (Africentric) psychological constructs: A Review of Existing Instrumentation. In H. Neville, B. Tynes, & S. Utsey (eds.), *Handbook of African American Psychology*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Utsey, S.O., Belvet, B., & Fischer, N.L. (2008). Culture and Worldview in Counseling and Psychotherapy: Recommended Approaches for Working Persons from Diverse Socio-Cultural Backgrounds. In Leach, M.M., & Aten, J. (Eds.), *Culture and the therapeutic*

process: A guide for mental health professionals. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Utsey, S.O., Hook, J.N., Belvet, B., & Fischer, N.L. (2008). Influence of cultural orientation, ego resilience and optimism on the subjective well-being of African Americans. *Journal of Positive Psychology*. 3(3), 202-210.

Utsey, S.O., Belvet, B.P, Hubbard, R.R., Fischer, N.L., Opare-Henaku, A., & Gladney, L. (in progress). Development and Validation of the Prolonged Activation and Anticipatory Race-Related Stress Scale.

Dzokoto, V.A., Gurgabious, M., & Fischer, N.L. (in progress). Exploring Embodiment in Euro-Americans and Ghanaians.

PRESENTATIONS

Hubbard, R.R. & Fischer, N.L. (2011, February). International Black Communities: Conceptual and Methodological Considerations. Poster presentation presented at the 2008 Winter Roundtable on Cross-Cultural Psychology. Columbia University Teachers College, New York, NY.

Fischer, N.L., Belvet, B., Hook, J.N., & Utsey, S.O. (2008, March). Convergence between scores on the Index of Race-Related Stress-Brief Version and heart rate variability in African Americans. Poster presented at the 2008 International Counseling Psychology Conference. Chicago, IL.

Belvet, B., Fischer, N.L., Stanard, P., Hook, J.N. & Utsey, S.O. (2008, March). Heart rate variability, trauma symptom expression, and psychological distress in African Americans with traumatic spinal cord injury. Poster presented at the 2008 International Counseling Psychology Conference. Chicago, IL.

Fischer, N.L., Belvet, B., Hook, J.N., Jones, R., & Utsey, S.O. (2008, February). Heart rate variability, trauma symptom expression, and psychological distress in African Americans with traumatic spinal cord injury: A preliminary study. Poster presentation presented at the 2008 Winter Roundtable on Cross-Cultural Psychology. Columbia University Teachers College, New York, NY.

Belvet, B., Fischer, N.L., Hook, J.N. & Utsey, S.O. (2008, February). Culture-specific coping behaviors and physiological predictors of stress vulnerability in African Americans: Implications for counseling interventions. Poster presentation presented at the 2008 Winter Roundtable on Cross-Cultural Psychology. Columbia University Teachers College, New York, NY.

GUEST LECTURES

Fischer, N.L. (2011, April). 'Psychoneuroimmunology, AIDS, Cancer, and Arthritis.' Health Psychology. Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA.

Fischer, N.L. (2011, February). 'Evolutionary Psychology.' Personality Psychology. Virginia

Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA.

Fischer, N.L. (2011, January). 'Health Behaviors and the Health Belief Model.' Health Psychology. Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA.

Fischer, N.L. (2010, September). 'Introduction to West African History.' Introduction to African American Studies. Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA.

Fischer, N.L. (2010, February). 'The Effects of Trauma in the Development of the Brain and how to Help Children and Adolescents Resolve Trauma.' Commonwealth Catholic Charities. Richmond, VA.

Fischer, N.L. (2010, April). 'Mediating and Moderating Effects of Acculturation on Life Satisfaction among West African Immigrants in the United States.' Psychology of African Americans. Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Society for the Advancement of Psychology, Student Member 2011-present

Association of Black Psychologists, Student Member, 2009-present

American Psychological Association, Student Member, 2008-present

American Counseling Association, Student Member, 2008-present