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BLACK AFRICAN INTERNATIONAL ADULT STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES
IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

A Dissertation in Adult Education

By

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Abstract

Making the decision to attend higher educational institutions in the United States is a major life event that affects non-traditional-age, adult international students. Much has been written on international students in psychology and sociology but hardly any literature exists addressing *non-traditional-age* or *adult* international students per se. This lack of literature on adult international learners in adult and higher education is an indication that this population of learners and their contributions to higher education has been overlooked. Even more lacking are literature addressing Black African adult international students.

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of adjusting to U.S. culture among non-traditional-age, adult Black African international students while attending predominantly White higher education institutions. This study explored how the role of race as well as cultural background informs their experiences as Black African adult international students, thus distinguishing them from other international students. In order to explore the lived experiences of these students, a qualitative research method drawing largely on heuristic phenomenology as well as insights from critical race theory as applied to research was employed. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants for this study and in-depth personal interviews as well as a focus group interview were the primary means of data collection.

The theoretical framework for the study is drawn from three intersecting areas. Critical Race Theory and sociocultural theories drawing from John Ogbu,

Franz Fanon, and scholars from adult and higher education inform the educational aspects of this study. These theoretical approaches are relevant to the study since they explicitly attend to culture, ethnicity, race, class, and gender that affect adult Black African international students in the U.S. system of higher education.

Given the emphasis on international students' adjustment, Jandt's (2004) acculturation model also informs this study

Five themes emerged from this research that constituted the experiences of Black African international adult students. First, the perceived motivations that influenced Black African adult international students to study in the United States are highlighted to give background to the study. The second set of findings focus on the challenges encountered by participants as a result of facing a new educational system. The third set of findings focus more specifically on participants' growing awareness of race, while the fourth set deal with the realities of being in a new culture. The last set of findings center on post-arrival experiences in the United States' educational journey.

The study provides key implications for adult education and also recommendations for faculty and higher education administration working with Black African adult international students on American university campuses.

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DEDICATION

The following document is dedicated to:

The Glory of God.

“O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago.”

(Isaiah 25:1).

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Making the decision to attend a foreign higher educational institution is a major life event that often occurs with very little knowledge and understanding of the complex nature of higher education life. For international students in the United States, the transition to a foreign culture, social changes, and a new educational system can be overwhelming. Perhaps one of the most unsettling aspects of this transition is the need to deal with a degree of cultural, social, and educational changes for the first time. For example, some of the changes international students in the U.S. face include encountering a different societal value system, unusual food, gender role adjustments, separation from family and friends, loss of social status and power (Abe, Talbot & Geelhoed, 1998; Lacina, 2002). In addition being considered a “minority” (and in some cases, becoming acutely aware of one’s skin color), having difficulty understanding the American accent, being unmarketable for the level of employment one was previously accustomed are issues for many in coming to a new culture (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Molestine, 1995). For those adults enrolled in higher education institutions being expected to function academically amidst unfamiliar teaching and learning styles, dealing with a generational gap between oneself and traditional-aged students, sensing that others perceive one as inferior, and having a general sense within and without the classroom that one does not fit in are factors that often affect international students.

As these changes suggest, this transition is even more overwhelming for non-traditional age adult international students whose experiences are different from those younger traditional-age students (Graham & Donaldson, 1999; Kasworm, 2003; Senter & Senter, 1998). The term *non-traditional student* has historically been used to describe a group of students who do not enter college immediately after high school graduation. Some scholars define them by age for example, non-traditional-age students are those students over 25 years old (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Edwards & Person, 1997; Graham & Donaldson, 1999; Kasworm, 2003; Sissel, Hansman, & Kaswaorm, 2001; Senter & Senter, 1998) while others define non-traditional students by the subcategories they represent: married, divorced, widowed, raising children, working or unemployed, retired, commuter or part-time students (Kinsella, 1998; Rogers & Gottlieb, 1999). On the other hand, traditional students are defined as students who enroll in college when they are under 19 years of age, and do so directly upon high school graduation, on a full time basis (Christie & Hutcheson, 2003; Edwards & Person, 1997). More recently within the adult education literature, students over 25 years of age are generally referred to more as “adult students” (Donaldson, 1999; Graham & Donaldson, 1999; Kasworm, 2003, 2005; Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001). For simplicity, this will be the term that is predominantly used throughout this dissertation.

Generally, international graduate students (often described as nontraditional adult learners) have been an active part of graduate education in the

United States. (Brown, 2005) yet little is actually known about how these students adjust or what contributes to their academic success in U.S. postsecondary institutions (Walker, 2000). What influences affect the success of international students studying in the United States? All international students who come to the United States to study come from a specific context and for particular reasons, and experience particular effects of being here that affect their adjustment. In order to provide context to begin to explore adjustment issues and as a lead-in to explaining the purpose of this study, I begin by sharing my own history and experience as an example of a Black non-traditional age adult international student from Africa attending a U.S. college.

Personal History as an International Student

My desire to pursue higher education forced me to leave my family and my social network in my homeland, Kenya, and move to the United States in 1987, as the U.S. has long been an educational beacon to many international students. In Kenya, at that time, there were only three public universities serving 25 million people and the chances of getting admitted to any one of them were very slim. The universities admitted only a small fraction of recent high school graduates while the majority of graduates attended two-year colleges and other vocational institutions. Therefore, the hope of my being admitted to a four-year college as a 32 year old, non-traditional age adult student was slim.

Kenya won its independence from Britain in 1963. Two- year colleges and vocational institutions were designed by the newly formed government for the

primary purpose of training nationals to take over the positions that were previously held by the British colonists. Another factor associated with the creation of two- year colleges in Kenya was poverty. As Kenyans embarked on building their new nation, the need for education became paramount. Many families realized that in order to escape generational poverty, educating the oldest son or daughter was critical to the survival of the family. The oldest son or daughter would assume the responsibility of educating the rest of his/her siblings as well as supporting the family. Such was my experience, as the oldest son, when I graduated from high school.

Upon completion of my two-year teacher's college program at age 23, I was hired by the Nakuru Municipal Council as a primary school teacher (the equivalent to elementary school in the United States). My ambitious spirit pushed me to pursue an advanced diploma outside formal educational setting, and within the two years I passed the Form Six the Kenya Advanced Certificate of Examination, reflecting formal higher education studies. Subsequently, I was appointed as the deputy headmaster of a primary school. A year later I was promoted to the position of headmaster (principal) at the age of 27. I was in teaching profession for 10 years prior to my coming to the United States.

Despite what to many was a successful career in teaching, I had a lingering hunger to further my education and as a result, I started looking for colleges and universities in the United States. In 1987, at the age of 32, I was admitted to a predominantly white educational institution in central Pennsylvania.

In August of that year, I left Kenya for Pennsylvania, leaving my wife and four children behind. Like many other international students, I encountered a mass of problems: culture shock, language barriers, homesickness, loneliness, social identity crisis, financial difficulties, as well as some experiences of racism and other generalized struggles in adjusting to the U.S. culture and its higher education system. Even worse than traditional-age international students, I experienced the shame of being in classes and sharing a room in one of the students' residence halls with comparatively very young students, performing jobs on campus that were substandard compared with my previous job responsibilities in Kenya, adjusting to imposed curfews (among other on-campus residents' rules) and basically being treated like a high school student by professors and college staff. All this contributed to the loss of my self esteem. I became emotionally and psychologically unstable. Unfortunately during this time, the college was slow to recognize the needs of international students on their campus. Over time, with the support of other students, both international and American, my adjustment roller-coaster experience subsided and I gradually grew accustomed to the higher education and social life in the U.S.

Although many years have passed since that adjustment period, my memories of that time remain alive. Events in my professional, personal, and academic life often trigger specific memories of the struggles in that adjustment period. For example, the day after my family and I moved into a new home, in a predominantly White neighborhood, we awoke to find three pumpkins on our

doorstep, each initialed with the letter “K”. While I recognize that potentially that could have happened to any Black family, it reminded me of the issues of race, attention to skin color, and the resulting discrimination that I felt for the first time when I came to the U.S. as an international student. As I interact with international students now in my day-to-day life, I recognize their struggles with the transition. Hearing the experiences they go through in their educational institutions, my passion and commitment to international students and the education of adult learners in particular leads me to my research interest: to explore the lived experiences of Black African adult international students in predominantly white higher educational institutions in the United States.

Purpose of the Research

Studying abroad has a long history in higher education. Students from under-developed countries seek opportunities to study abroad in order to acquire new knowledge and techniques. Those from well-developed countries also pursue studying abroad, gaining cross-cultural learning experiences for the purpose of individual growth and for the development of international understanding and global economy benefits. Among the many countries that attract international students, American universities have opened their doors for many decades. During the academic year 1998/1999, the international student enrollment in the U.S was 490, 933 (Institute of International Education [IIE], 1999). This enrollment figure was 14 times the international student enrollment during the 1954/1955 academic year. The overall number of foreign students

enrolled in colleges and universities in the U.S. for the academic year 2002/2003 was 6.4% more than that in the 1998/1999 academic year. By 2003, the number of Ph.D.s awarded to foreign students reached over 30% of all doctorate recipients in the U.S. (Alberts, Wulf, & Fineberg, 2003).

The presence of international students on American campuses is an economic benefit to the U.S. IIE (2003) reveals that funds from students contribute nearly \$12 billion dollars to the U.S. economy. The Department of Commerce (IIE, 2003) data describe U.S. higher education as the country's fifth largest service sector export.

The increasing number of international students on U.S. campuses has provoked higher education scholars to invest their knowledge in understanding international students' adjustment process both to American culture and also the education system. An extensive body of literature, both conceptual and empirical, has been written on the topic of acculturation and adjustment of *traditional-age* international students studying in the United States (Jacob & Greggo, 2001; Sadowsky, Lai, & Plake, 1991; Yeh, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2002). There is also a body of literature that deals with the issues adult students face in higher education overall (Donaldson, 1999; Graham & Donaldson, 1999; Kasworm, 2003, 2005; Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001). Sissel et al (2001) in particular have discussed what they refer to as "the politics of neglect" (p. 17) that have affected adult students in general, though they do not discuss how this plays out for adult international students. Furthermore, literature that specifically addresses adult

international students' adjustment and the challenges they experience in American educational institutions is scarce. Even more limited is the literature that addresses the Black African adult students' challenges.

One of the challenges for any international student is the significant turmoil upon relocating to the new country. This turmoil is a result of major culture shock that may be evidenced by increased stress and anxiety and can be the source of major conflict between the students and their family members. Upon their entry in the United States, loneliness and tension are inevitable experiences as these students seek ways to survive in the educational institutions (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). Thus, it is necessary for higher education administrators and educators to recognize the psychological trauma that these international students face and provide unbiased support while fostering the acculturation process.

Taking classes, completing term papers, and struggling to comply with immigration educational regulations are all important for international students studying in the United States. Adjustment both to educational settings and the general U.S. culture are critical as these students encounter various stages of transition and adaptation. All international students bring along with them their previous social and cultural experiences from their home countries. For Black African international students in the U.S. this includes values, language, ethnic distinctions, traditions, and practices that are often very different from what is the norm in the U.S. Discriminatory treatment based on race is another experience that Black African international students encounter, documented by Sodowsky

and Plake (1992) in their study. They found that Black African international students in the U.S. perceived more prejudice than did Asian and South American students. Similar findings were found by Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, and Utsey's study (2005), who reported some of the same discriminatory experiences of Black African international students. Further, they suggest that the experience of race related discrimination is foreign to many Black African international students since they have grown in a largely racially homogeneous environment (Constantine et al.). Since U.S. culture has significant influence on these students' academic experiences it is therefore necessary to integrate academic adjustment with sociocultural adjustment. The purpose of my study was to investigate the lived adjustment experiences of non-traditional-age Black African international students in higher education in the U.S.

Guiding Research Questions

In an effort to understand the lived experiences of these students, my study attempted to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the academic and cultural experiences faced by non-traditional-aged adult Black African international students on U.S. campuses?
- 2) What is the essence of the lived experience of adjusting to attending predominantly White U.S. higher educational institutions among adult Black African international students?

Theoretical Orientation

The primary purpose of my study was to explore the lived experiences of adjusting to U.S. culture among Black African international non-traditional-aged students while attending predominantly White higher academic institutions. There were two factors that guided the selection of my theoretical approach to understanding Black African international students' experiences in U.S. universities and colleges. First, considering the fact that my study focused on adult learners, recognition of those profiles and the literature by adult educators (Donaldson, 1999; Kasworm, 2003a,b; Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001) that identify and describe adult learners (such as age, prior experiences, adult roles and responsibilities, etc) were critical in determining the theoretical approach. Second, Black African students in the United States come from various African nations. The recognition that these students came from different political, historical, and cultural backgrounds was critical in selecting the theoretical approach. Two theoretical perspectives were appropriate in this study for understanding experiences faced by Black African international students. First, I drew from the Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens originally developed from legal theory based on the work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001), and second from sociocultural approaches specifically based on the work of adult educators including Alfred (2002), Guy (1999), Johnson-Bailey (2001), and Tisdell (1995, 2001). These theoretical approaches were relevant to my study since they explicitly attend to

culture, ethnicity, race, class, and gender that affect Black African international students in the U.S. system of higher education. Since the emphasis on international students' adjustment has been focused on the *process*, I therefore drew also from the acculturation model as described by Jandt (2004).

Within critical race theory are five themes that are integral components in the field of education (Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001), which can potentially offer understanding of the experiences of the Black African international students in predominantly White institutions of higher education. The themes include the following: 1) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; 2) challenges to the dominant ideology (Solorzano & Yosso (2001); 3) commitment to social justice (Solorzano, 1998); 4) the centrality of experiential knowledge (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001); and 5) race and racism in education can best be fully understood by incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

The second theoretical perspective for this study is sociocultural learning theory. Sociocultural learning theory has some common elements to CRT in that both perspectives address issues of race, class, gender, and power dynamics. Because these issues do not take place in a context-free environment, sociocultural learning theory takes a step further by recognizing the context component. Recognition that Black African international students come from different political, historical, and cultural backgrounds is critical in understanding the intersection of these factors in their adjustment process. Many adult educators

have discussed the importance of attending to cultural issues (Alfred, 2002; Guy, 1999, Johnson-Bailey, 2001; Tisdell, 2001). With limited exception (Alfred, 2002) most of these discussions have focused more on domestic minorities in the U.S. Specifically within the adult education literature, there has been relatively little attention to international students in higher education contexts. Because my study focused on Black African international students, a sociocultural learning perspective increased one's understanding of the experiences of these international students in the United States. The adjustment of international students from a sociocultural perspective considers and seeks to understand the cultural context within which students are in relation to others.

This study was based on the assumption that African international students undergo a process of intercultural adjustment, identified as culture shock (Jandt, 2004) when they arrive in the U.S. Jandt's (2004) framework on intercultural adjustment and acculturation is based on five stages, beginning with a honeymoon phase, and then proceeding through phases, until they are more fully integrated in the new culture. While these stages will be discussed further in chapter it is important to acknowledge that when international students undergo these stages of acculturation, there is a potential for substantial personal change through cultural adaptation and development of a bicultural identity and integration of new cultural aspects into one's previous self-concept.

Overview of the Research Methods and Design

My study explored the lived academic experiences of international adult Black African students within the higher educational institutions in the United States. The study utilized a qualitative research design with semi-structured interviews. This form of research methodology provided an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives and to describe how people interpret what they experience (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). In order to explore the lived experiences of these students, I employed a predominantly phenomenological heuristic approach, with some insights from other interpretive approaches to qualitative research that would better get at sociocultural elements in the study (Patton, 2002; Schwandt, 2000).

The study is primarily phenomenological because it explored Black African international adult students' lived experiences in a naturalistic way from various perspectives. Phenomenological approaches allow participants to have voice as they make sense of their own lived experiences (Merriam, 2002). I chose to use phenomenological inquiry as the primary approach in the research design for various reasons. First, Black African international adult students, like other international students, by necessity depart from their native environments and cultures, and they will inevitably undertake transitional experiences in their new academic and cultural settings. These lived experiences contain meaning worth discovering, and because meaning making is the primary purpose of phenomenology, a predominantly phenomenological approach was appropriate.

Secondly, because critical race theory focuses on the development of counternarrative, and phenomenology allows for the giving voice to a counternarrative that includes experiences of race as participants make meaning of their experiences as adult international students, a predominantly phenomenological method was appropriate.

The study is also a heuristic study (a form of phenomenological inquiry) because I was a participant in my own study as demonstrated in the introduction. The heuristic nature of my study was evident throughout my work because the study originated from my own lived experiences in United States' higher education. The heuristic nature is characterized by my personal interest in the phenomenon under study. In support of this concept is Patton (2002) who suggests that heuristic inquiry is the "combination of personal experience and intensity that yields an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon" (p. 107). In addition heuristic inquiry emphasizes connectedness and relationship in analyzing an experience (Patton). Thus, my personal interest to address the issues affecting Black African adult international students stemmed from my experiences and upon hearing and observing what other similar students go through in their universities and colleges in the United States.

Because phenomenology doesn't really account for social constructivist approaches to knowledge construction to any great degree, and because I wanted to have participants construct further knowledge together in the context of a focus group, a broader social constructionist approach to research as discussed by

Schwandt (2000) also informed the research design. This will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

Significance of the Study

The literature indicates that the experiences of traditional students differ significantly from those of non-traditional age adult students (Donaldson, 1999; Gibson, 2004; Jonas, Weimer & Herzer, 2001; Kasworm 2003b, 2005; Kenneth & Lopez, 2005; Rosenthal, Folse, Alleman, Boudreaux, Soper, & Von Bergen, 2000; Sissel et al, 2001; Waltman, 1997). However, the higher education administrators, instructors and scholars of international students have treated all international students as a homogeneous group. Sodowsky and Plake (1992) noted that the issues related to the adjustment of international students have been over-generalized. In addition, research on international students has put undergraduate and graduate students of all nationalities into one group, ignoring students' cultural differences and academic needs (Wang, 2004).

My study has added to the knowledge base regarding the adjustment of adult international students in the United States. In particular, it has shed considerable light on the cultural and academic experiences of adult Black African students' adjustment to the cultural environment in U.S. higher education settings. This study was intended to narrow the existing gap in the literature on Black African international students. The literature on Black African students in predominantly White institutions is minimal and most of the studies that have been done use questionnaires, which do not provide the depth needed to

understand students' experiences (Nebedum-Ezeh, 1997). My study followed a qualitative methodology, aiming at exploring non-traditional-age international Black African students' lived experiences of adjustment to the U.S. Scholars of international students have historically treated all international students as members of a homogenous group, failing to acknowledge cultural, ethnic, and racial differences among them. In exploring the lived experiences of adjustment to the U.S. among non-traditional-age Black African international students, how one's race and cultural background inform those experiences were identified, thus distinguishing those students from other international students. My study is also unique in that it focused on Black African adult international students who have been out of formal education for a number of years and are returning to gain an advanced degree to enhance their employment opportunities. Most international students, particularly graduate students, can be regarded as adult learners who present unique learning needs and characteristics by the principles and philosophy of adult learning theories (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Thus, my study also significantly contributes to the knowledge base and literature of the adult education discipline.

My study is significant for researchers, students, practitioners, and U.S higher education administrators. It has shed light on a new line of research on adult international students from African countries by examining academic and sociocultural lived experiences and reflections on their adjustment. The study therefore supports the need for higher and adult education to change the culture

and pedagogy to better meet the needs of international students. Foreign study and multiple issues related to it will remain an important phenomenon worldwide since students crossing borders from the Third World including African nations will continue to study abroad and will be a challenge to both sending and host countries (Altbach, 1991).

The education and training of America's culturally distinct populations, whether those historically recognized as minority groups, foreign-born residents, or new immigrants and temporary visitors (for example international students), has become a vital concern for the nation's well being (Wan, 2001). Much of the responsibility for the successful integration of America's minority population into mainstream society falls to the field of adult education. Lee and Sheared (2002) argue, "foreign-born adult learners' socioeconomic status, immigrant status, and how they operate within school are highly correlated with academic performance and success" (¶ 18). If this is so, then adult educators need to understand the impact of non-academic dimensions on the learning process of international adult learners.

Given the multiple problems international students encounter in American higher institutions of learning, it is critical for adult educators to create a culturally responsive learning environment (Lee & Sheared, 2002) if Black African international adult students are to succeed in U.S. education. Traditionally, the widespread application of the melting pot ideology based on western culture continues to be applied to people in general with a "one-size-fits-

all” notion. Adult educators must therefore counteract this by recognizing adult students bring with them a wealth of experiences that can be beneficial to others within the U.S. education system. Part of the significance of this study to the field of adult education is that it gives theoretical and practical insight into how adult educators might better respond to the adjustment needs of Black international students.

The literature in adult education highlights the need for adult educators to be more inclusive of diverse perspectives, histories, cultures and identities and to recognize how these contexts influence the dynamics of teaching and learning (Guy, 1999; Johnson-Bailey, 2001; Manglitz, 2003; Preece, 2001; Sheared & Sissel, 2001; Tisdell, 1995). If this is the case, then adult educators have an important role in helping international students succeed in their academic endeavor. In the long run, this approach provides international students with support as they move through the acculturation process.

The Limitations of the Study

My study focused on non-traditional-age Black African international students’ academic experiences in predominantly White institutions of higher education in the U.S. The sample subjects were students from African countries who at the time of college re-enrollment did not possess permanent residency status in the United States. Because of the scope of my study, there are several limitations:

1. My study utilized a qualitative methodology, and therefore it is not possible to generalize the findings to all other African populations. However, the findings are useful for understanding the experiences of nontraditional African international students in colleges and universities in the U.S.
2. Sample for this study included representatives (who are Black) of various African countries who presented cultural, ethnic, and tribal differences. Once again the findings cannot be generalized.
3. International students for this study were limited to those who had resided in the United States for at least 3 years at the time of the sample selection. The three year criteria allowed international students to adjust to the U.S. culture, including language proficiency and learning styles. In addition the time frame also allowed international students to adequately describe their cultural adjustment lived experiences. However, it could be a limitation that people will need to recall those experiences retrospectively.
4. Considering the focus of my research was on adult non- traditional African international students, the selected sample was limited to those African international students who had prior employment in their own countries for at least four years. This timeframe suggests that the individual is independently capable of making sound career decisions, including opting to return to college with the aim of furthering his or her career.

Assumptions

The following are the assumptions that were considered in my study:

- 1) Participants will be able to describe their experiences in the U.S higher education institutions in English.
- 2) African international students have various special concerns and needs in their interaction with a predominantly White education institutional environment.
- 3) There are certain factors or variables that affect international students' needs and concerns such as age, length of stay, language abilities, race, discrimination, and cultural differences. Relative to these variables, some students adjust better than others.
- 4) Given that the adjustment into a new culture is a transitional process that occurs over time (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998) it is assumed that African international students will undergo substantial personal change through cultural adaptation and development while in U.S. culture.

Definition of Terms

Acculturation: Refers to a gradual process of acquiring the values and some cultural characteristics of a host culture while at the same time maintaining one's personal cultural identity (Ladd & Ruby, 1999).

- Adaptation:* The process by which an individual incorporates the values and behaviors of the new culture (Farver, Narang & Bhadha, 2002)
- Adjustment:* Ability to cope with the new culture of the host country (Zhang & Rentz, 1996).
- Adult student:* A college student who is over the age of 25 years, financially independent, and possessing other life responsibilities such as family, community commitment and work etc.(Kasworm, 2003)
- Culture:* Culture represents the vast structure of behaviors, ideas, attitudes, values, habits, beliefs, customs, language, rituals, ceremonies and practices "peculiar" to a particular group of people (Isaacs & Benjamin, 1991). Culture provides them with: 1) a general design for living; 2) patterns for interpreting reality. Culture determines how we see the world and the way we see the world is reflected in our behavior.
- Discrimination:* Discrimination is the denial of institutional access on the basis of ethnic or racial identity (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998, p. 169).

<i>International student:</i>	International students who enter the country on F-1 or J-1 visas.
<i>Non-traditional-age adult international student:</i>	International undergraduate or graduate students over 25 years old, having had previous employment in their countries of origin, who are re-entering college with the goal of advancing their career after having at least one break in their education. (These phrases ‘Non-traditional age adult,’ ‘non-traditional age student,’ and ‘adult student’ are used interchangeably to mean the same).
<i>Prejudice:</i>	A negative feeling toward a group based on a faulty generalization (Bergen, 2001).
<i>Racism:</i>	Racism is a set of attitudes or ideas that targets racial and ethnic groups and denies them dignity, humanity, or equality. It is socially and historically constructed phenomena and as forms of the exercise of power that enter into complex relationships with the exercise of class and gender power. (Mojab, 2005)

Traditional-age students: College students who enroll in higher education under the age of 19 immediately following their graduation from high school.

The purpose of this first chapter was to provide introduction and background of my study. It outlined my intentions to make a contribution to the field of Adult Education literature regarding Black African adult international students' adjustment. The literature review presented in Chapter 2 explores the previous studies of international students' adjustment, adult students, and theoretical perspectives that guided my study. Chapter 3 presents research methodology and design and data analysis. Description and introduction of participants is presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 offers a summary of the findings, and chapter 6 provides implications for international students, faculty, and administrators in higher educational institutions in the U.S. It concludes with recommendations for future research on Black African adult international students.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses the literature that will guide my research study. The focus of my proposed study is to explore the lived experiences and adjustment issues of non-traditional-aged Black African international students who are currently enrolled or had previously attended predominantly White institutions of higher education in the United States. This chapter consists of a review based on literature that informs this study. This literature review is divided into two major sections. The first section discusses the theoretical framework of the study, while the second section reviews in depth some of the theory and major research studies on international students in higher education.

Theoretical Framework

Given that the study is about Black African international adult students in the United States, the theoretical framework of the study is grounded primarily in a combination of sociocultural learning theory, critical race theory, and the acculturation models of international students in higher education. But an exploration of the theoretical framework will make more sense by first providing an overview of the landscape of higher education in light of its growing diversity and increasing numbers of adult learners.

Cultural and Age Diversity in U.S. Higher Education

As Guy (1999) states “the United States has been, is, and will continue to be a culturally diverse society” (p. 6), and obviously there are some implications

of cultural diversity affecting higher education. But understanding how this relates to international students can best be understood in light of a brief consideration of the larger sociohistorical and cultural context.

Diversity in U.S. Society

The United States has been a land of diverse groups of immigrants since the 1800s (Davis-Willey, 2002). The earliest data recorded by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) indicate that about 8385 immigrants were recorded as arrivals in 1820, and between 1901 and 1910 the number had increased to almost 9 million (Yost & Lukas, 2002). Recent INS data show that from 1991 to 1998 an average of 950,634 immigrants were arriving and or adjusting their temporary status to permanent resident status each year (Yost & Lukas, 2002).

The United States is still undergoing a major demographic transformation in racial and ethnic populations. In 2001, The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS) indicated that in 1990, 23% of adults and 31% of children in the U.S. were from racial and ethnic minority groups, and in the year 2000, 30% of the U.S. population was from racial and ethnic groups. In 25 years, it is projected that about 40% of adults and 48% of children in the United States will be from racial and ethnic minority groups (USDHHS, 2001). These demographic shifts show that the population is changing from one that is predominantly white to more heterogeneous with significant proportions from racial and ethnic minority groups (Guy, 1999). These changes in the composition

of the U.S. population mean that the traditionally accepted Eurocentric cultural values, traditions, and practices will increasingly be subject to question and challenge. According to Guy (1999) the process is already in progress.

For many years the United States embraced and operated on a “melting pot” ideology which was predicated on the assumption that the end result for ethnic groups was that they would become assimilated into the dominant mainstream American culture (Guy, 1999). Unfortunately, this concept did not work completely, or worked at personal cost of those coming to the United States because they were expected to assimilate. As a result, cultural pluralism as a concept which described the American society as multiethnic in character (Hunt, Bell, Wei & Ingle, 1992), developed among those who saw the limitations of the melting pot idea. Pluralism is a term used to refer to groups of people that share a similar cultural identity across groups. The pluralism concept promotes a sense of one’s cultural identity but the drawback of pluralism is its ignorance in being open to understanding and appreciating other cultures (Boyle-Baise, 1999). On the other hand, cultural diversity not only acknowledges the multiethnic nature of the American society, but also strongly advocates for acceptance of cultural differences. Through recent and emerging trends there has been a major shift from the pluralism approach to one of cultural diversity. Such trends are evident in the workforce for example, regarding the aging population. The Census Bureau predicts that those in the U.S. population over the age of 65 (currently 13% of the population) will rise to 23% of the population by 2100 (Little & Triest, 2002).

Women make up nearly half of the U.S. workforce and yet they experience discrimination in terms of position, pay and promotion. Individuals who are gay or lesbian comprise 10% of the population and 18% of the general population are non-white (Bierema, 2002).

The most striking of the recent trends in the demographic shift is the increase of the immigrant population in the U.S. The Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) (Camarota, 2002) defines 'immigrants' as foreign-born people residing in the U.S. either legally or illegally. According to a CIS 2002 report, immigrants accounted for about 11.5% of the total U.S. population, the highest percentage in 70 years (Camarota). This figure implies that there are 1.5 million immigrants entering the country each year. The composition of this immigrant group has changed from predominantly European to those of Latino and Asian descent (Bierema, 2002). In fact the CIS reported that those from Mexico accounted for 30% of all immigrants to the U.S. in 2002 (Camarota, 2002). This immigration wave is being felt in the U.S. higher educational institutions and it is no surprise that Lee and Sheared (2002) challenged adult educators to start addressing cultural and linguistic differences and learning among immigrant adult learners.

Cultural and Age Trends in Higher Education

Colleges and universities are experiencing a major change in the way they conduct business, not only as a result of increasing cultural diversity, but also as a result of globalization, and a huge number in the increase of adult students.

Brown (2005) posits that globalization is often used to describe a process of change. Some of the indicators of globalization include the huge transfer of money around the world, the rapid development of information technology (Watkins & Tisdell, 2006), and international production and exchange of services (Cudmore, 2005). Given the influence of globalization in the world today, the challenge that higher educational institutions face is how to respond to the impact of globalization and embark on the internationalization of their educational institutions. Globalization in higher education is a process by which higher educational institutions integrate an international component into their educational business including research, teaching, and other educational services (Cudmore, 2005).

The nature of students entering colleges and universities and the way they want to learn is changing the current landscape of higher education. Watkins and Tisdell (2006) have noted such change resulting from the “advances of technology and the increased diversity of college students by cultural background, age, and gender” (p. 135). How higher educational institutions will continue to meet the demands of their culturally diverse population of students in this current shift remains a challenge (Cudmore, 2005). Historically in the U.S., most students went to college immediately after high school, taking four years to complete their undergraduate degree to join the labor force in their selected profession. Now learners are taking between six and eight years to complete a baccalaureate degree due to changes in the composition of students (Safman, 1997). The majority of

these students enrolling in colleges and universities are adult learners over the age of 25, more of whom are female (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Watkins & Tisdell, 2006). The number of women not only comprises a larger percentage of adult learners than men but their number is growing at a more rapid rate (Kasworm, 2003b).

The current fast growth of adult participation in U.S. higher education has been documented by several scholars of adult learners. In the last three decades, adult students in U.S. higher education increased from 28% in 1971 to 43% in 1991 of the total undergraduate enrollment (Kasworm, 2003a&b; Donaldson, 1999; Graham & Donaldson, 1999). Even more recent work by Donaldson and Townsend (2007) found that there were 7.1 million adult undergraduate students in U.S. higher education institutions in the academic year 1999-2000 compared to 5.73 million adult students enrolled a decade earlier (1989-1990). These studies reflect that adult learners are the new majority in higher education today and yet scholars have paid negligible attention to this new population of students and their impact in the U.S. higher education system (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001).

The profiles of these older adult learners are very different from the students of past generations in that they are defined by the several roles they represent: “female, married, raising children, working or un-employed, commuter and part time students” (Edwards & Person, 1997, ¶ 3). Further, Boulmetis (1998) reported that 73% of graduates (most considered adult students) had been

employed full time while in school. Compared with traditional students, adult students often fill more roles (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002) and these role demands can create additional challenges and barriers to academic success. Consequently, these challenges presented by adult learners reflect a new trend in higher education today in the United States. For example, this trend is evident in the nature of adult students' class enrollment and work commitment. The majority of adult learners tend to enroll part-time, take classes through modern distance technologies such as the internet, and call for creative ways to complete their education without spending more time on campus (Donaldson, 1999; Graham & Donaldson, 1999).

Work responsibility is another major characteristic that describes adult students. Kasworm (2003b) similarly reported that in the 1989-1990 academic year over 46% of adult students had full time employment and another 25% worked at least twenty hours. In light of this, adult learners are often attracted by those programs and colleges that will offer flexibility in course scheduling and accommodate adult lifestyle commitments (Kasworm, 2003b). Another trend that is evident with adult students particularly with undergraduate adult students is the family commitment. Kasworm (2003b) found that 57% of all undergraduate adult students who attended U.S. higher education institutions in 2002 were married and 53% were supporting dependents other than a spouse. Given this huge commitment and the responsibility of the family it is no surprise that participation of adult students' activities on campus become very minimal.

Despite this significant presence of adult students in U.S. higher education, adult students are described as “invisible” and continue to “face institutional neglect, prejudice, and denial of opportunities” (Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001, p.18). Consistent with this alarming concern Donaldson and Townsend (2007) noted that despite the current major shifts in U.S. higher education practice, “the lack of full and equitable treatment in research marginalizes adults in higher education” (p.28) as opposed to the attention traditional students are afforded in education research. Given this new composition and profile of older students, institutions of higher education must be committed to adopting procedures, policies, and practices that address the needs of these new majority students.

The introduction of accelerated learning programs is one of the fastest growing forms of learning that is transforming higher education, and partially accounts for the greater numbers of adult learners. Wlodkowski (2003) identified 250 colleges and universities that practice accelerated programs that are designed to serve adult working learners. The author estimates that 25% of adult students will be enrolled in accelerated programs in the next ten years compared with the current enrollment of 13%. A similar study by Wlodkowski, Mauldin and Campbell (2002) examined 2 universities with an extensive cadre of accelerated programs. The authors found that a higher percentage of students graduated sooner from the school with an accelerated format and women were twice as likely as men to graduate. Findings from such studies propose alternative

educational formats that bring about implications for higher educational institutions.

Immigration to the U.S. is another force transforming the higher educational institutions' landscape. The majority of these immigrants are reportedly from developing countries (Alfred, 2005). In light of the increase numbers of international students, the higher education system has a challenge to prepare faculty and staff to develop cultural knowledge, and culturally relevant educational strategies which will enable them to work effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds, creating learning environments that promote and value diversity (Guy, 1999; Tisdell, 2001).

Factors Influencing the Increase of Adult Students

The influx of non-traditional age adult students in higher educational institutions has been attributed to social, cultural, and economic factors. In addressing social factors, Schuetze and Slowey (2002) argue that “the increasing social demand for higher education and the rapid massification of higher education systems which has widened the patterns of participation in higher education beyond conventional full-time school leavers” (p. 312) is a significant change that has opened doors for non-traditional age students. The cultural change of learning in higher education from its conventional approaches to the establishment of new modes of study to accommodate the special needs of non-traditional age adult students is another factor that increases the participation of non-traditional age students (Schuetze & Slowey). Many non-traditional age

students are employed with domestic responsibilities and therefore are unable to participate in traditional forms of higher education (e.g., the campus-lifestyle, schedules for young and full-time students). This new flexibility and resultant changes of institutional policies to meet the needs of non-traditional age adult students have opened doors to new types of students.

There are two economic factors influencing the increase of non-traditional age students in colleges and universities. First, the impact of changing labor market requirements calls for rapid change in occupational structures and demands higher qualification requirements to meet many employment opportunities. This forces the working adult to return to school for higher education in an attempt to meet these new workforce challenges (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002). The second economic reason is related to a decrease in institutional revenue. To offset the declining numbers of traditional students enrolling in higher education, a driving force for colleges and universities has been to focus their market and recruitment efforts on non-traditional age students to counter balance the higher levels of traditional student attrition and shrinking budgets (Edwards & Person, 1997).

In conclusion, the growing diversity in the U.S. has expanded beyond the African American and American Indian groups (historically considered the only minorities) to include immigrants. In the past two decades, an unprecedented immigration wave has brought to the United States a large number of immigrants from every part of the world to join an already richly diverse population. Included

in this immigrant population are a high number of Hispanic speaking groups that now comprise the largest and the fastest growing minority group in the United States (Davis-Willey, 2002). The influx of international students has also added another flavor of diversity into the fabric of American culture and U.S. Higher education. Currently, the United States is a destination of approximately half of the world's total number of international students from over 170 countries (Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004). This study focuses on one particular group of them: Black African international nontraditional-aged students while attending predominantly White higher academic institutions, and their lived experiences of adjusting to the U.S. culture of higher education. With the above remarks in mind, the component parts of the theoretical framework can now be considered.

Theorizing Adjustment of African International Students

Traditionally, scholars of international students have conducted their studies emphasizing more on the *process* perspective of how international students acculturate. For example, Lin and Yi (1997) investigated the adjustment process of international students and identified four adjustment stages that these students often go through: pre-arrival, initial adjustment, on-going adjustment, and return home adjustment. Similarly, Leong (2001) and Yeh (2003) examined the adjustment process of international students and both scholars concluded that there are four adaptation stages: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Although these adjustment models have laid a foundational

framework of how international students adjust to U.S. culture, they have underscored the importance and yet failed to fully appreciate other important factors such as international students' work experience, past educational knowledge, and familial roles. Most importantly, these international student scholars have ignored factors such as how class, power, and racial discrimination impact their adjustment into the U.S. educational institutions.

The adjustment approaches generally discussed by scholars stem from the psychological discipline (Zea, Asner-Self, Birman, & Buki, 2003) and explicit in these models is the de-emphasis of the sociocultural context, including students' ethnic differences. The focus is to *help* students adjust regardless of their cultural background and treating all international students as one homogeneous group. Consideration of culture, class, power and gender factors is generally minimized. Lacking in the adjustment models are theoretical approaches that have potential to address those issues of concern (class, power, race etc.). Thus, there are two factors that have guided the selection of my theoretical approach to understanding Black African international students' experiences in American universities and colleges.

First, considering the fact that my study is focusing on adult learners, recognition of those profiles that identify and describe nontraditional adult learners (such as age, prior experiences, adult roles, responsibilities, etc) are critical in determining the theoretical approach. Second, Black African students in the U.S come from various African nations. The recognition that Black African

international students come from different political, historical, and cultural backgrounds is critical in selecting the theoretical approach. Because my study focuses on adult Black African nontraditional international students two theoretical perspectives and one adjustment model are appropriate in this study for understanding experiences faced by these students: First, I will draw from the Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens, and the works of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman (Bergerson, 2003; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Because aspects of CRT are a better fit for African Americans than Black African internationals, I will also draw from sociocultural approaches specifically based on the work of John Ogbu and Franz Fanon, as well as adult educators including Alfred (2002), Guy (1999), Johnson-Bailey (2001), and Tisdell (1995, 2001). These theoretical approaches are relevant to my study since they explicitly attend to culture, ethnicity, race, class, and gender that affect Black African international students in the U.S. system of higher education. Since the emphasis on international students' adjustment has focused on the *process*, I will draw also from the acculturation model as described by Jandt (2004).

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical Race Theory is a conceptual framework that has its roots in the 1970s, developed by legal scholars Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman both of whom were “deeply concerned over the slow pace of racial reform in the U.S.” (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). CRT addresses specifically the effects of race and racism and how they shape social life (Bergerson, 2003), “while simultaneously

addressing the hegemonic system of White supremacy on the ‘meritocratic’ system” (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 27). Although the CRT has been commonly visible in the legal discipline, it has recently gained popularity in other disciplines including education (Valencia, 2005), women studies and sociology (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). In fact DeCuir and Dixon (2004) describe CRT as a “powerful theoretical and analytical framework within education research” (p. 27) particularly among those educators who have invested their effort to study race and ethnicity.

Underlying critical race theory are five themes that are integral components in the field of education (Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001), most of which can potentially offer understanding of the experiences of the Black African international students in predominantly White institutions of higher education. The first theme is the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism. According to Bell (one of the developers of CRT) “racism is a permanent component of American life” (as cited by DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 27). Thus, racism is so embedded into everyday life that it often appears to be natural and normal to many people within the American culture (Rolon-Dow, 2005). The second theme in CRT challenges the dominant ideology (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) that claims that the legal and educational systems operate to ensure objectivity, meritocracy, neutrality, and equal opportunity. This concept addresses the existing inequality in the society and the thus, CRT educators challenge the “dominant social and cultural assumptions

regarding culture and intelligence, language and capability, through research, pedagogy, and praxis” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 2).

The third theme according to Solorzano (1998) is the commitment to social justice. A CRT framework provides a compelling support for social justice and the elimination of racism, class, gender, and sexual orientation discrimination in education. The centrality of experiential knowledge is the fourth theme of CRT. This concept of the CRT recognizes the value of the experiential knowledge of the people of color in understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racism in education (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Often lived experiences of marginalized groups are ignored or silenced in discourses of education, and this experience can be expressed in the form of story telling, family histories, biographies, parables, and narratives. These forms of expressions provide the space for marginalized voices to be heard (Rolon-Dow, 2005; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). The fifth theme of CRT argues that race and racism in education can best be fully understood by incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Although CRT was intended to further the interests of African Americans in the United States, I generally argue that CRT can also be applied to Black African international adult students as well. There are many cultural similarities between Black Americans and Black Africans. Phinney and Onwughalu (1996) examined the differences between African Americans and Black Africans and concluded that the two groups share some common characteristics, most notably a common racial heritage. The authors further said that both groups have been

dominated by Whites since most of the African countries particularly East and West Africa were at one time European colonies. Similarly Berry and Asamen (1989) suggest that both Black African and African American college students are beneficiaries of high status compared with their peers since both represent a small number of students in U.S. higher education institutions. However, in spite of these similarities there are differences also as indicated by Helms (1990). One obvious difference noted by Helms is in reference to racial identity. Helms concluded that African Americans have had to struggle to affirm their racial identity, in other words, to develop pride for whom they are in terms of race, that is, their Blackness. In contrast Black African international students' or indigenous Africans' racial identity is less salient than for African Americans since Black African international persons have lived in racially homogeneous settings. Thus, they have not had experiences related to race. A later study by Phinney and Onwughalu (1996) noted the difference for Black African international students who had a longer stay in the United States. The authors concluded that racial identity scores did not differ between Black African international and African American student groups, but for the Black African students racial identity significantly increased with longer residence in the United States. The two groups also were different based on their history as stated elsewhere by Ogbu and Simons (1998) in this dissertation.

While it is true that CRT was developed with a focus to bring the African Americans' experiences to the forefront since they have not been part of the

mainstream, especially in education (Peterson, 1999), several other marginalized subgroups including, for example, Asian American, Native American, and Latina/Latino have developed distinctive frameworks stemming from CRT (Valencia, 2005). Interestingly, these frameworks address issues such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality, issues that critical race theorists have failed to incorporate in the discussions (Valencia, 2005; Villalpando, 2004). Given the fact that CRT has been applicable to other marginalized groups residing in the U.S., I argue that CRT can also be applicable to Black African international students in their struggle to adjust to U.S. culture.

First, a quantitative study by Sodowsky and Plake (1992) found that Black African international students perceived more prejudice than did Asians and South Americans. Similarly Constantine et al. (2005) indicated some of the same discriminatory experiences of Black Africans such as being called racial slurs by White Americans and viewed as less intelligent than White Americans. The CRT framework will help one recognize patterns and practices of racial exclusion and other forms of discrimination against Black international college students.

Second, storytelling, narratives, and autobiographies of Black African international students' experiences regarding their adjustment to U.S. culture will provide an opportunity for them to voice their own personal lived realities, an essential tenet of CRT. Historically in the African community storytelling has been a kind of medicine to heal the wounds of pain caused by any form of

oppression. Ladson-Billings and Tate IV (1995) posit that “the story of one’s condition...[can] lead to the realization of how one came to be oppressed and subjugated and allows one to stop inflicting mental violence on oneself” (p. 57). Similarly, voicing one’s experiences is a means to communicate the experiences of *reality* of the oppressed, “a first road to justice” (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, p. 58). Storytelling and voicing of Black African international students’ lived experiences is critical in understanding how higher educational institutions relate to them.

Third, given that the fundamental differences in education expectations for teachers and students usually result in various differences in teaching/learning approaches between the U.S. and many foreign countries, CRT challenges the dominant educational system and supports the need for implementing a culturally relevant system of education. Traditionally, educational programs and teaching/learning styles have been designed from the Eurocentric mainstream point of view resulting in a one-size-fits-all solution (Peterson, 1999; Villalpando, 2004). Fourth, the adjustment models discussed by various scholars of international students including Lin and Yi (1997), Leong (2001), and Yeh (2003) have failed to recognize the effect of past experiences of Black African international students in their adjustment process. In addition, these models have treated all international students as one homogeneous group. In this case, CRT framework recognizes that lived experiences of people of color are often marginalized or silenced in educational discourse. CRT does value those

experiences and considers them legitimate in understanding the racial subordination in the U.S. (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Fifth, CRT can also provide insights into the manner in which race impacts pedagogical practices. For example, Black international students often are considered inferior to Whites in American society (Rhee & Sagaria, 2004) and this is often displayed in the classrooms of predominantly White institutions of higher education. Fanon (1967) argues in his discussion on inferiority and race that one does not perceive another to be inferior based on skin color but “it is the racist who creates his inferior” (p.93).

In addition, missing in the literature of international students is mention of women of Third world countries, including African countries. There are very few references to females in studies regarding adjustment of international students to U.S. culture (Rhee & Sagaria). This omission raises questions about sexism, a tenet that is recognized in the CRT framework. Similarly, inequalities between men and women prevail in most African countries (Maundeni, 1999) and often women are subject to racial and class oppression as well as sexual domination, factors that are silenced when studying the *process* of adjustment to another culture. Because the CRT framework in education “theorizes and examines that place where racism intersects with other forms of subordination such as sexism, and classism” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 3), CRT will thus challenge the African male dominant discourse on sexism, gender, and class injustices as

experienced by Black African women who are international students in the U.S., giving these women a measure of liberation in their experience of education.

Lastly, the primary purpose of my study is to explore the lived experiences of adjusting to U.S. culture among Black African international nontraditional-aged students while attending predominantly White higher academic institutions. In order to explore these lived experiences, this study will be conducted as a phenomenology, a form of qualitative research. CRT educators can utilize storytelling, family history, biographies, and narratives “to draw on the strength of the lived experiences students bring to the classroom” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 3). This concept is evident in phenomenological qualitative research and therefore is reflected in the CRT framework as the researchers “revisit and rewrite history from the perspective of the respondents’ experiences rather than an ‘objective’ record of reality” (Broido & Manning, 2002, p. 440). Through storytelling and narratives connections and new meanings emerge as a result of listening and reflecting on each other’s stories (Amstutz, 1999). In light of this argument, CRT would serve as a useful theoretical framework by which to recognize and explore issues related to the lived experience of adjustment to U.S. culture within the context of Black African nontraditional-age adult international students in predominantly White higher educational institutions. However, because CRT was developed in an African-American context and not an African one, there are aspects of CRT that do not take into account the differences between African and African-American experiences and issues in the current U.S.

cultural context. For this reason additional sociocultural perspectives on adult learning and the cultural experiences will be explored.

Sociocultural Learning Perspectives

It is clear that not all people of color have the same experiences in the United States, whether they are born in America or born in Africa or elsewhere. To try to account for some of these cultural differences and experiences, the work of other authors, such as John Ogbu and Franz Fanon as well as the work of adult educators who address sociocultural perspectives will be discussed.

John Ogbu. Ogbu's early work focused on minority performance in the U.S. educational institutions. He attempted to offer explanations why some minority learners did not excel well in schools compared with their majority counterparts. One of his most outstanding studies compared school performance of students from six countries (Britain, India, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States) (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). This study concluded that regardless of the students' country of origin, they were all denied "equal educational opportunities in terms of access to educational resources" (p.157). Although Ogbu's study did not include Black African international students, I argue that they are also susceptible to similar treatment since they too are among minority learners. While all these minorities had the same educational disparity as a common denominator, there are yet some within-group differences. One of the major within-group differences is voluntary vs. involuntary minorities.

Voluntary minorities who are also referred to as immigrants are people of color who have relocated to the United States voluntarily for personal, economic or political reasons (Ogbu, 1992). This group of minorities considers the United States their new home (Tomich, McWhirter, & Darcy, 2003). Black African international students do not meet this criterion but rather correspond to the category of migrant minorities because they are usually temporary visitors with no intention to settle in the United States (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). On the other hand involuntary minorities are those groups of minorities that are part of the United States permanently in opposition to their own will and choice (Ogbu; Ogbu & Simons). In this case African American minorities fall under this involuntary minority category because their presence in the United States resulted from slavery rather than by choice. African Americans' presence in the United States was forced on them by the White people (Ogbu; Ogbu & Simons).

Based on the definitions of voluntary and involuntary minorities, it is clear that Black international students do not fall under either definition, but rather are characterized as so-called migrant or short-term visitors to complete their educational goals. Nevertheless, as guests in the United States they share the same attitudes and behaviors of voluntary minorities (Ogbu, 1992). And, there are sociocultural differences that exist between the African Americans (involuntary minority) and Black African international students (temporary visitors). For instance, Black African international students (as voluntary short time guests) come to the United States with pre-existing differences in language and culture

and thus are willing and able to adopt and learn the new culture and language of their host country in order to achieve their educational goals. In contrast the African Americans (involuntary minority) tend to distrust White people and “their cultural/language frame of reference lead them to interpret the cultural and language differences they encounter in school as symbols of their group identity to be maintained, and to consciously or unconsciously avoid closing cultural and language boundaries” (Ogbu, 1992, p.291). Secondly, because of the cultural differences that exist between African Americans and White society, some African Americans tend to push for culturally relevant education rather than accept the school mainstream approach, unlike voluntary minority groups (Ogbu, 1992), including Black African international students.

A third sociocultural difference that exists between African Americans (involuntary minority) and Black African international students (temporary visitors) reflects views on learning. In keeping with some of the common characteristics Black African international students share with those in voluntary minority communities, they tend to gravitate to and nurture educational environments that embrace the importance of individual academic success and identify such success as a means of competing with those in the dominant society (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). In contrast, “one finds in the community of involuntary minorities cultural models that make them skeptical that they can get ahead merely through mainstream beliefs and strategies, even though they verbally endorse education” (Ogbu, 1992, p. 291). For African Americans, this skepticism

stems from the discrimination against them that has existed for many years, something perceived as a visible, permanent problem in U.S. society. Despite these differences, Ogbu and Simons (1998) concluded that both voluntary and involuntary minorities have one common problem: they are all denied equal educational opportunities because they all encounter one form of discrimination or another, what Ogbu and Simons call the “collective problem.” Ogbu (1992) concluded by admonishing educators that the sociocultural differences of the group membership alone (voluntary or involuntary) do not determine success or failure of the group, but rather sought to provoke educators to think about the differences and help them understand how these minorities learn in order to better meet their educational needs.

Frantz Fanon. In his book, *Black Skin White Mask*, Fanon examines the impact of colonialism and its distorted effects on civil rights, anti-colonialism, and black consciousness movements around the world. Fanon contends that white colonialism enforces a certain false and humiliating existence upon its Black victims to the extent that it demands their conformity to its distorted values. Thus, the colonizer does not see the colonized as a human being; this is also the reality the colonized is forced to accept.

Fanon’s experience with colonialism differs from the experiences of the Black African international students in this study because they have never encountered life in a colonization era. Nevertheless, there are sociocultural issues that he raises that appear to affect Black African international adult learners. For

example, Fanon expounds on how the issues of race, color, national culture, and violence influence the struggle for national liberation (Fanon, 1967). Fanon uses psychoanalytical framework to explain the feelings of dependency and inadequacy that Black people experience in a White world because of their race. This form of inadequacy as evidenced by discrimination (Guy, 1999; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992) is similar to what Ogbu (1992) and Ogbu and Simons (1998) observed taking place in educational settings.

Another one of Fanon's sociocultural issues appearing to affect Black African international adult learners is the use of language that has become an indicator of both cultural and power imbalance (Fanon, 1967). For Fanon, being colonized by a language has larger implications for one's consciousness: "To speak . . . means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (p. 17-18). It follows that Black African international adult students often use English as their second or third language. For learning to take place these students have to overcome a variety of linguistic barriers (e.g., local accents or slang) during their educational process. Sociocultural learning perspectives call for educators to recognize such cultural and linguistic differences for these Black African international adult students to excel well in American institutions.

Adult education perspectives. Sociocultural learning theory, particularly as discussed in its various forms in adult education, has some common elements to CRT in that both perspectives address issues of race, class, gender, and power. Because these issues (racism, classism, gender and power differences) do not take

place in a context-free environment, sociocultural learning theory takes a step further by recognizing the context component. Recognition that Black African international students come from different political, historical, and cultural backgrounds is critical in understanding the intersection of these factors in their adjustment process. To be sure, many in adult education have discussed the importance of attending to cultural issues, (Alfred, 2002; Guy, 1999, Johnson-Bailey, 2001; Tisdell, 2001). With limited exception (Alfred, 2002) most of these discussions have focused more on domestic minorities in the U.S. Specifically within the adult education literature, there has been relatively little attention to international students in higher education contexts. Mary Alfred's (2003) work on Caribbean immigrant women in the U.S draws on sociocultural theory to understand their learning experiences. In an attempt to define the concept of sociocultural learning theory, Alfred (2002) highlights the importance of the social environment and the influence of culture on students' learning experiences. She argues that cultural influences such as social relationships, beliefs, social environment, and cultural context cannot be separated from learning experiences. Because my study focuses on Black African international students, a sociocultural learning perspective increases one's understanding of the experiences of these international students in the U.S. The adjustment of international students from a sociocultural perspective considers and seeks to understand the cultural context within which students are in relation to others.

Although the works of Guy (1999), Tisdell (1998), and Johnson-Bailey (2001) tend to focus more on marginalized groups residing in the U.S. their concepts are also relevant to my study. These adult education scholars have tirelessly advocated for a change of education pedagogy to reflect that of multicultural concepts and thus creating a culturally relevant adult education. Guy (1999) recognizes that the United States is a multicultural society and it will continue to be a culturally diverse country; unfortunately, the macroculture (with emphasis on Anglo-Western European cultural values) continues to dominate the nation. He continues to argue that culture is critical in defining people in terms of who they are, and “how they view themselves and the world around them” (p.6). This implies that culture is inevitable in one’s self and is an important component in social life and therefore critical in understanding human activity. Black African international students bring along with them a different cultural experience in the U.S. In fact the cultural gap between the students’ country of origin and the U.S. (represented by cues, beliefs, language, customs, and values), the greater the adjustment needed on the part of international student (Tomich, McWhirter & King, 2000). It is no surprise that European international students adjust better than Black African and South American international students (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). A possible explanation is that the European international students have a greater commonality of the traits, beliefs, and values found within U.S. society. To facilitate the adjustment of Black African students one will need to understand the “cultural worlds within which individuals have grown and

developed; how individuals interpret who they are in relation to others” (Alfred, 2002, ¶ 5). Although people of color (Black African students included) are described as coming from subordinate cultures they “have the right to maintain their home culture as well as become competent in the mainstream culture” (Guy, 1999, p. 11). Darder (as cited by Guy, 1999) describes the concept as cultural democracy while Guy calls it biculturalism.

In support of Guy’s (1999) work is Johnson-Bailey (2002) who emphasizes the concept of cultural diversity. Johnson-Bailey acknowledges that U.S. society is comprised of different cultures and each cultural group with different values and experiences. She challenges the educators to recognize the accomplishments of each culture and accept and value diversity. That is to view diversity as a positive component of the U.S. culture, thus promoting equity in the educational setting. In the case of cultural adjustment, the consideration of the students’ personal factors (ethnicity, values, family, age, religion, language, etc.) in relation to their current environment is critical to their success in adapting to not only U.S. culture but also to academic culture. Understanding the interaction of all these factors may result in a more comprehensive explanation of how the international students to be studied learn and grow in the new academic environment.

Although Tisdell’s (1998) work focuses on poststructural feminist pedagogies, like other adult education scholars (Alfred, 2001; Guy, 1999; Johnson-Bailey, 2002) she has also included issues of race and class in her

literature. What is intriguing and evident in her work is her indiscriminate appreciation of all students. Most notably relevant to my study in Tisdell's work is the concept of "voice" among other themes included in her feminist pedagogies. Tisdell (1998) and Sheard (1994) see "giving voice" to women and people of color in general as a step toward social change and emancipation. Creating a learning environment that allows space for marginalized voices to be heard is a concept that is consistent with CRT. Traditionally international students' orientation programs are created by those in power without students' voices being involved in the planning or implementation of such programs. This reflects Cervero and Wilson's (1994) position that oppression maintains a political system in which those in power create educational programs believing that they know what is best for learners, thus denying learners a voice in the planning process. The concept of voice is an important factor for Black African international students. Like other peoples of color, Black African international students' voices are also marginalized. Empowering these students to voice their adjustment experiences verbally or nonverbally (using for example artwork, dance, etc.) can provide a means of expressing their unique experiences while highlighting the importance of their culture, thus leading to emancipation.

Sociocultural learning perspectives are useful in understanding the adjustment process of international students in American higher education institutions in that it addresses culture and its relationship to the individual. An individual lives in a cultural environment consisting of social institutions, ideas,

and beliefs. According to Kono (1999) it is by means of culture that one learns to adapt himself/herself to the physical environment and to the people whom he/she associates. The college or university environment is the primary educational, cultural, recreational, and social setting that provides a range of opportunities which will influence the adjustment of the individual (Wu, 1993), in this case the international student.

Jandt's Acculturation Model

This study is based on the assumption that Black African international adult students undergo a process of intercultural adjustment, identified as culture shock (Jandt, 2004) when they arrive in the U.S. Jandt's (2004) framework on intercultural adjustment and acculturation based on five stages is one of the important theoretical influences on this study. The first stage is the *honeymoon phase* "where everything is new and exciting" (pp. 320-321). The person in this stage is basically a tourist with her or his basic intensity rooted in the home culture. This stage is characterized by "interest, excitement, euphoria, sleeplessness, positive expectations, and idealizations about the new culture" (Winkelman, 1994, p.122).

The second stage in the acculturation process is *disintegration and difference*. In this stage an individual becomes irritated and hostile as the familiar cues of their home culture disintegrate and the differences between home and host culture become more visible. Disenchantment with the host country sets in and the person recognizes cultural differences causing depression and alienation that

often result in homesickness and withdrawal. Huntley (1993) postulates that a person in this stage finds the behavior of the host culture unusual and starts to hate the culture. Some people in this stage withdraw or isolate themselves while others experience symptoms of culture shock. Winkelman (1994) describes this stage as the crisis phase characterized by negative experiences and reactions.

Reintegration is the third stage of the acculturation process. At this stage an individual starts recognizing the home and host cognitive cues and starts melding them together. Although a person in this stage may still exhibit some elements of anger and resentment toward the host culture for being different, there is an increased ability to function in the new culture. The fourth stage is *gradual adjustment* where one is able to see good and bad elements in both the home and host cultures. An individual in this stage starts becoming comfortable in the host culture as she or he is able to understand and predict the actions and expectations of the host society. In light of this knowledge a person feels less isolated, feels more comfortable and more in control (Jandt, 2004). In this gradual adjustment stage, an individual assumes the position of a settler identity and state of mind (Wright, 2005) and makes a commitment to stay and progressively adopt to the new culture.

The final stage is described as *reciprocal interdependence* by Jandt (2004). In this stage there is a clear understanding of the reciprocal interdependence between home and host cultures and one is able to cope comfortably in both the home and host cultures. This stage is regarded as the

optimal stage of acculturation by Shih and Brown (2000) describing it as a biculturalism stage where a person “adopts characteristics of both the host culture and the original culture” (p. 37). Likewise Winkelman (1994) argues that this stage is achieved as one develops stable adaptations in being successful at resolving problems and managing the host culture. It is important to acknowledge that when international students are in this stage of acculturation, there is a potential for substantial personal change through cultural adaptation and development of a bicultural identity and integration of new cultural aspects into one’s previous self-concept. This does not necessarily imply that she/he is assimilated into the host culture, but rather is functional within the host culture and yet still maintaining her or his cultural identity. While research studies of acculturation will be discussed later in this literature review, in summary, critical race theory, sociocultural learning perspectives in adult education, and Jandt’s (2004) acculturative model are the primary theoretical influences guided this study. To lend further insight, it is now time to consider the major research studies and theory that specifically relates to Black international students in higher education

International Students in Higher Education: Research and Theory

Understanding the experiences of international students in general, it is helpful to have good understanding of internationalization and U.S. higher education that is a result partly of the pressures of globalization, increased mobility, and the internet. Thus, this section will begin with such a discussion, understanding of the experience.

Internationalization and U.S. Higher Education

There is evidence that international education contributes to students' intellectual and personal development. Barrows (1981) in his survey found that students who participated in study abroad programs demonstrated higher knowledge levels and improved language skills. Cummings (2001) also reported that students who have several years of a second language have a better vocabulary and are more expressive and creative writers. Internationalization in higher education does not produce benefits for individual students alone but also for the nation's economy. Cudmore (2005) describes internationalization of education as a means of "improving the country's national economic competitiveness" (p. 41). In this case, internationalization of higher education is viewed as an "export commodity" (Cudmore, 2005, p. 41). From this view, internationalization of education is perceived as a process of turning education into a commodity of trade that can be packaged and sold in other markets resulting in direct economic benefits to the institutions (Altbach & Peterson, 1999).

There are four ways internationalization in higher education has been described by Cudmore (2005) and Sharma and Mulka (1993). The first one is the traditional view of internationalization that includes the academic activities under international studies such as language, political science, and cultural anthropology. The goal is to develop knowledge about other countries and cultures in order for one to function well within those cultures. By gaining intercultural knowledge, all students, particularly those from marginalized countries will have the opportunity to present their voices. The second view of internationalization includes a range of activities that promote interaction between faculty and domestic students with students from other countries, for example, study abroad programs and the recruitment of international student initiatives under International Student Affairs. Cudmore (2005) argued that recruiting international students is a means to increase diversity in American college campuses and their surrounding communities. The third view of internationalization is using international education as a means of foreign aid to other countries, for example, training programs conducted in developing countries. The fourth view of internationalization calls for the preparation of people to function in a culturally diverse context. This view prepares people to compete in the global market place.

Of the four approaches discussed above, the most visible aspect of internationalization of higher education is the recruitment of international students. The driving force behind this view is economics. The presence of

international students on American campuses is an economic benefit to the country. Institute of International Education [IIE] (2003) reveals that funds from students contribute nearly \$12 billion dollars to the U.S. economy, the country's fifth largest service sector export.

Above and beyond the internationalization of education and its impact on the economy there is a deeper impact: "they [international students] lay a foundation for the coming changes in the American workplace that will demand cross-cultural sensitivity and improved interpersonal skills" (King & Koller, 1995, p.22). Throughout American history the nation has benefited enormously from foreign-born scientists and engineers (Alberts et al., 2003). In her speech addressing the Committee on Science in the U.S. House of Representatives on March 26, 2003, Shirley M. Tilghman, president of Princeton University testified that over 30% of the doctoral degrees in science and engineering awarded in the U.S. each year go to international students and two-thirds of international students who receive a Ph.D. in science or engineering occupy positions in higher educational institutions and industries in the U.S. (Alberts et al.). American's dependency upon foreign-born human capital in certain fields is very pronounced. "[F]oreign students are essential for much of the federally funded research carried out at academic laboratories [in the U.S.]" (Alberts et al., p.48).

International students are described as "one of the most important elements of international knowledge system" (Bourke, 1997, p.327) and are carriers of knowledge across borders, therefore the sending and the host countries

should benefit. This form of contribution to international education is not only brought by international students, but also by those who permanently immigrate to this country. The next section addresses the international students in the U.S.

Adjustment of International Students in U.S. Higher Education

Before considering how international students adjust in U.S. higher education, it is important to consider first their presences, and numbers as well as how terms are defined. Although the number of international students enrolled in U.S. higher educational institutions decreased by 2.4% in 2003/2004 academic year due to heightened security put in place after September 11, 2001 (IIE, 2004), the United States still remains the leading destination of many international students representing more than 186 countries (Jacob & Greggo, 2001). The results of a survey by several higher education and international institutions (IIE, 2003, 2004; Brown, 2005; McCormack, 2005) recently proposed that international students' enrollment in U.S. higher educational institutions were approaching pre-9/11 levels in the fall of 2005 (Anonymous, 2005), indicating an increase of 3% compared with the previous year. This number is expected to continue to rise particularly in graduate school enrollment (Brown, 2005).

The increased number of international students in higher education poses the question of how best to serve their needs. In an effort to understand this population, there is much discussion in the cross-cultural and higher education literature on how international students in U.S. higher education institutions adjust to a new culture. This section begins by providing definitions of terms that are

associated with *adjustment* as used by various scholars. In an attempt to understand the adjustment process, it is critical to address adjustment approaches (along with their philosophical underpinnings) commonly used to help international students adjust to a new culture and to examine the culture shock faced by international students upon their arrival to a foreign country.

Definitions and Use of Terms

Scholars have used various terms interchangeably to mean adjustment. These terms include integration (Farver et al., 2002), acculturation (Senyshyn, Warford & Zhan, 2000), and adaptation (Ladd & Ruby, 1999). For example, the terms adjustment and adaptation have been used interchangeably for international students' ability to cope with the new culture of the host country (Zhang & Rentz, 1996). Another example is Pope-Davis et al. (2000) in their study to investigate the relationship between acculturation and racial identity of African-Americans, where the authors use the term adaptation to relate to acculturation in that context. They describe acculturation as an adaptive process that occurs when an individual interacts with another culture. Similarly, Farver et al., (2002) define adaptation as the process by which an individual incorporates the values and behaviors of the new culture.

In another work by Sue and Sue (1999) acculturation is a process that involves integration, implying the possible combination of two cultures (that is, host and natural cultures) within the individual, while the individual maintains his or her cultural identity in the process. They describe this process as biculturalism.

In contrast, Ladd & Ruby (1999) suggest that acculturation (i.e., one's adaptation to the host culture) is akin to a net gain, while assimilation (the process whereby one's individual cultural characteristics are replaced by those characteristics of the dominant culture) is a net loss. For the purpose of this paper, the use of the term acculturation will incorporate the definitions given by both Iwamasa and Yamada (2001) and Sue and Sue (1999) to refer to a gradual process of acquiring the values and some cultural characteristics of a host culture while at the same time maintaining one's personal cultural identity. The terms acculturation and adjustment have been used interchangeably to mean the same in this chapter.

Phases of Adjustment

Adjustment from one culture to another is a challenging process for international students. In order to achieve an increased understanding of this issue, it is vital to recognize the different patterns of adjustment as discussed in the literature. Several international students' studies have described stages of the adaptation and adjustment process to a new culture. Lin and Yi's (1997) discuss four adjustment stages for international students: the first stage is pre-arrival adjustment stage that starts before students' arrival to the U.S. The main goal is to help students reduce their anxiety and possible culture shock. Initial adjustment is the second stage that starts with students' arrival and lasts for about 6 months. Providing orientation to the American culture, activities of daily living, and the services available at an educational institution would facilitate smooth transition through this stage. The third stage is on-going adjustment that lasts until students'

graduation. The main goal is to help students with bicultural conflicts to achieve a balance between participating in the new culture and maintaining their own cultural identities. The last stage is return-home adjustment starting upon students' graduation and lasting up to 6 months upon return home. The main goal for an educational institution is to help students anticipate the readjustment process upon return home.

A similar international students' adjustment process is proposed by Huntley (1993). Huntley suggest that the first stage of adjustment occurs prior to leaving one's country of origin. This stage is characterized by both eager anticipation and fear regarding the new life abroad. Participation is the second stage: upon arrival, the student becomes a passive spectator until such a time he builds confidence for participation in the host country's activities and interactions. The third stage is culture shock, when disenchantment with the host country sets in and the student recognizes cultural differences causing depression and alienation that often result in homesickness and withdrawal. This is the period when the student is able to make more or less integration into the community depending on the nature of support accorded to the student. The final stage of adjustment occurs upon re-entry into the native culture. The student recognizes that his or her values, ideologies and lifestyles are different from those of their families and compatriots because of the new lived experiences while in the foreign country.

Leong (2001) and Yeh (2003) discuss the adjustment process of international students. Both Leong and Yeh suggest that there are four adaptation stages: assimilation (rejecting one's cultural values in favor of those of the dominant culture), integration (maintaining one's own cultural identity and adapting to dominant cultural values), separation (valuing their own cultural norms while rejecting norms of the dominant culture), and marginalization (failing to participate in either set of cultural practices). The study found that there were different levels of acculturation depending on how much an individual voluntarily accepted dominant values and also one's length of stay in the host culture.

One of the strengths associated with these patterns is the recognition that within- cultural differences in the adjustment process is a critical concept. The group differences based on ethnic and generational status were examined as important cultural variables suggesting that we cannot assume and treat all international students as a homogeneous group. Recognition by these approaches that adjustment to a host culture does not necessarily result at the expense of one's native culture is another strength. This implies that international students can maintain ties with his or her culture and still become competent and functional in more than one culture. The weakness of these adjustment patterns have assumed that both traditional age and adult students will go through the same process failing to put into consideration other factors such as work experience, educational levels and familial roles as factors impacting their adjustment process.

Class, power, racial, and gender discrimination are other factors that impact adjustment of international students (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992; Olsen, 2000), and some students experience more forms of racial, ethnic, or cultural discrimination based on the color of their skin or other physical features (Maddox & Gray, 2002; Phinney & Onwughalu, 1996) that are not addressed by these approaches. Personality differences also influence the transition process of international students Tomich, McWhirter & Darcy (2003), a concept that is not given any attention in the adjustment stages discussed above.

Culture Shock

The study of culture shock has its root from the works of Oberg (Tomich, McWhirter, & King, 2000) who describes culture shock as an “occupational disease” of people who are suddenly transplanted abroad. According to Oberg (as cited in Tomich, et al) culture shock “...is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (2000, ¶ 5). A similar definition was echoed by the Center for Research and Education which defined culture shock as being

“cut off from the cultural cues and known patterns with which you are familiar...living/or working over an extended period of time in a situation that is ambiguous, having your own values (which you had heretofore considered absolutes) brought into question...[and] being continually put into positions in which you are expected to function with maximum skill

and speed but where the rules have not been adequately explained” (as cited by Stewart, 2003, p. 105).

It follows that the greater the distance between the home and host country’s signs, beliefs, values, and customs the greater the adjustment required on the part of international student. In addition, more time is needed for that adjustment to occur. Major symptoms include a feeling of hopelessness, withdrawal, irritability, stress, and tension (Stewart, 2003).

Despite the multiple definitions attributed to culture shock, there is a consensus definition by researchers that culture shock is associated with “multiple demands for adjustment that individuals experience at the cognitive, behavioral, emotional, social, and physiological levels, when they relocate to another culture” (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004, p. 168). There are four approaches proposed by Chapdelaine and Alexitch used to explain culture shock. The first approach is cognitive whose proponents argue that cross-cultural adjustment is dependent on one’s ability to accurately understand the values, beliefs, behaviors, and norms associated with the new culture. In other words, they interpret, judge and behave in the new culture using their own cultural knowledge as the standard measure.

The second approach is behavioral. The supporters of the behavioral approach hold that culture shock occurs because individuals do not know what verbal and nonverbal behaviors are appropriate in the host culture. In other words, behaviors that were acceptable in the home country may not necessarily be welcomed in the host country. For example direct eye contact with an individual

from African countries during communication may be interpreted as a sign of disrespect while such may be viewed as an attentive communication sign in American culture.

Phenomenological, the third approach, argues that culture shock is a “transitional experience from a state of low self-and cultural awareness to a state of high self-and cultural awareness” (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004, p. 169). According to this approach, international students face culture shock because they are incapable of exercising their cultural references to convey and validate aspects of their own identity in the new culture. For example, if politeness is one of the concepts of self-identity, the meaning associated with politeness is determined by the social rules and therefore one may not be able to convey and validate this aspect of self-concept in the same way as in one’s own culture, thus challenging one’s self-concept.

Sociopsychological is the final approach that postulates that affective or psychological and social adjustment can facilitate understanding of culture shock. According to this approach, cross-cultural adjustment is dependent upon one’s ability to bridge cultural differences between their home countries and the host country, as well as on the extent to which one is able to interact with members of the host culture. In other words, psychological adjustment of international students relates to their feelings of well-being in the American culture while the social adjustment is associated with international students’ ability to interact effectively with the American students. The experience of culture shock is evident

and disturbing for international students when they begin their college life on U.S. campuses. Although culture shock may be experienced by all international students at different levels, the impact is more severe for students from non-western countries (Shigaki & Smith, 1997), obviously resulting in greater difficulty in adjustment. The culture shock approach posited by Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004) will be revisited later in the chapter under theoretical framework discussion.

Philosophical Underpinnings

The adjustment and culture shock approaches discussed above seem to stem from behavioral and humanistic philosophical perspectives. The behaviorist philosophy of adult education is generally considered as a system of psychological theory rather than a philosophy; however, assumptions and questions raised by behavioral thought are clearly philosophical in nature (Elias & Merriam, 2005). Humanists view individuals as "...persons who are open to change, and continued learning, persons who strive for self-actualization, and persons who can live together as fully functioning individuals" (Nuckles, 1999, ¶ 3). The significance of the interaction between behavior and the environment is acknowledged in behaviorism and as well as in the above adjustment approaches. According to Wu (1993), to understand the behavior of a person, one must understand the environmental context in which the behavior takes place. In this regard, the adjustment approaches above view acculturation as the process of behavior change for individuals and groups as a result of long term contact with

another culture (Zea et al., 2003), a characteristic evident in behavioral philosophy.

The focus of the adjustment process is to help international students adjust psychologically and addresses those behaviors that pose a risk to one's health such as homesickness, loneliness, depression, feelings of alienation, and loss of status or identity (Jacob & Greggo, 2001). This focus is consistent with the humanistic view that advocates for growth and good life (Elias & Merriam, 2005). Explicit in these models is that they virtually give no attention to the sociocultural context and students' ethnic differences. The emphasis is to help students adjust regardless of their background and treating all international students as one homogeneous group. The educators who use these acculturation approaches are presented as 'experts' in helping international students' adjustment, however they fail to address students' cultural, class, and gender differences. This 'expert' concept is consistent with a humanistic orientation.

Lacking in the discussion on adjustment and culture shock approaches above are emancipatory perspectives that have potential to confront or challenge the existing multiple systems of power and oppression as established in the educational institutions in terms of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. It is obvious these factors (particularly race, class, and gender) affect the adjustment process of international students since they are part of marginalized groups. Despite the effort to recruit international students in American colleges and universities, cultural values that differ from those of the White academic

environment are often not recognized, accepted, or appreciated. Race and class are the main controversial issues facing not only higher education institutions but the U.S. at large (Weissglas, 2003). These issues are commonly neglected in education forums; to ignore them is to do injustice to international students.

Tisdell and Taylor's (2001) philosophical perspectives (critical/emancipatory and feminist/emancipatory) are relevant to understanding how issues of race, class, power, and gender affect the adjustment of international students. A critical/emancipatory orientation emphasizes primarily on class while the feminist/emancipatory orientation focuses on issues of power and positionality (gender, race, class, sexuality) as part of the learning process. The emphasis in the feminist-emancipatory perspective is on confronting the social structures from the intersections of race, gender, and class which form the bases of oppression and privilege. Although feminist theories are oriented toward understanding the dynamics of gender relations (Tisdell, 1998), they often address issues of marginalization associated with race, class, sexual orientation, and the practices of educational systems (Safarik, 2002). In general feminism focuses on power relations, shifting positionalities, voice, individual experience, and socially constructed knowledge (hooks, 2003). It is my contention that Tisdell and Taylor's emancipatory philosophies can inform Black African adult international students' adjustment thereby encouraging them to question the dominant viewpoint by confronting the systems of oppression and privilege (i.e., gender, race, sexuality, and class), and by so doing construct new ways of knowing.

Adjustment Problems Affecting International Students

Acculturation/adjustment is a force that significantly impacts the lives of international students; therefore an understanding of the acculturation experiences' effects and the needs of international students in American universities, particularly those for whom English is not their primary language, is critical. These students face several concerns and difficulties in adjustment (Lin & Yi, 1997). Several scholars have categorized these concerns in different areas. Sodowsky and Lai (1997) explored international adjustment problems in four areas: socialization, concerns and feelings, acculturation, and academic concerns. Similarly, Tseng and Newton (2002) grouped adjustment problems into: general living, academic, socio-cultural, and personal psychological adjustment. For the purpose of this section, I will categorize international students' adjustment problems into three broad areas: academic, psychological, and cultural and social adjustment specifically addressing those international students for whom English is not their primary language.

Academic Adjustment

As we move closer toward the reality of a global community, university instructors see more and more of their classrooms filled with foreign students, individuals whose world views and experiences are vastly different from their American counterparts. Communication between teacher and student, in itself a challenge, now becomes even more complicated as the teacher must recognize and overcome cultural barriers that may impede learning. This discussion on

academic adjustment will be limited to English language proficiency, the American educational system, and learning styles in American classrooms.

English language proficiency. One of the major hurdles international students face is the English language which is a critical influence in the acculturation process. Zehtabchi and Houck (1996) conducted a qualitative study exploring the communication and acculturation of Iranian college students in the U.S. The study concluded that greater proficiency in English yielded a greater level of acculturation. This finding was consistent with the work of Tompson and Tompson's (1996) study of international students enrolled in business programs who found lack of confidence in language skills to be one of the significant barriers to a positive adjustment experience. An earlier, similar study by Huntley (1993) examining the relationship between language skills and interaction with American students, found that there is a high correlation between poor English language speaking skills and lack of interaction with American students (as well as with others in the broader community), concluding that English proficiency influences adjustment of international students. Even a more recent qualitative study with both undergraduate and graduate students yielded that language inadequacies were a factor in problematic cross-cultural communication interactions (Hinchcliff-Perias & Greer, 2004).

Language is perceived as a predictor of academic success for international students. Examining the factors associated with the academic achievement of 77 undergraduate students Stoyhoff (1997) concluded that a positive significant

relationship exists between a students' language proficiency and their academic performance. This conclusion was later confirmed with the study of adjustment issues of Turkish college students in the United States by Poyrazli, Arbona and Bullington (2001) who found a correlation between high English language skills proficiency and high GPA's. They also concluded that students who had better reading and writing proficiency in English had fewer adjustment problems.

Classroom atmosphere. The American educational system is another challenge that international students have to overcome. The adjustment to the educational system in the United States is made difficult for many international students due to the fact that the structure and process of American higher education is different from what they are accustomed to (Sharif, 1994). Many international students find the open, individualistic U.S. classroom atmosphere to be one of the most conspicuous differences they perceive when starting to study in U.S. universities. The classroom atmosphere is much more informal than what they are used to. In exploring diversity issues in the classroom with international students, Tompson and Tompson (1996) noted that international students observed American students speak out more frequently, often without being called on, and interact with their professors using more familiar terms. According to the study, most international students agreed that because these behaviors would be unacceptable in their native countries, it was difficult to violate these ingrained beliefs and fully participate in the classroom discussion. This largely comes from a difference in educational objectives between the United States and

other countries (especially Africa and Asia). In the United States, education is regarded as a means of personal achievement (Tanaka, 2002) and geared toward enabling students to apply gained knowledge to solve problems and to test challenging theories. In his words, Tyler (1949) argues that a student “has not acquired the objective when the teacher does the problem-solving and the student only watches” (p. 70).

In contrast, the primary educational objectives in many international countries is to have students absorb what instructors teach and what is written in text books (Wan, 2001); thus memorizing facts and theories becomes a central learning activity. In other words, whereas emphasis is placed on student ability *to do* things in American education, teaching students *to know* things is a primary educational aim in many foreign countries like Africa (El-Hassan, 2000). This perception of international students (as they enter American universities) obviously contradicts the American education approach and can therefore affect their learning.

Learning objectives. Students in American classrooms are expected to develop critical thinking abilities. The conversation on education and social change by Horton and Freire (1990) emphasize the need to teach students to think critically. They contend that for a democratic education that results in social change, “it’s absolutely necessary to teach [students] how to think critically” (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 172). The classroom is where a high level of student interaction and discussion takes place (Wan, 2001). Students ask teachers

questions in order to clarify their understanding of reading materials, critically analyze topics, and exchange their perspectives during discussion with other students. The higher the education level, the more individual learning and thinking is emphasized through independent work in library research, field research, and writing (Horton & Freire, 1990; Tanaka, 2002). These expectations allow students to have responsibility for their own learning, through outside readings and independent projects.

On the other hand, a rigid hierarchical system exists in academic communities of many foreign countries, for example some of the countries of Africa (El-Hassan, 2000). Teachers, who possess absolute power in the classroom, are expected to shoulder the entire responsibility for student learning. Freire (1970) condoned this approach that existed in South America and described it as a banking system of education. With this expectation, teachers provide students with knowledge necessary for their study. Students, on the other hand, are required to absorb the information by intensely listening to the teacher as the authority and source of knowledge on the subject matter (Ali, 1992).

Generally, international students who have gone through a typical “banking” system of education feel intimidated by the extensive teacher-student and student-teacher interactions in American classrooms (Riley, 1992). Classroom learning approaches with active interaction are perceived by many international students as informal and less structured (Wan, 2001; Tompson & Tompson, 1996).

A study by Wan (2001) that investigated the learning experience of Chinese students in American universities reviewed that Chinese teachers (in their native education system) lecture with little interaction with students: “teachers ask questions and students answer them...students work closely with text books” (¶ 22). This form of classroom behavior is “regarded as a respect and an appreciation to teachers when students listen attentively and quietly” (¶ 22). This hierarchy is characterized by a dominance-obedience relationship and the subsequent relationships between the teacher and students are rigid and authoritarian in nature. The little interaction that may be found in Asian classrooms may produce great distance between teachers and students (Wan, 2001). A similar concept is also evident in most African schools that predominantly follow the British academic tradition (Riley, 1992).

Teaching/learning approaches. Fundamental differences in educational expectations for teachers and students usually result in various differences in teaching/learning approaches between the United States and many foreign countries. Although teaching is a topic of debate in learning styles research (e.g., whether students should match their learning styles to that of an instructor’s teaching style or whether the instructor should use a variety of teaching styles to accommodate various students’ learning styles), Baglieri and Knopf (2004) stress that educators have an ethical responsibility to provide for students’ educational needs. Acknowledging learning strategies is a factor in international students’ academic success.

Traditionally, the majority of international students learn through the lecture method, a concept that was identified by Ladd and Ruby (1999) when they asked international students to identify the primary mode of learning in their home country. These two researchers conducted a quantitative study using the Canfield Learning Styles Inventory (CLSI) to identify learning style preferences for international students. The CLSI results indicated the students' preferred style of learning was contrary to the actual style to which they had been accustomed. The CLSI concluded that international students can shift from the lecture method to a freer learning environment, i.e., they adapt to solving problems instead of memorizing facts and also learn to find information independently instead of depending on their instructors. In addition, Ladd and Ruby's study found that international students' preferred style of learning is one that reflects a warm and friendly relationship with their instructors. This 'warm and friendly relationship' conclusion does not necessarily imply the loss of absolute power of the teacher in the classroom as proposed by El-Hassan (2000), but rather reflects a positive teacher-student interaction. In exploring learning strategies preferred by international students Stoyhoff (1996) conducted a qualitative study with 27 international college students and found that students are capable of controlling the ways in which they learn and that self-regulated learning strategies (rehearsal, reviewing texts, and notes) can enhance student achievement.

Study methodologies and learning processes employed by international students are also critical to students' academic achievement. Stoyhoff (1997)

conducted another study using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to explore the factors associated with the academic achievement of international students in American universities. For the quantitative approach, the researcher distributed the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) and a self-report questionnaire that asked for information on whether the student had previously received training in learning and study strategies. This process was later followed by the qualitative approach where interviews were conducted a few weeks after LASSI and the self-reported questionnaires were completed. The study revealed that those international students that achieved high in academics effectively integrated social assistance into their learning while lower achievers did not. The study further demonstrated that more academically successful students better managed their study time, were better able to prepare for and take tests, were better at identifying the main ideas in spoken and written discourse, and spent more time studying than less academically successful students. The study concluded that training in learning and study strategies may lead to lower student anxiety, less frustration, and improved academic performance.

Learning preferences and strategies are usually rooted in the learners' culture and social traditions. A comparative study by Hayhoe and Pan (1996) examined East-West dialogue in higher education including differences in learning strategies. They found that contrary to the more open and relaxed ways of classroom teaching and learning on U.S. campuses, most Asian universities are more rigid in classroom regulations. Influenced by the Eastern philosophy of

teacher authority, most of the international students' native educational systems support a strong notion of distance between professors and students to emphasize respect and order (Chen, 1999). Bennett (1999) confirmed that culture has a strong influence on the general pattern of learning strategies in different societies. In her analysis of field-independent and field-dependent learners, she concluded that most international students are field-dependent learners while American students are field-independent learners.

It is evident that U.S. universities have a difficult task in trying to accommodate the learning needs of international students; this is in part due to the fact that these students come from diverse cultural, social, political, and educational backgrounds.

To respond to the academic needs of international students, U.S. universities need to assess critically the learning experiences of international students on their campuses so they can understand the challenges, successes, and failures these students face during their academic pilgrimage in the United States (Lin & Yi, 1997).

Psychological Adjustment

Psychological adjustment to a new culture is a critical process because of its implications on individual's performance and functionality (Poyrazli, et al., 2001). The common problems associated with psychological adjustment that international students have to encounter when they leave their motherland include experiencing homesickness, loneliness, depression, frustration, feeling of

alienation, isolation, the loss of status or identity, and feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness. Although all students experience a certain level of psychological stress, international students may experience more psychological problems than their U.S. counterparts (Rahman & Rollock, 2004).

A possible explanation for this psychological stress can be attributed to conflict in value systems. The United States generally has values associated with individualism (Constantine et al., 2005; Thomson & Thomson, 1996) as characterized by exhibited aspects of self-reliance (Swagler & Ellis, 2003), while most of the international students particularly those from African countries exhibit values that are more relational. Most international students report a certain degree of culture shock when they arrive on their campuses to start their academic life. Culture shock is typically manifested as stress, anxiety, feeling of powerlessness and hopelessness, rejection and isolation (Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Stewart, 2003; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005).

In their effort to investigate the presence of depression among 199 south Asian international students, Rahman and Rollock (2004) found that the measure of acculturation significantly predicted levels of depressive symptoms resulting from prejudice experienced in the host country. Individual students' perception of prejudice is echoed as an important concern for international students (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). Some scholars are concerned with alienation as one of the major psychological stressors that affect learning of international students. The study on perceived causes of stress among Asian students yielded that academic concerns

were the most outstanding factor contributing to their stress (Abu Al Rub, 1995). Concurring with this finding are Lin and Yi (1997) who postulate that academic demands may lead to social isolation among international students.

Exploring various types of stress among international students, the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students instrument was used to determine the psychological needs for international students (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). The data analysis indicated that deprivation/alienation (feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social estrangement) were the main concern among the international students. Loneliness (homesickness, loss of emotional/social support), fear (sense of insecurity in unfamiliar surroundings), and stress due to change scored second on the rater scale. These findings were later confirmed by Lin and Yi (1997) and recently by Heggins and Jackson (2003) who concluded that alienation, homesickness and loneliness are the common problems affecting international students upon arrival to U.S.

Social and Cultural Adjustment

Various scholars have examined characteristics of international students who adjust well to U.S culture. Perrucci and Hu (1995) explored determinants of satisfaction with graduate international students' academic and social life. Their study revealed several factors related to academic satisfaction: self-esteem, contact with U.S graduate students, perceived discrimination, and perceived attitudes towards their home countries. The study concluded that international graduate students who were satisfied with their academic program felt that they

were living in a social environment that did not discriminate against them and did not reveal negative attitudes toward their countries. These findings were consistent with previous results by Sodowsky and Plake (1992) who examined the acculturation differences among international students. They found that although Africans were more fluent in English than Asian students, they perceived more prejudice, and hence were less adjusted than their Asian counterparts. International students who experienced discrimination reported more adjustment problems than peers who reported little or no discrimination (Senyshyn, Warford, & Zhan, 2000).

With regard to satisfaction with social life, the study by Perrucci and Hu (1995) identified being married, having good language skills, having extensive exposure to U.S. culture, experiencing less or no discrimination, and having high self-esteem as positive factors. The authors concluded that each of these factors facilitated positive social contacts with others in the community outside academic settings and had significant influence on one's adjustment. These findings were consistent with Barratt and Huba's (1994) conclusions. Their study revealed significant positive relationships between interest and success in building relationships with Americans and students' positive evaluations of their experiences with the people of the city in which the university was located. Poyrazli et al, (2004) study also indicated that students with higher levels of social support experienced lower levels of acculturative stress. However, the study did not indicate if the English language had any influence in forming such

relationships. The study also concluded that the more interest and success students had in building relationships with Americans, the higher their perceived self-esteem. These factors had a major influence on adjustment of international students.

Similarly, Wang's (2004) study examined the relationship between married status and adjustment of international students. The study revealed that single students had significantly greater self-perceived problems than those who were married and living with their spouses. The researcher concluded that the positive aspects of companionship associated with married life are important factors in how an individual perceives particular problems. In contrast, a previous study by Wong (1991) did not find a significant difference in problems between single and married international students.

Exploring the relationship of residing in ethnic communities and adjustment of international students, Duan and Vu (2000) investigated the influence of community involvement in facilitating acculturation. They compared the acculturation level of Vietnamese students who stayed in or around a Vietnamese community while attending college with those who lived in non-Vietnamese communities during their college years. Surprisingly, the study concluded that Vietnamese students who lived in their own ethnic communities had a higher level of acculturation than those who did not. A possible explanation for this finding was that those who lived in Vietnamese communities appeared to integrate at a higher functional level with the host culture while strongly

identifying with their own culture in terms of values and attitudes. Previous studies have demonstrated that international students from communal and interdependent cultures value interpersonal relationships (Kozu, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Moore & Constantine, 2005; Nebedum-Ezeh, 1997). Thus, forming such relationships within their own ethnic community can ease adjustment. Inconsistent with this finding are Poyrazli et al, (2004) in their effort to investigate if there is any correlation between social support and demographic variables with acculturative stress of international students. The study concluded that international students who socialized with non-Americans experienced more acculturative stress than did students who socialized with Americans, thus experiencing more adjustment problems. These findings support previous studies (Abe, Talbot, & Geelhoed, 1998; Jacob & Greggo, 2001; Zimmerman, 1995) alluding that international students' interaction with the host members contributed to a better adjustment process.

In concluding this section, it is worth noting that there is a consensus in the literature that international students for whom English is not their primary language encounter several roadblocks as they negotiate their place in the higher education institutions. It is evident in this literature review that the topic of international students' adjustment has attracted several researchers from various disciplines resulting in the duplication of efforts without overarching theories (Tomich, McWhirter, & Darcy 2003). Although there are some scholars of international students who have included the theoretical foundation of their

studies like Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004) and Heggins and Jackson (2003), the majority are lacking. The topic of adjustment of international students is the basis for my study. However, in reviewing a myriad of works on the topic, I found some of them spoke directly to my experiences as an international student such as the works of Poyrazli et al, (2004) who address the correlation between social support and acculturative stress, and Lin and Yi (1997) who identify academic demands as the cause of social isolation. However, the literature discussed above has failed to recognize past experiences international students bring along with them such as English language proficiency, economic-class status (e.g., some who may have been exposed to western culture prior to coming to the U.S.), and gender differences.

What is striking in the literature is that the adjustment problems faced by international students have been generalized. The majority of the studies make no distinction between the kind of students being studied, e.g., graduate versus undergraduate, traditional versus non-traditional. In addition, most scholars fail to identify differences in adjustment of students from various countries. The few exceptions I identified regarding this point are Sodowsky and Plake (1992), Riley (1992), Poyrazli et al, (2001), and Sanner, Wilson and Samson (2002), who have recognized the differences in adjustment of students from various countries in their studies, of particular note, the differences that exist for *African* students. The inclusion of Black African international adult students and understanding their adjustment problems is critical to my study.

Adult International Students

On today's U.S. higher educational campuses, there is an increase in the number of non-traditional age adult students, both domestic and international, that reflects the changing demographics of higher educational institutions' populations. Nationally, 1998 saw a marked increase of 46% in higher education enrollment among older students (Bell, 2004). Even more current, the traditional student is described as a minority today that comprises only 27% of the national college population (Kenneth & Lopez, 2005). There are no signs that this current trend is weakening. Given this situation, educational institutions must be committed to adopting policies and procedures that will address the special needs of the new student majority if they are going to be competitive. What are the differences between traditional-age and adult students and what characteristics constitute the differences? In response to these questions, I will first set the stage by providing definitions and characteristics attributed to traditional and non-traditional age adult students and then explore factors that influence non-traditional age adult students' return to colleges, concluding with a review of existing literature that addresses international non-traditional age adult students.

Definitions and Characteristics

There is a major debate over the best definition of non-traditional age adult students. Some scholars define them by age for example, adult students are those students over 25 years old (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Donaldson, 1999; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Edwards & Person, 1997; Kasworm,

2003a&b; Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001) while others define adult students by the subcategories they represent: married, divorced, widowed, raising children, working or unemployed, retired, commuter or part-time students (Graham & Donaldson, 1999; Kasworm, 2003b; Kinsella, 1998; Rogers & Gottlieb, 1999; Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001). Some adult educators have suggested that the terms *non-traditional*, *commuter*, or *reentry* describing adult students reflect lack of privilege and their visibility in U.S. institutions of higher education, that these labels define them as marginal and thus do not indicate respect and dignity for the qualities of adult students (Kasworm, 1993; Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001). On the other hand, traditional-aged students are defined as students who are between the age of 18 to 22 years, who enroll to college directly upon high school graduation, on a full time basis (Christie & Hutcheson, 2003; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Edwards & Person, 1997; Graham & Donaldson, 1999).

As mentioned earlier, non-traditional age adult students generally face circumstances different from those confronting traditional students. In an effort to compare traditional age and non-traditional age adult students, Kinsella (1998) conducted a study with a university in Florida. The study concluded that non-traditional students tended to be married, had dependents, and held full time employment while traditional students were young (under age 24), held part-time employment and lived on campus. A similar study was conducted by Senter and Senter (1998) and found that social roles of traditional undergraduate students are

different from those assumed by non-traditional students. Traditional students have had fewer roles than adult students commonly associated with adulthood.

Other attributes that differentiate adult students from traditional students include their involvement inside and outside the classroom, and their intellectual and academic development. Graham and Donaldson (1999) conducted an outstanding study using 28,000 both adult and traditional students to explore relationships between academic and intellectual development and college environment. This study concluded that adult students had less involvement than younger students in campus activities but were much more actively involved in providing care for and supporting their families. Surprisingly, the study found that despite adults' lesser level of involvement on campuses, they demonstrated higher levels of growth than did traditional students as indicated by their academic and intellectual scores.

Consistent with this study is the work of Kasworm (2005) who explored the nature of adult student identity in an intergenerational college setting using a diverse group of 28 both adult and traditional students. Kasworm found that adult learners were more committed in college studies than were their traditional student counterparts and that this commitment influenced their learning engagement in the classroom. In light of this discussion, it is worth noting that adult students when compared with traditional students bring a wealth of life experiences, skills and prior knowledge (Kasworm, 2003a) that can be beneficial to younger learners. Other characteristics attributed to non-traditional age adult

students include entering higher education at an older age (as compared to traditional college freshmen), returning to higher education after having stopped at least once, being financially independent, and being married, divorced, widowed, and/or a parent (Kasworm, 2003b & 2005; Rogers & Gottlieb, 1999).

International Adult Students' Experiences

The number of graduate international student enrollment in U.S. universities continues to rise (Institute of International Education, 2004). The foreign student population represents more than 11% of graduate enrollment in U.S. higher education (Shen & Herr, 2004). A more recent report released by the Council of Graduate Schools indicates a 3% increase of international students' admissions in 2005 (Brown, 2005). The importance of international adult students' presence in the U.S. cannot be overlooked when the country is clearly dependent on the foreign born population within certain disciplines. More than 50% of the engineers with Ph.D.s and 45% of math and computer scientists with Ph.D.s working in the United States are foreign-born (Anderson, 2005). Given the assumption that these students are generally considered adult students by definition of age, it is surprising that the literature addressing their adjustment and experiences is silent.

Because over half of international students enrolled in U.S. institutions are studying at the graduate level (Brown, 2005), the importance of understanding their experiences in higher education cannot be diminished. Distinguishing between graduate and undergraduate international students' experiences is critical

and therefore “it is important to study graduate students as a separate group so that this knowledge could help counselors, professors, advisors and the international student offices to better understand and help this population” (Poyrazli, Arbona, Nora, McPherson, & Pisecco, 2002, p. 634). There are some exception cases where a few adult international students could be enrolled in undergraduate programs whose experiences are similar to graduate international students and therefore need to be recognized. In light of this the focus of my study is to shorten the existing gap by providing a valuable perspective on non-traditional age adult international students’ experiences specifically those from African countries.

After an extensive search of literature, I came across only one author who specifically used the phrase *adult international students* (Huntley, 1993). Graduate students are categorized as adults that have been out of formal education for a number of years, and often return to acquire an advanced degree in an effort to enhance their employment opportunities and career aspirations (Huntley). In her effort to understand international adult student experiences, Huntley examined research findings on adult international students and their adjustment problems and identified three problem areas unique to foreign students: language barriers, academic adjustment, and social adjustment. These problems are similar to those all other international students encounter while pursuing their education in the United States as described earlier. While non-traditional age adult students face similar challenges as their younger undergraduate counterparts, there are some

differences between them. This section reviews the literature that specifically addresses graduate students' academic, social and cultural adjustment.

Academic experiences. There is a consensus from the majority of international students' scholars that language is the initial overriding concern for international students for whom English is not their primary language (Huntley, 1993; Lin & Yi, 1997; Poyrazli et al., 2002). Examining the language barrier, Huntley observes that language can affect active participation in the class. While international undergraduate students' participation may be less emphasized, the expectations of graduate and doctoral participation (defined as adults) is considered as one of the requirements of learning. This finding was recently acknowledged and confirmed by Wang (2004) who investigated multiple aspects of 21 international students' experiences pursuing graduate education in the United States including pre-arrival motives, experience within academic programs and impact of U.S. education. The participants of the study had a minimum of two semesters by the time of the study. The study found that international graduate students exhibited uneasiness with class activities that involved oral participation resulting from language deficiency that affected students' speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension. The study also concluded that while academic and career-related motives were primary reasons behind students' pursuit of U.S. education, social relation marked by isolation, feelings of exclusion from class activities, and prejudiced attitudes were positively correlated to academic adjustment.

In a broad sense, English language proficiency is positively correlated with the ease and stability of one's adjustment. The study with graduate students whose average age was 27 years old yielded that the ability to negotiate issues related to education, cultural adjustment and social relationship with Americans was attributed to English proficiency (Poyrazli et al, 2002). In other words adequate English language skills are necessary if one is to participate in the social life of the educational institution and community.

Reading and writing can also pose problems for international students. Angelova and Riazantseva (1999) investigated the writing skills of four international graduate students from various cultural backgrounds learning to write discipline-specific papers during their first year in the United States. The study concluded that there were no unified standards or expectations within the academic discourse community. Each discipline had its own values and practices posing a great challenge for international students. An earlier study by Casanave (1995) investigated the experiences of 12 first year graduate sociology students for whom English was their second language. The primary purpose of the study was to examine how these students learned to think and express their thoughts in writing. The author found that the students thought and wrote in ways different from the dominant discourse of U.S. academia. This conclusion does not imply that these students could not write but rather that they wrote in a way that was previously learned in their countries of origin.

Learning to write in one's professional community is a process that involves acquisition of specific knowledge and expression of paradigms of the respective disciplines and writing styles (Myers, 1990). This problem is compounded by the fact that international students' comprehension and writing requires them to transit from English to a native language for informational processing (Pardue & Haas, 2003). Students who demonstrate writing and reading skill deficiencies experience difficulties in their course work leading to more stress and more adjustment problems (Poyrazli et al, 2001). This challenge poses adjustment problems for graduate or adult international students since there is a greater emphasis and higher expectation in writing for graduate students than undergraduate students (Huntley, 1993).

Adjusting to the U.S. educational system also poses learning problems for international graduate students. Since one's previous experiences have significant influence on one's learning process (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999), understanding these students' previous educational experiences can facilitate the adjustment process. Most international students have had prior experiences in higher education in their countries of origin and are well grounded in those educational approaches. For example in China both undergraduate and graduate students, within their respective cohorts, took the same prescribed courses at the same time as long as they were in the same educational major and year (Qian, 2002). On the contrary, these students, upon entry into U.S. higher education, are expected to choose their courses to fulfill academic requirements, a protocol that is unfamiliar

to them. Given that graduate students are under pressure to complete their studies in a limited time (Poyrazli et al., 2002), this new experience of decision making regarding choosing courses can be a frustrating process to adult international students whose achievement of their career aspirations is an ultimate goal (Shen & Herr, 2004). This transition poses more adjustment problems to graduate international students compared to undergraduate international students who are in their early stage of career exploration (Shen & Herr) and did not have any higher educational experiences prior to coming to the United States.

Educational expectation from U.S. professors is another confusing problem to adult international students. An explanation of Muuka (1998) is a classic example of a misunderstanding of educational expectations. In his organizational behavior class for graduate students seeking a MBA, Muuka gave an assignment where students were to work in self-selected groups in order to produce a paper together. A group of four international students worked together on the assigned paper. These international students assumed that the first and final examinations in the course would carry more weight than the group paper and since none of them had experience writing a paper before, they did not put much effort in the paper assignment. Instead they invested all their effort in preparing for exams. This resulted in low grades that eventually frustrated these students.

Social and cultural adjustment. Social and cultural adjustment is another hurdle faced by adult international students (Huntley, 1993). The author argues that traditional undergraduate students are more socially successful in adjustment

than adult students. This success is attributed by the fact that most undergraduate students live on campuses and have daily interaction with American students, thus improving their language and communication skills, while on the other hand most adult students have their families and live off campuses and often enclave with students from their own countries, thus furthering their alienation from American culture and language (Tomich et al., 2000). Consistent with this finding is Poyrazli, Arbona, and Bullington (2001) in their quantitative study which concluded that older students have more adjusting problems because their values, customs, and interests may have been even more grounded in their home cultures than younger students. These studies suggest that adult international students have a tendency to manifest less flexibility than younger traditional international students.

Family status in the host country (for my purposes, the United States) has an indirect influence on adjustment of adult nontraditional students. Chapdelaine and Alexitch's (2004) quantitative study explored if the international students' social interaction with nationals from the host country plays any role in aiding the adjustment process. The outcome of the study indicated that international students who were accompanied by their partners and children were less likely to interact with host nationals. A possible explanation to support this proposition is international students who are accompanied by their families may want to spend their available time with their families thus limiting the amount of interaction with the host nationals. It is also possible that the families may demand more time

from the international students. The study then concluded that as social interaction with the host nationals decreases, the more adjustment problems experienced. Conversely, research has indicated that younger (traditional students) have more time to interact with the host nationals resulting in less adjustment problems (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Poyrazli et al, 2001; Tomich et al, 2000). This family status concept is consistent with an earlier qualitative study by De Verthelyi (1995) that examined the characteristics, needs, and expectations of international students' spouses. The adjustment problems experienced by the international students' spouses and children had a direct implication on the adjustment process of students. These concerns were an additional strain to international students' adjustment process.

Exploring the relationship between acculturation and vocational identity of 112 graduate and undergraduate Taiwanese students, Shih and Brown (2000) found that older students (often graduate students) who had lived in the United States for a shorter period of time had more adjustment problems but adhered more to Asian identity and had higher vocational identity. It appears that older Taiwanese students were more likely to possess a clearer understanding of career aspirations, interests and abilities while undergraduate students are still in their early stage of career exploration (Shen & Herr, 2004). Career maturity is one of the factors that define nontraditional students (Huntley, 1993).

In an attempt to explore cross-cultural experiences of two Chinese students in an American university, a case study of a student and his wife (also a

graduate student) was conducted by Wan (2001). The study reviewed both positive and negative experiences of studying in the United States. One of the positive issues is economics. The couple stated that although they had prestigious jobs in China they were underpaid and unsatisfied with the living conditions in China as compared with their life in the United States. The negative experiences included discrimination and disillusionment experienced in the United States. The couple reported that they were treated differently in social areas such as in shopping. In terms of disillusionment, the couple stated that financial problems, pressure from school work and language were some of the things that had disillusioned them. A recent study by Wang (2004) exploring cross-cultural graduate education yielded the same result. The purpose of the study was to explore the international graduate students' experiences in higher education. The study concluded that cultural differences in values and customs posed challenges and struggles in cross-cultural education settings such as conflicting cultural norms for classroom behaviors and social relations as marked by prejudiced attitudes.

Critique of literature. The purpose of this section was to review the literature that addresses nontraditional international students. Because of the extensive study done on international students in general, the selection criteria for the purpose of this section was determined as follows: (a) that all literature somehow included graduate or used the term *older* international students studying in United States, (b) that the population under study used English as a second

language, and (c) that all studies were conducted within the last 15 years since 1987 marked a high number of enrollment of older students in higher education (Senter & Senter, 1998). In addition to these criteria, I selected the studies that included the definitions and attributes of nontraditional students in particular even though the terms *nontraditional* or *adult international* student were silent in the literature. Because the researchers have defined students 25 years of age or older as nontraditional (Senter & Senter), there was an assumption in selecting the literature that most graduate students fall under this criteria. Since not all students are defined by age in the literature, other descriptive criteria included terms such as older students, return students, full-time employees, financially independent, or students with family responsibilities (Bundy & Smith, 2004).

In reviewing the literature, there are issues of common concern faced by both traditional and nontraditional international students, collectively. These issues include academic adjustment (such as language, learning styles, and educational expectations from U.S. professors) and cultural and social adjustment (social interaction, discrimination, value system, etc.). However, the studies have indicated that older or nontraditional international students seem to face more challenges in the adjustment process than younger or traditional international students (Huntley, 1993; Poyrazli et al., 2001; Wang, 2004).

There is a plethora of international students' literature but one must recognize that the experiences and identity of older or nontraditional international students are different from traditional international students due to differences in

variables such as previous educational and career experiences, age, and responsibilities that are attributed to adults (Bundy & Smith, 2004). In addition, much has been written on international students in psychology and sociology disciplines (Rong & Brown, 2001) but hardly any literature addressing nontraditional adult international students per se. This lack of literature on nontraditional adult international learners in adult and higher education is an indication that this population of learners and their contributions to higher education has been overlooked in the field. Even more lacking is the literature addressing Black African international adult students.

Nationally, over half of international students enrolled in U.S. institutions are studying at the graduate level (Brown, 2005) and therefore considered as adult learners. These students' profiles are very different from the traditional international students in that they are defined by the several roles they represent (Bundy & Smith, 2004). Unfortunately, adult education scholars from all disciplines have treated international students as a homogeneous group failing to keep pace with the changing trend of international students in higher education. My proposed study on Black African nontraditional international students is intended to narrow this existing gap.

African International Students

The history of African international students in American institutions of higher education can be traced from the early 1960s after many African nations acquired their independence from foreign political domination. The African

assumption of sending students to developed countries particularly to the United States is to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for developing countries. This is only true if such person educated in the West return to their country of origin (Bratsberg, 1995; Chen & Barnett, 2000). Although African international students are one of the least represented groups among the international students in campuses of American institutions of higher education, a recent report released by Open Doors (IIE, 2004) indicated that the African continent was ranked fourth among the top seven leading places of origin for international students. Enrollment patterns vary by countries of origin within the African continent. In the 2000-2001 academic year, international students from Kenya, Nigeria, and Ghana comprised the three highest totals of U.S. African international students, and the numbers from these three countries rose between 6% and 16% from the previous year (Constantine et al, 2005). As the numbers of African international students continue to rise, there remains a compelling need to qualitatively examine the experiences of these African international students, particularly the adult-aged African international students whose presence is more visible in graduate programs.

The purpose of my study is to investigate educational and cultural experiences of Black African international nontraditional adult students in U.S. higher educational institutions, and therefore assumes that there is a possible interaction and influence among the academic, social and cultural aspects of the experience requiring a comprehensive exploration. Accordingly, this section

examines the research that covers academic, social and cultural experiences of African international students in the United States. Because of limited published studies of African students' experiences in the United States, much of the studies are found in dissertations. Thus, the literature review will include both dissertations and the works on African students published within the last 15 years.

Educational Experience

One's country of origin is a factor affecting adjustment of international students in the United States. Guclu (1994) examined differences in adjustment among international students from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. The study concluded that European students experience fewer problems than those from the other four regional groups. A similar conclusion is documented in a recent study by Senyshyn, Warford and Zhan, (2000) who compared the academic adjustment of different international students from various countries. The study concluded that students from Western countries adjusted more easily to American higher education than international students from Third World countries.

More specifically, Oluyedun (1997) suggests that West African students do not participate in North American academic work in the same way that their North American counterparts do. For example, students particularly from West African countries usually participate in silence or they actually withdraw from participation in an emotional and/or intellectual sense. This silence in particular can be misinterpreted by North American professors. In addition, the African

students under study brought many expectations regarding their educational experiences, including their professors' teaching styles in that they expected their professors to behave like their African professors. At the same time, the North American professors had expectations of these West African students, such as the forms of participating in the class discussions and negotiating time and other aspects of assignments. In neither case were expectations met. Because these expectations conflicted in the learning process itself, numerous occasions existed for misunderstanding.

Black African international students come to classrooms with certain expectations from their teachers. For example, Black African international students particularly in graduate programs, find the open and interactive classroom atmosphere to be one of the most conspicuous differences they perceive in U.S. universities. The classroom atmosphere is much more informal than what they are accustomed to (Riley, 1992). American graduate programs often exercise adult learning approaches which are commonly unfamiliar to Black African international students. The adult learning approach is characterized by creating a supportive learning environment, to use learners' experience as a resource for learning, to promote self-directed learning, and to encourage and foster collaboration in the learning process (Brookfield, 1986).

In an earlier work, Molestsane (1995) explored the success of Black South African students in U.S. universities. Molestsane argues that in order to investigate educational expectations for African international students the primary

emphasis rests on discovering the students' perceptions versus those of the faculty and school administrators. Not surprisingly, determination, motivation, and hard work were positively correlated to Black South African students' academic success in the United States. Further, Black South African students attributed their academic success to adequate facilities, effective instructional techniques, and challenging curricula. Lack of practical opportunities to apply their learned knowledge was raised as a concern by these students. Overall, Black South African students in the U.S. strongly believed that their instructors treated and graded them fairly. In support of this study is El-Hassan, (2000) devoted his study on exploring the experiences of African international students in the United States. This qualitative study found that the American professors judged African international students as "capable, hard working and committed to their academic work performing well in coursework and dissertations" (pp. 223). El-Hassan argues that unlike other non-English speaking international students, African international students had satisfactory English skills because of the British influence on some of their national education systems. El-Hassan concluded in his study that the relevance of the academic experience to African international students was the most important aspect in their educational goal. These studies indicate the various elements within the classroom environment that can impact educational success for African students studying in the United States. Although these studies' results cannot be generalized to all African students, they provide insights that may inform my proposed study.

Lack of English language proficiency has been shown to be a major factor in international students' adjustment to the classroom environment (Hinchcliff-Perias & Greer, 2004; Stoyhoff, 1997), and even more so for students from non-English speaking countries (Abriam-Yago, Yoder, & Kataoka-Yahiro, 1999). In exploring experiences of female Nigerian international nursing students in a baccalaureate nursing program, Sanner, Wilson and Samson (2002) conducted a qualitative study. The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 48 and 75% of these participants had prior college experience. The study identified social isolation as a major theme. The Nigerian international students were concerned about their accents and the American students' responses to their accents as reasons for feeling isolated from the dominant group. This perceived American attitude and/or the Nigerian students' perceived lack of their own language skills led them to form cohesive groups among themselves in order to more effectively cope with issues related to language proficiency.

The studies discussed above regarding the experiences of African international students in American universities and colleges indicate the need to incorporate the students' past educational experiences in their countries of origin in order to orient them to the American educational system. Previous studies demonstrate clearly that a disproportionate amount of attention has been spent on the present American educational system with little consideration or no attention to the past experiences of African international students, a critical element in education for adult learners. This study will explore the lived experiences of adult

non traditional Black African students in the American educational system. In order to understand those experiences, consideration of their past experiences in their own countries will be essential.

Cultural Experiences

African international students in the U.S. bring with them unique values, language, tribal distinctions, traditions, and practices that are often very different from what they encounter in the United States. In an attempt to explore the African international students' cultural adjustment experiences in the United States, Constantine et al., (2005) conducted a qualitative study with 12 Kenyan, Nigerian, and Ghanaian international college students through semi-structured interviews. The study identified several themes that seemed to be related to African international cultural experiences: (a) pre- and post-sojourn perceptions of the United States, (b) responses to prejudicial or discriminatory treatment, (c) family and friendship networks, (d) coping strategies with cultural adjustment problems, and (e) openness to seeking counseling to address cultural adjustment problems.

In addressing the theme on the pre-and post-sojourn perceptions of the United States, Constantine et al. (2005) observed that the African international students under study believed that United States offered many academic and personal opportunities for African international students. Sandthu and Asrabadi (1994) and Sadowsky and Lai (1997) noted that graduate international students in particular often have high expectations of academic life when they move to the

United States. Other scholars have specifically addressed the *quality* of graduate education programs as being an important criterion for one's decision to study in the United States. (Altbach, 1991; Clark, 1995; Mauch & Spaulding, 1992; Wang, 2004). African international students' assumption was that the United States had better educational systems and greater personal freedom than their countries of origin. To these students' surprise, they came to realize that White Americans occupied such power to the extent that the educational system was geared toward White cultural values (Constantine et al., 2005). Nevertheless, African international students found the U.S. educational system to be excellent in its focus and content. A common belief among these students was that the industrialized nations may provide attractive opportunities for study (Bourke, 1997).

The Constantine et al. study (2005) supports the previous work by Nebedum-Ezeh, (1997) who investigated the experiences and coping strategies of African international students. The researcher concluded that African international students experience adjustment difficulties because of inadequate preparation for their sojourn to the United States. Because African international students leave their countries with certain expectations about how their lives will be like upon arrival in the United States, they may experience disappointments and frustrations when such expectations are unmet. Lin and Yi's (1997) study supports that pre-sojourn preparation prior to students' arrival to the United States helps students reduce their anxiety and possible culture shock.

Discriminatory treatment is another experience that African international students encounter. This experience is documented in an earlier quantitative study by Sodowsky and Plake (1992) who found that African international students perceived more prejudice than did Asians and South Americans. Interestingly, 13 years later similar findings were evident in Constantine et al.'s study (2005), which indicated some of the same discriminatory experiences such as being called racial slurs by White Americans and being viewed as less intelligent than Americans. Similar concerns are raised by Alidou (2000) in that international students in their acculturation process often experience racism and discrimination from those in the mainstream culture. Racist remarks and jokes in class can cause deep offense to international students. International students who experienced discrimination have more adjustment problems than peers who report little or no discrimination (Senyshyn, Warford, & Zhan, 2000).

Race may also play a role in relation to the cultural adjustment of African international students in the United States. Black African international students have grown in a racially homogeneous environment and therefore are "less likely to have had negative experiences related to discrimination or racism prior to coming to the United States" (Constantine et al., 2005, p.58). However, race may become a more prevalent issue for many of these African international students particularly for those in predominantly White institutions (Adeleke, 1998; Molestsane, 1995), and this racial discrimination may lead to their adjustment difficulties. Previous studies on international students indicate that differences in

skin color have a direct relationship with the perceived prejudice experienced by international students (Tomich, McWhirter, & Darcy, 2003). Often those with Black skin color suffer more prejudice from White people than do others with any other skin color (Smith-McLallen, Johnson, Dovidio & Pearson, 2006).

Going abroad, for most international students, means leaving their families and breaking from familiar sociocultural and other support systems, and this can result in students experiencing adjustment problems (Hayes & Lin, 1994). Family and friendship networks were found to have positive influence in the adjustment of African international students (Constantine et al., 2005). This conclusion is consistent with a previous study by Mori (2000) that indicated the importance of family and peers' support in the lives of international students in the adjustment process. A similar conclusion is well founded in Maundeni's (1999) qualitative study that investigated the role of social networks in the adjustment of African international students to British society. Of particular importance, this study viewed students from the same region as an important source of emotional support and associated this with better adjustment. Consistent with this conclusion is El-Hassan (2000) who found the social domain of African international students to have a regular pattern of socializing first with their fellow nationals, then with other African students, and third with Americans and other international students. Chapdelaine and Alexich (2004) concluded that international students belonging to a large co-national group find emotional support in such an environment. A possible explanation that emotional support within co-national

groups facilitates adjustment for these students is the fact that African international students had homogeneous experiences in their countries of origin. These co-nationals therefore promote the sharing of common problems and concerns. This co-ethnic community concept may pose a problem to African international students since they constitute a relatively small number on most campuses in the United States. Students from Africa may find it difficult to find people from the same geographic home region who share their cultural heritage as compared with other international students from other nations (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004).

In addressing the coping strategies and openness to seeking counseling services, Constantine et al., (2005) found that African students from Kenya, Nigeria, and Ghana were not generally open to seeking professional counseling to address their adjustment problems. This concept is consistent with a previous study that documented the underutilization of mental health services by African international students in the United States (Essandoh, 1995). A possible reason for not seeking professional counseling can be traced from the Afri-centric worldview that views mental illness resulting from individuals not living in harmony with nature. Another possible explanation is that African international students keep their problems to themselves so as not to burden others (Constantine et al., 2004). However, many African international students may prefer to seek help and support from their family members and address their problems within their family systems or close friendship networks (Moore & Constantine, 2005).

Constantine et al., (2004) performed a quantitative study to examine self-concealment behaviors and social self-efficacy skills as potential mediators in the relationship between acculturative stress and depression in African, Asian, and Latin American international students. This study revealed that African international students seemed to be fairing worse with regard to their well-being than Asian and Latin American international students. Specifically, students from Africa reported lower social self-efficacy and high levels of acculturative stress and depression as compared with others from Asia and Latin America. A possible explanation to this finding may be associated with discrimination African students encounter in the United States. According to Nebedum-Ezeh's (1997) study, African students encounter discrimination on campus, feel isolated and are not socially connected to native students. In their study Sodowsky and Plake (1992) found that African international students perceive more prejudice than did Asian and South American students. This prejudice indicates a sense of alienation from the dominant group thus causing acculturative stress. Ward and Searle (1991) support the hypothesis that higher degrees of cultural distance between international students' countries of origins and their host countries are associated with higher degrees of social difficulty in cross-cultural interactions. It is reasonable to conclude that international students experiencing high degrees of cultural distance also experience higher degrees of acculturative stress.

In concluding this section, it is worth highlighting some critical issues arising from the literature reviewed. Certainly, Constantine and her co-researchers

can be commended for taking an active role in researching about the issues affecting African international students given that literature on this population of students is minimal. In their efforts to investigate the cultural adjustment of African students from Kenya, Nigeria, and Ghana, the researchers seem to recognize that there is great heterogeneity among these students and therefore generalizing their findings was limited. On the other hand, the literature discussed above have grouped all African students both traditional (commonly undergraduate) and adult aged students (often graduate) as one homogeneous group. Unfortunately, these studies on African international students make no distinction between the experiences of traditional versus nontraditional students. Conversely, other studies examining the experiences of international students in general (versus those from a specific continent) have indicated that older or nontraditional international students seem to face more challenges in the adjustment process than younger or traditional international students (Huntley, 1993; Poyrazli et al., 2001). To bridge this gap in the literature, my study is intended to address nontraditional Black African international students' experiences in higher education.

Although lack of English proficiency has been shown to be a contributing factor in the adjustment of African international students as indicated by Sanner, et al. (2002), it worth recognizing that one's accent is not necessarily indicative of language deficiency. Consideration of the historical foundation of a country's European colonization and its influence on language is critical. Those African

nations which were formally colonized by the British adopted the British system of education in which English speaking is highly emphasized. Such countries include Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana. El-Hassan, (2000) asserts that students from African French-speaking countries encounter more communication problems than those from African English-speaking countries.

Summary

Adjustment of international students in the new social and academic environment is often a challenging and sometimes difficult process. This chapter examined academic and cultural adjustment of international students by reviewing the literature from different perspectives. The chapter begins by demonstrating to the reader that the United States is still undergoing a major demographic transformation in racial and ethnic populations and the growing diversity in the United States is reflected in the multicultural population with whom educators interact. This demographic shift has inevitable implications on higher education posing challenges to educators such as the presence of adult nontraditional students and the need for internationalization of higher education.

Given that the study is about Black African international adult students in the United States, the theoretical framework of the study is grounded primarily in a combination of critical race theory, sociocultural learning theory, and the acculturation models of international students in higher education. Critical race theory, sociocultural learning theory, and Jandt's (2004) acculturative model guided this study. CRT addresses specifically the effects of race and racism and

how they shape social life, while at the same time challenging the hegemonic system of White supremacy on the 'meritocratic' system (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). Sociocultural perspective seeks to understand the cultural worlds within which an individual has grown and developed and how they define themselves in relation to others. Inherent in this approach is the notion that culture (race, values, practices and traditions) of a group defines and dictates the rules and behaviors for group members (Alfred, 2003). My study is also based on the assumption that Black African international adult students undergo intercultural experiences which are identified by Jandt (2004) as stages of acculturation. This framework was used to investigate the adjustment process of the students under study.

The underlying theme in this chapter is adjustment and adaptation of international students in the United States. The internationalization of higher education in the United States has motivated thousands of international students to leave their cultures, families and friends, and thus experience a variety of adjustment concerns when matriculating at universities in the United States. These concerns include: academic problems such as adjusting to second languages, adapting to new educational systems, psychological issues (e.g. culture shock), cross-cultural problems such as social norms of the host culture (Huntley, 1993; Lacina, 2002), racism and discrimination (Alidou, 2000). In order to achieve an increased understanding of adjustment from one culture to another, this chapter has provided the different patterns of adjustment as discussed in the literature. Such models include those of Lin and Yi (1997) (describing four stages

as pre-arrival, initial adjustment, on-going adjustment, and return-home adjustment stage), Huntley (1993) (pre-arrival, participation, culture shock, and re-entry stage), and Leong (2001) and Yeh (2003) (four adaptation stages: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization).

Because over half of international students enrolled in U.S. institutions are studying at the graduate level (Brown, 2005) and often considered adult students by age definition (Senter & Senter, 1998), the importance of understanding their experiences in higher education is critical. In reviewing the literature, issues of common concern faced by both traditional and nontraditional international students collectively were identified. These issues include academic adjustment (such as language, learning styles, and educational expectations) and cultural and social adjustment (social interaction, discrimination, value system, etc.). Other studies have indicated that older or nontraditional international students seem to face more challenges in the adjustment process than younger or traditional international students (Huntley, 1993; Poyrazli et al., 2001; Wang, 2004). In the literature review, studies from all disciplines have treated these students as a homogeneous group failing to recognize the existing differences (Sodswky & Plake, 1992). Although there is limited literature on African international students within the last ten years, the available literature was not apparent how African nontraditional international students' experiences differ from other international students. The focus of my study is therefore intended to contribute to this gap by

exploring the adjustment experiences of nontraditional international Black African students in the United States.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Higher education administrators, scholars, and instructors of international students have treated all international students as a homogeneous group (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). In fact, research on international students has put undergraduate and graduate students of all nationalities into one group, ignoring students' cultural differences and academic needs (Wang, 2004). While there is overwhelming literature addressing international students' adjustment process in the U.S. higher education (Duan & Vu, 2000; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992; Yeh, 2003), most of these studies have been conducted using only questionnaires (Tanaka, 2002). My study moved beyond a quantitative analysis of the process of adjustment of international Black African adult students and investigated and explored their lived experiences in the U.S. higher education system. This chapter focuses on the research methodology, including procedures, data collection, and analysis processes used in my study. It starts with restating the purpose of the study, research questions, and providing a detailed description of the sampling process. My personal experience and unqualified efforts to ensure the credibility of data collection is included in this chapter.

Purpose and Research Questions

The increasing number of international students on U.S. campuses has provoked higher education scholars to invest time in understanding their adjustment process both to American culture and also the education system. The

purpose of my study was to explore the adjustment issues encountered by adult Black African international students attending predominantly White institutions of higher education in the United States. Various lived experiences of Black African adult international students were investigated on the basis of their descriptions, recollections, reflections, and points of view on their experiences.

In an effort to understand the lived experiences of these students, my study attempted to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the academic and cultural experiences faced by non-traditional Black African international adult students on U.S. campuses?
- 2) What is the essence of the lived experience of adjusting to attending predominantly White U.S. higher educational institutions among these adult Black African international students?

Research Design

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study. Patton (2002) suggests that a researcher who utilizes a qualitative methodology seeks to understand the perceptions, feelings, and knowledge of people, typically through in-depth, intensive interviewing, and/or observation and analysis of documents. Qualitative research is a common and popular methodology in the field of adult education (Taylor, Beck, & Ainsworth, 2001). Qualitative research is defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3) and consists of a set of interpretive prototypes that make the world visible. In other words, the qualitative approach depicts a world in which reality is

socially constructed. Patton (1990) describes qualitative research as naturalistic inquiry that entails “studying real world situations as they unfold naturally, non-manipulative, unobtrusive, and non-controlling” (p. 41). This means that a qualitative researcher examines particular phenomena in depth and in natural settings and tries to understand a process or how people make sense or meaning of their experience. As a result, greater credibility is given to the 'voices' of the participants through processes of investigation ranging from ethnographic studies, naturalistic inquiry or case studies, to action research, biographical analysis and profile studies (Patton, 2002).

Because I wanted to understand the lived experiences and the meanings derived from those experiences of Black African international adult students, a qualitative design was most appropriate for the study. Exploring the points of view of research participants can be well attained through qualitative interviewing (Miller & Glassner, 1997). It follows that this qualitative interpretive research paradigm would be most appropriate in helping to understand and put into a larger context the interpersonal, social, and cultural aspects of the environment in which adult Black African international students find themselves.

In a qualitative approach, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, and data are mediated through this human instrument (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). The experiences, values, and judgments of the researcher are acknowledged and are explicitly included in the research report (Creswell, 1994). Because I was also a participant in my study it was my intention

to address my personal experiences, values and judgments that might influence the findings. There are different types of qualitative research; my study was designed largely according to the procedures recommended specifically for *heuristic* phenomenology with additional insights from critical race theory regarding aspects of the study that pertain to race. The section that follows provides a description and a rationale of how phenomenology using the heuristic perspective, social constructionist approaches (Schwandt, 2000), and racialized epistemologies apply to my study (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Phenomenological Approach

In the broad sense, phenomenology is the study of phenomena. Merriam and Simpson (2000) suggest that phenomena “includes both the acts- such as thinking, believing, perceiving- and the things to which these acts are related such as ideas or material objects” (p. 91). Precisely, people’s experience of particular phenomena is depicted in their descriptions of those phenomena as well as how they make meaning of them through their life experience.

Phenomenology emerged from philosophy as an attitude of science with Hegel providing the first definition: phenomenology is “knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one’s immediate awareness and experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26).

However, it was Edmund Husserl who developed the methodology to enable a clear and unbiased study of human consciousness and experience (Cross, Stewart, & Coleman, 2003). Husserl intended “to remove the outside observer from

interpreting human experience to offer researchers the opportunity to discover the essential elements of a subject's experiences as they are lived out" (Cross, p. 75). Thus, phenomenology provides structures of conscious experience as experienced from the first-person point of view, along with relevant conditions of the experience (Cross, Steward, & Coleman, 2003).

There are basic assumptions underlying phenomenology according to Moustakas (1994). Phenomenology "focuses on the appearance of things, a return to things just as they are given" (p. 58) versus seeking explanations or causal relationships related to the experience. The product of phenomenological research, that is, rich, evocative descriptions of the essence of an experience, is brought about by the researcher's exploration of an experience in its entirety as well as an objective examination of various perspectives of the experience. In order to derive the essence of an experience, the phenomenological researcher immerses herself or himself in the data, reflecting on it and her or his own self-reflection throughout both data collection and analysis. Because my study aimed to get at the lived experiences of Black African international adult students, the study was largely informed by phenomenology.

Phenomenological research suggests that conscious experiences are unique in that we can experience them, live through them, or perform them (Moustakas, 1994; Stanage, 1987). What therefore makes an experience conscious is a certain awareness one has of the experience while living through or performing it. In fact describing, explicating, and interpreting this experience is

critical to phenomenological research (Patton, 2002). Thus, phenomenology emphasizes how “we put together the phenomena we experience in such a way as to make sense of the world and, in so doing, develop a worldview” (Patton, 2002, p. 106).

Aspects of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research design aligned well with my study for several reasons. First, phenomenological interviews aim to explore individuals’ lived experiences; such interviews give voice to participants to allow them to make sense of their own experiences (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). Black African adult international students inevitably integrate into and undertake transitional experiences in new academic and cultural environments. The use of phenomenology gave voice to those studied (Black African non-traditional-aged international students) in this research.

Second, non-traditional-aged Black African international students bring along with them previous academic and work experiences which have a significant influence on their adjustment and adaptation to the new environment. These students may reflect on their transitional experiences which may prompt them to re-examine both their previous and current experiences in an attempt to make sense of them. Phenomenological interviews were employed to capture the broad range of the lived experiences of the participants in the study and in so doing revealed “what [they] experience and how they interpret the world” (Patton, 2002, p. 106). Third, generally, most studies on international students collect data using quantitative methodologies, specifically questionnaires (Tanaka, 2002).

Given that the international students' adjustment experiences are comprehensive in scope, it would have been difficult to capture their experiences using quantitative methods.

Phenomenology is primarily interested in investigating how human beings experience their world (Moustakas, 1994) and it “uncovers invariant structures that represent the essence of the human experience” (Cross, Stewart & Coleman, 2003, ¶ 3) through descriptions, observations and interviews. Through phenomenology, I therefore sought meanings from participants' descriptions and strove to arrive at essences through analysis of the lived experiences of non-traditional adult Black African international students. While standard phenomenological research elicits the lived experiences of the subjects under study, its philosophy does not regard the experiences of the researcher; it effectively keeps the researcher from voicing their personal experiences. In order therefore to include my rich experiences as an adult Black African international student in the U.S. higher educational system, I turned to the heuristic branch of phenomenology.

Heuristic Approach

Heuristic inquiry is based on the works of Moustakas (1990). The term heuristic stems from a Greek verb *heuriskein*, which literally means to “find,” denoting the study of how to find things out or to discover (Moustakas, 1990). The heuristic approach is a form of phenomenological inquiry that allows the self of the researcher to be present throughout the process of investigation and “while

understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9).

I used a heuristic methodology primarily because it allowed me to draw on my own lived experiences as a non-traditional Black African international adult student in American higher education. I came to the United States in 1987 to further my education and have attended predominantly White higher educational institutions in eastern Pennsylvania. Prior to coming to the U.S., I worked in the field of education in my home country of Kenya and had attained the position of headmaster of a secondary school. I had also been married for nine years by that time and had four children. Given my personal, cultural, career, and academic experiences, I met the inclusion criteria for participating in my study. Using a heuristic methodology I also explored the lived experiences of other participants in the study. Heuristic inquiry therefore provided me with the opportunity to continuously relate others’ experiences to my own. In this inquiry, there was a firm connection between “what is out there...and what is within me in reflective thought, feeling, and awareness....I stand out within my experiences and in the entire domain of my interest and concern” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 12). Given this position, I did not detach myself from the process of exploring the lived experiences of the subjects under study. I was personally involved, gathering my own observations, thoughts, feelings, and intuitions; all were part of the research process.

My personal interest and experience with the phenomenon of interest along with the assumption that other co-participants would share similar experiences are other reasons I chose to use heuristic inquiry. In practice, the heuristic inquiry emphasizes intense human experiences both from the primary point of view of the investigator and that of the co-participants (Patton, 2002). “It is the combination of personal experience and intensity that yields an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon” (Patton, 2002, p.107). At the center of heuristic inquiry are several key concepts and processes. Moustakas (1990) provides a six-phase model for organizing key concepts in heuristic inquiry as the basic research design: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis.

Initial engagement. Every researcher has a specific topic or problem that reflects a deep interest in searching for answers. It is at this initial engagement stage that a researcher discovers his or her “intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher, one that holds important social meanings and personal, compelling implications” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 27). Initial engagement is characterized by focused self-dialogue regarding the experience. The process is achieved via self-exploration or by personal autobiography and its implication within the social context. During the self-exploration process, one specific question stands out and “lingers within the researcher and awaits the disciplined commitment that will reveal its underlying meanings” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 27). It is during this initial engagement period that a researcher understands the unknown

or tacit knowledge that forms the basis of the phenomenon in question. In my study, this stage was reflected through my own personal experience of being a non-traditional-aged Black African international student in the United States.

Immersion phase. The meaning of the research question emerges through the immersion process. The processes of self-searching and personal reflection from an internal frame of reference are evident during this phase. The key to understanding the nature and meanings of any experience are the perceptions, feelings, and thoughts of the persons experiencing the phenomenon. Therefore to explore the meaning from the internal frame of reference it is critical for an individual to be aware of his or her own perceptions without judging or conforming to others' perceptions (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985). Throughout this phase, I explored the research questions identified earlier in this chapter from the internal frame of reference using self-searching in an effort to discover the relevancy and characteristics of the themes. For example, as I conducted interviews, I was conscious of and willing to accept non-judgmentally the experiences of others, particularly if those experiences varied considerably from my own.

Incubation and illumination. Incubation is the stage by which the researcher detaches from the “intense, concentrated focus on the question” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28), providing room for the inner workings of tacit knowledge and intuition to bring the outward awareness into perspective. Researchers at this stage are not necessarily actively involved with the topic but

retreat from “an intense, concentrated focus on their research questions” (Mandzuk, 1997, p. 442). This retreat from the question or from the people and situations that contribute to understanding the phenomenon does not necessarily mean that the researcher is not growing in knowledge but rather is in a different mode of learning. This phase was accounted for during the real research process. Incubation occurred in unplanned situations often days after an interview took place.

Illumination opens the door to new awareness of the phenomenon, a modification of an old understanding, a synthesis of fragmented knowledge, or altogether a new discovery of something that has been present for sometime yet beyond immediate awareness. “[I]llumination occurs naturally when the researcher is open and receptive to tacit knowledge and intuition” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29). New perspectives on the topic may emerge and/or corrections of any misunderstandings or distortions take place during this stage. For such perspectives to arise, a certain degree of reflection on the data is inevitable. It was during this reflection process that I began to see recurring themes in the data and evaluated and clarified my initial observations.

Explication. Explication involves deeper understanding and explanation of the meanings behind the themes. The purpose of the explication phase is to fully examine what has awakened in consciousness, in order to understand its various layers of meaning (Moustakas, 1990). The explication process challenges the researcher to fully know himself or herself (feelings, values, and beliefs) before

attempting to fully understand another. It is during this phase that I developed individual profiles and defined and described core themes of participants' experiences, seeking verification of the data where needed. Verification involves "returning to the research participants, sharing with them the meanings and essences of the phenomenon as derived from reflection on and analysis of the verbatim transcribed interviews and other materials, and seeking their assessment for comprehensiveness and accuracy" (Moustakas, p. 33-34).

Creative synthesis. The last phase is creative synthesis. This process is described by Moustakas (1990) as the stage when the researcher is challenged to put the components and core themes into portraits derived from the new data. Much of the time at this stage is spent organizing themes from interview transcripts (Mandzuk, 1997). In this stage, I became thoroughly familiar with all the data in its major constituents, qualities, and themes and in the explication of the meanings and details of the experience as a whole.

In summary, the heuristic inquiry was used because I was a participant in my study. I started to demonstrate my involvement in this approach by providing my personal story in the opening of chapter 1. I began the chapter by addressing those issues that have been a challenge as a non-traditional-aged African international student in the search to understand myself and the world. My study gave meaning to the lives of others and to my life as well. Heuristic inquiry is a powerful tool that recognizes that individual stories and personal experiences in one's life can enhance the lives of others. Heuristic inquiry was critical in

constructing meaning of my personal experiences and those of my participants' experiences as adult African international students making meaning of their academic experiences in the United States.

Social Constructionist Approaches and Racialized Epistemologies

Neither phenomenology, nor heuristic inquiry provides a framework for getting at experiences of oppression or privilege. In fact, socialization and acculturation for some people can suggest that such subjects should not be discussed, or people are only partly conscious of such effects, for as Fanon (1967) suggests, many people have a “colonized mind” or can be complicit in their own oppression. Because phenomenology and heuristics typically focus only on individual interviews, and not focus groups, I needed to find a way to allow participants to get at deeper knowledge and experiences of the phenomenon of their lived experience as adult Black African international students on multiple levels. Thus, my study was also informed by social constructionist approaches because phenomenology does not really account for socially constructed knowledge to any great degree as discussed by Schwandt (2000).

The social constructionist perspective is understood as being about the way knowledge is constructed by, for, and between members of a discursively mediated community. Schwandt (2000) argues that “human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it” (p. 197). This construction of knowledge does not take place in isolation but rather in social settings. Because I wanted to gather more experiences and the meanings derived

from those experiences of Black African international adult students from the group through focus group sessions, a social constructionist approach was most appropriate for this purpose. A line of communication between the researcher and the participants, as well as among participants themselves within the focus group, created a form of dialogue which is primarily based on the social discursive matrix from which knowledge claims emerge and from which their meaning is derived (Schwandt, 2000). The premise underlying the focus group method is that free discussions generate fresh ideas and insights because the participants stimulate each other, thus, as Schwandt posits, individual learning is shaped by others by providing accessibility to group knowledge.

Because this study is about Black African international adult students, the way of knowing is linked intimately to their worldview. Ladson-Billings (2000) addressing racialized discourses and ethnic epistemologies argues that one's worldview and systems of knowledge are symbolic and therefore how one views the world is influenced by prior knowledge. This knowledge and worldview are contextual, that is, shaped by the conditions under which one lives and learns. In the case of Black African international adult students, their knowledge and their worldview is influenced by their African cultural and social background. The significance of race is central in Ladson-Billings' view on racialized discourses. She describes racialization as a socio-historical process through which social structures and individuals take on a racial dimension.

The language of racialization is useful because it raises attention not only to the ways individuals think about and practice race, but also how race influences the organization of social structures. Thus, racialized discourse has the potential to challenge the hegemonic structures that maintain injustice and inequality faced by the marginalized groups like Black African international students and others in U.S. institutions of higher education. Because I wanted to have participants construct further knowledge together in the context of a focus group, a broader social constructionist perspective (Schwandt, 2000) along with one which acknowledged racialized discourses (Ladson-Billings, 2000) informed the research design. Incorporation of a focus group was critical in order for participants to talk to each other and share experiences, thus socially constructing knowledge and raising their consciousness which is part of critical race theory. Solorzano and Yosso (2001) argue that CRT emphasizes and values knowledge construction and the multiple and varied voices and vantage points of people of color. This study's focus group provided such a setting where multiple voices were heard and participants listened to each other and expressed differing attitudes and opinions on a topic; as a result, opinions began to shift and new opinions were formulated.

Participant Selection

Qualitative methodology often focuses on relatively small samples in which in-depth investigation and exploration is carried out. This section provides the criteria and a rationale for the selection of participants.

Selection Process and Criteria

The selection of the individual participants for my study was through purposeful sampling. The justification and strength of purposeful sampling rest on the fact that participants provide rich information that contribute in-depth study of phenomena (Creswell, 1994; Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that, for the researcher to discover, understand, and gain insights into the research problem, selection of a sample that can provide both first hand and secondary information during the interview process is critical (Merriam,1998). Given that there are different strategies for purposefully selecting information-rich cases (Patton, 2002) my study used combined or mixed sampling techniques. Specifically, three techniques were used: intensity sampling, network, and convenience sampling. Intensity sampling often “consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely” (Patton, 2002, p. 234). Intensity sampling strategy is commonly used in heuristic research because it draws on the personal experiences of the researcher. The non-traditional-aged Black African international students who have attended U.S. higher education system institutions were perceived to have lived experiences that related to the experiences of my own, as the primary researcher. Purposive sampling using an intensity approach seeks to “discover, understand, gain insights; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn most” (Patton, 1990, p. 185).

The network sampling denotes that participants are referred to or named by a preceding individual or group (Merriam, 1998). To obtain participants for my

study I solicited referrals through friends, acquaintances, and colleagues.

However, the decision to participate was left to the individual once it was clear to me as the primary researcher that they met the selection criteria. Participants in the study had to meet the following criteria: 1) one had to be a Black African, 2) over the age of 25 years, 3) had to have lived in the United States a minimum of 3 years at the time of the initial study interview, 4) had to have been enrolled in a higher educational institution in the United States, and 5) had to have satisfied at least one of the following additional criteria of a non-traditional adult student, that is, having had previous employment in their country of origin or having had re-entered college with the goal of advancing their career after having had at least one break in their formal education.

Another sampling method I used was convenience sampling.

Convenience sampling challenges the researcher to “do what is easy to save time, money, and effort” (Patton, 2002, p. 244). It was essential to establish rapport so that the participants could provide good and rich data. To that end, in addition to individual interviews, six of the thirteen participants met together to share their experiences in a focus group.

In an effort to understand the experiences of Black adult students from Africa, the participant group represented an overall cross-section of six women and seven men from various African countries. It was necessary to ensure that participants from different African countries were included in the sample because of their cultural, political, educational, and ethnic differences. I obtained as many

participants with diverse cultural backgrounds as possible, recruiting until responses by the participants began to become predictable. I selected participants who were open to sharing their experiences and feelings and who were capable of expressing their ideas, perspectives, and views clearly. Specifically, I looked for non-traditional Black African international adult students who had rich information regarding their academic adjustment, who were able to make sense of their experiences, and were willing to express such experiences to me openly and honestly.

In addition to using a purposeful sampling process in selecting my participants, LeCompte and Preissle (1993) recommend a criteria-based approach that calls for the researcher to establish a set of criteria or attributes in advance. These attributes emerged from my research problem and questions that explored the lived experiences of participants. In definitive terms, participants in my study comprised those who had either graduated from or were currently enrolled in graduate or undergraduate programs in U.S. higher education. These sample participants were Black non-traditional-aged students from African countries who at the time of college enrollment did not possess permanent residency status in the U.S., and for whom English was not their primary language.

Although Chang (1996) and Qian (2002) suggest that international students need at least two semesters to be able to reflect on their adjustment process and be able to verbalize their lived experiences regarding their stay, for the purpose of my study I chose participants who had resided in the United States

for at least three years at the time of the sample selection. The three year criterion allowed time for African international adult students to adjust to the U.S. culture, including language and academic adjustment. In addition the time frame also allowed these students to adequately describe their lived experiences with cultural adjustment.

Considering that the focus of my research was on adult non-traditional-aged African international students, the selected sample was limited to those Black African international students who had prior employment and/or family responsibilities in their own countries for at least four years prior to enrollment in U.S. higher education institutions. This timeframe suggests that the individual was independently capable of making sound career decisions, including opting to return to college with the aim of furthering his or her career. In addition, participants had to have held F1 (student) or J (exchange student) visas at the time of enrollment. Immigration regulations require that F1 and J visa holders enroll in a full time load each semester except in certain cases approved by the educational institutional administrator. Either full-time or part-time students were included in the study.

Accessibility to the sample is another factor that guided my sample selection. Based on Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993), accessibility addresses the geographic location and ability to gain entry and cooperation from pertinent 'gatekeepers'. Because of my geographical proximity and my familiarity with the sites, I selected my sample from those who attend or had attended

academic institutions within the Eastern United States that are predominantly White.

Sample Size

According to Patton (2002), qualitative inquiry does not have any rules for sample size but rather “sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources” (p. 244). Addressing the question of the appropriate number of participants required in heuristic inquiry, Moustakas (1990) states that even though it is possible to conduct heuristic research with only one participant, 10-15 co-researchers will potentially provide richer, deeper, more profound, and more varied meanings when their experiences are all included.

Redundancy is the primary criterion for determining the size of the sample (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, the sampling is terminated when there is no new data or information can be generated from the sampled units. This sampling strategy provides freedom for researchers by leaving the question of sample size open. This redundancy approach works well for basic research that is characterized by unlimited timeliness and unconstrained resources. I determined the precise number of participants needed by waiting for data saturation, that is, when data began to add nothing new, I completed my interviews. Data saturation was reached after I interviewed twelve participants. In addition, my data was

collected through an interview conducted by one of my dissertation committee members Dr. Peter Kareithi as recommended by the committee.

Data Collection Procedures

In order to elicit adult Black African international students' experiences, I utilized qualitative methods of inquiry to collect and analyze data. The data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview.

In-Depth Interviews

Because my study is largely phenomenological as well as heuristic, the process of collecting most of the data involved in-depth interviews (Creswell, 1998). There are three approaches for designing the interview suggested by Patton (2002): informal conversational, general interview guide, and standardized open-ended. Because the in-depth interviews are critical to phenomenological inquiry, I used a combination of informal conversational and general interview guide approaches.

The informal conversational interview is an open-ended approach that provides "maximum flexibility to pursue information in whatever direction appears to be appropriate" (Patton, 2002, p.342). I utilized this approach because it was more relaxed in nature and hence made my co-researchers feel more comfortable talking about their experiences; communication was deepened because interview questions were personalized (Patton, 1990). However, at the same time, I had an interview guide consisting of pre-determined questions or

issues to be explored (Patton, 2002). This pre-determined questionnaire was used as a guide but not as a strict framework of gathering information. Participants were encouraged to share their own experiences far and beyond the pre-determined questions.

In an effort to specifically select my participants, I first made initial contact via telephone with the individuals that I knew. Other participants, who were made aware of my study by friends or acquaintances, were referred to me; thereafter I followed up with them via telephone. The purpose of the initial telephone contact was to conduct a screening interview, utilizing an informal conversational approach, to determine if the individual met the inclusion criteria. After this initial contact, I sent each qualified participant a written explanation of the study and a preliminary questionnaire to solicit demographic information to confirm that the selection criteria were met.

My next contact with the participants was to establish a mutually convenient time for their personal interview. I explained to the participants that the interview would last approximately 90 minutes. At the beginning of each interview session, a participant received a consent form that met the Institutional Review Board standards. Each participant read the consent form as I read it aloud, prior to the participant signing her/his own copy. Included in the consent form was the participant's consent for the interview to be taped using an audio-recording device.

The semi-structured interview questions were formulated based upon personal reflection of my experiences of coming to the United States for study as well as the experiences of others. My interview questions were grouped into two categories: (a) before coming to the United States and (b) during the U.S. higher education experience. Interviews were held at a convenient place as mutually agreed upon by both the participant and myself. Six participants' interviews took place at their homes, four at their offices, one in my house and one in a participant's car. All interviews were conducted in English and audio-recorded. I also utilized an information sheet to document the participant's non-verbal behaviors, the physical surroundings of the interview setting, and personal reflections with my observations regarding the informant. This documentation was conducted immediately after the interview so as to not detract from establishing rapport with the participant.

Because this is a heuristic study, it allowed me to draw on my own lived experiences as an adult Black African international student in American higher education. In order to document my experiences, my personal interview was conducted by Dr. Peter Kareithi (a member of my dissertation committee) as recommended by my dissertation committee during my proposal presentation session. To maintain consistency with the interview procedure, Dr. Kareithi adhered to the same interview questionnaire and format used with the other participants. My personal interview by Dr. Kareithi was conducted and audio-recorded in his office.

Heuristic inquiry allowed me to elicit experiences of my participants and also permitted me as a primary researcher to share my personal experiences with others in the study. This perspective challenged me to be open to a significant dimension of experience and to pursue knowledge “through self-inquiry, full immersion into the phenomenon, and spontaneous observation of and dialogue with persons who are experiencing the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990, p. 98). In light of this, it was important for me to explore the experiences of the co-researchers and attempt to understand them from the lens of my experiences.

The next step involved transcribing data. Each interview was transcribed verbatim from the audio-tapes. Transcribing was conducted simultaneously with the interview sessions in order to examine the efficacy of interviewing procedures. This process allowed me to evaluate the relevance of interview questions and probes to determine if there was any need to modify them. I also examined my own interviewing behavior by listening to the recorded sessions to determine the areas that needed to be changed so as to yield more meaningful responses from interviewees. I then electronically mailed each participant the interview transcription report for review. Participants were asked to ascertain the accuracy of transcription and to make any necessary corrections. Any other pertinent information that the participant wanted to add was communicated through emails.

Focus Group Interviews

The second method of data collection was through a focus group interview. Because my study aimed at exploring the lived experiences of Black African international adult students attending predominantly White U.S. higher education institutions, the study was largely informed by phenomenology. However, neither phenomenology, nor heuristic inquiry provides a framework for getting at experiences of oppression or privilege. In light of this and since collecting data through a focus group is inconsistent with the principles of a strictly phenomenological research approach, I also incorporated a social constructionist approach (Schwandt, 2000) and racialized discourses perspectives (Ladson-Billings, 2000) in the design of my study.

In brief, the social constructionist approach allows participants to share their knowledge through shared understandings and narratives. Social constructionism deals with knowledge formation among participants in social relationship, thus in my study, the focus group provided the forum for a social setting. Through this interaction within the focus group, participants had the opportunity of processing new experiences and the creation of new knowledge; hence new meanings were derived out of this social interaction. The racialized discourses and ethnic epistemological perspective allowed the participants in the focus group to address issues related to race and power in U.S. institutions of higher education. Through the racialized discourse lens, participants were able to raise their awareness in terms of racial-group-experience of the world via sharing

their individual experiences. This perspective was useful because it raised attention not only to the ways Black African international adult students think about race, but also how race influenced their personal learning.

The focus group is an effective tool for collecting data in education because it is a way of listening to people and learning from them (Morgan, 1998). It creates a line of communication between the researcher and the participants, as well as among participants themselves. Morgan argues that the researcher's primary role is to listen and to learn from participants. The premise underlying the focus group method is that free discussions generate fresh ideas and insights because the participants stimulate each other. I requested all participants in my study to convene together as a group to share their experiences, ideas, and insights among themselves. Six participants gathered in my office conference room since it was a central location for most participants. The focus group forum was an opportunity for me to share my own personal experiences with the participants.

Dr. Peter Kareithi, a member of my dissertation committee was recommended and requested by my dissertation committee to facilitate the focus group interview because I was a co-participant in the focus group. Dr Kareithi was recommended because of his experience as an international educator as well as his experience as a previous Black African international adult student. Morgan posits that a primary researcher is also a source of data and not just a means of producing data, thus, I participated in the focus group in order to share my experience as one of the participants in the study. Prior to the focus group, I met

with Dr. Kareithi to go through the format and the focus group questionnaire, particularly highlighting specific gaps that I found during individual interviews. After I introduced the participants, Dr. Kareithi reminded those present that all participants had consented to being audio-taped. They were also reminded that participation in the focus group was voluntary, and that they could opt not to answer any question or withdraw their participation at any time, for any reason. They were further reminded that all recordings and transcripts would be kept secure and confidential by the researcher, and only he would know the identity of the participants.

There were two main purposes of the focus group interview as highlighted by Dr. Kareithi. First, to create the opportunity for participants to share their experiences that might not have been shared during their one-on-one interviews. Second, to share my own personal experiences as an adult Black international student with the group since the study is heuristic in design. After Dr. Kareithi had gone through the focus group conditions of disclosure as described above, he asked me to start the discussion by sharing my own personal experiences in U.S. institutions of higher education. My experiences included social interaction (with faculty and other students), learning, and work experiences as an adult student. My specific experience with racism and discrimination provoked other participants to disclose their lived experiences on these issues, actively filling in the missing gaps related to race issues and work experiences they had encountered. As facilitator, Dr. Kareithi kept the discussions moving using subtle

probing techniques, while trying to prevent any one participant from dominating the discussion. In addition to my participation and involvement in the focus group, I also made all necessary efforts to capture the main points from the group discussions. The focus group provided me as the principal investigator the opportunity to compare the individual interview and focus group data and revisit areas that may not have been captured during individual interviews.

Data Analysis

Typically phenomenology research requires a particular type of data collection and analysis involving what is referred to as *Epoche* (Patton, 2002). *Epoche* is a Greek term meaning to “stay away from or abstain....in the Epoche we set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). For the researcher, this concept implies the need to conduct self assessment and acknowledge personal bias, prejudices and preconceptions regarding the phenomenon under study. Although it was admittedly difficult to restrain myself from being judgmental given that I had gone through similar experiences as did my participants, I was very careful and sensitive to my own personal biases and preconceptions as I refrained from imposing my views on the data. Collaboration with my dissertation advisor regarding data analysis was one way that kept me away from imposing my views on the data as she attentively examined and compared my findings with the participants’ verbatim interview transcripts.

A similar concept to *Epoche* in phenomenological data analysis is phenomenological reduction (Patton, 2002). Typically, phenomenological reduction necessitates the researcher to bracket out “the world and presuppositions to identify the data in pure form, uncontaminated by extraneous intrusions” (Patton, p. 485). The concept of *bracketing* originated with Husserl (Denzin, 1989). He and other supporters of bracketing argue that in bracketing oneself, the researcher critically examines the phenomenon. Supporters of bracketing contend that there is a higher possibility of treating all aspects of data with equal value when data are bracketed (Smith, 2003).

Husserl and Heidegger disputed over the method and the process of phenomenological reduction (Stanage, 1987). In contrast to Husserl, Heidegger held that “we [as researchers] and our activities are always in the world, our being-in-the-world” (Smith, 2003, p. 9). This implies that researchers cannot explore their own or others’ experiences in a vacuum by bracketing the world around them, but rather they must interpret those experiences and determine what meanings one can generate from them “by looking to our contextual relations to things in the world” (Smith, p. 9).

I aligned myself with Heidegger in that I could not separate myself from the phenomenon of interest in this study, chiefly because I have lived and experienced the phenomenon of being an adult Black African international student in the United States. Furthermore, I included my own story as part of the study. For these reasons, I chose to do a heuristic phenomenology for it allowed

me as a researcher to be present in the investigation as a co-participant, to give voice to my own experience. For me to have employed bracketing as Husserl suggests would have required me as the researcher to negate my own lived experience as a co-participant in this study.

As mentioned earlier, I collected data from individuals who had experienced the phenomenon under investigation. The process of data collection and analysis was done simultaneously. Glesne and Peskhin (1992) argue that data analysis that is simultaneously done with data collection enables a qualitative researcher to focus and shape the study as it proceeds, consistently reflect on his or her data, organize the data, and try to discover what the data have to tell. Creswell (1998) notes that the research process is a spiral process involving repetitive loops. When researchers proceed in sorting out material and seeking patterns, themes, and categories they may find that they need to collect more information to test their ideas. In light of this, I listened to each recorded interview at least twice, read and re-read (often many times) the transcriptions with attention to specific details, and identified those significant statements that were indicative of co-researchers' experiences. This stage is described as the *explication phase* in heuristic inquiry.

Data analysis in phenomenology involves the process of reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for all possible meanings. This stage is described as *creative synthesis* in heuristic inquiry (Patton, 2002). At this stage I gathered together all the "pieces that have emerged into a total

experience, showing patterns and relationships” (Patton, 2002, p. 487). Through this process, I captured the richness of the participants’ experiences as well as my own personal experiences and communicated them in a “personal and creative way” (p. 487). My personal insights and experiences in the data analysis were critical in heuristic inquiry.

Data analysis involves a form of searching and arranging interview transcripts. It requires working with the collected data, interpreting, categorizing them, breaking them into meaningful units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, and making sense out of those units (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). For my study, the data reduction and analysis began soon after transcription of the interviews were completed. The first step of my data analysis entailed obtaining and highlighting a full description of my own experience of the phenomenon from the verbatim transcript conducted with Dr. Kareithi. I then carefully considered and recorded relevant statements describing the experience and clustered meaningful units into categories. Using this method as a template, I repeated the same process of carefully analyzing the verbatim transcript of each of the participants. I was personally immersed into the data until I fully understood the material. At that point I stepped away from the data for four days, meanwhile reflecting on the process thus far. I later returned to the data, reviewing again each one the participants’ verbatim transcripts and the clusters of categories that I had coded. I revisited each category as derived from each participant’s verbatim transcript to determine if participant depiction of the experience fit the data from

which it was developed. The next step was to gather and highlight individual categories representing each participant's experience and developed common main themes that represented the majority of the participants. These steps constitute the development of *creative synthesis* as described above. This approach prompted me to return to the self and reflect on my own experiences in reference to the experience that I was investigating. In this role, I was not only able to derive knowledge from others but I also served as a necessary resource for explicating others' experience. As a heuristic study, the inclusion of my own experience as a non-traditional, adult Black African international student was critical.

Verification of the Data

Since heuristic inquiry utilizes a qualitative approach in deriving themes and essences, verification of such data becomes critical. The data from co-researchers are only valid if co-researchers can recognize them as being a true record of their interview responses. Moustakas (1994) observes that,

in heuristic investigations, verification is enhanced by returning to the research participants, sharing with them the meanings and essences of the phenomenon as derived from reflection on and analysis of the verbatim transcribed interviews and other material, and seeking their assessment for comprehensiveness and accuracy (p. 33-34).

The process of verification is described by Erlandson, et al. (1993) as *member checks*. Member checks refer to verification of data and interpretation by the participants in the study.

To validate the data that I collected from co-researchers, I followed the suggestion given by Marshall and Rossman (1999). These scholars suggest that one needs first to discover themes and patterns in the data since “establishing the truth of things” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 57) starts with the researcher’s perception. In this case, I reflected first on the meaning of experience for myself before turning outward to co-researchers. Then, I utilized the member checks approach in which I provided each co-researcher with a copy of their verbatim transcript, individual profiles, and a draft of the core themes that I elicited from the findings. This process allowed the co-researchers to edit and affirm the accuracy of their own words, profiles, and descriptions. The process also allowed participants to verify that I accurately reflected their perspectives in the data analysis. At this stage only two participants called to clarify specific instances of their experiences regarding racial discrimination. Otherwise the rest of the participants confirmed the themes identified from their interview data were accurate. In addition, I maintained frequent, close and open communication with my dissertation advisor who confirmed the accuracy of my themes and appropriateness of the verbatim transcripts that I used to justify my findings.

Verification was enhanced further through triangulation. Triangulation is the use of “multiple methods in the analysis of the same empirical events”

(Denzin, 1989, p. 13). The concept of triangulation is particularly pertinent in qualitative research because of the influence and the impact that the researcher has on data collection. Triangulation of data will not only provide “diverse ways of looking at the same phenomenon but in adding to credibility by strengthening confidence in whatever conclusions [will] be drawn” (Patton, 2002, p. 556). The use of triangulation in my study was critical in testing and comparing the data for consistency. I compared the data from individual interviews, the focus group interview, and written notes. In addition, I also used investigator triangulation (the use of two or more different researchers or evaluators) whereby my dissertation advisor worked closely with me to ensure the accuracy of data analysis even though she was not a co-investigator. She carefully compared my categories and themes with verbatim transcripts for consistency and accuracy. During this stage I made several edits, rewording my categories and themes to reflect the accuracy of the data.

Trustworthiness of research can be built by the increase of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Erlandson et al., 1993; Patton, 2002). Credibility is defined by Erlandson et al. as the degree of confidence in the “truth” that the findings of the study possess, and how much the researcher shows an authentic portrait of what she or he investigated (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this process, I consistently remembered the challenges posed by Maxwell (1996) regarding the researcher’s ability to provide an accurate portrait of the study. First is the understanding of the description; the use of verbatim transcripts addressed

this issue. Second is the interpretation. I was very careful not to impose my own meaning but employed maximum effort to understand the perspective of co-researchers and the meaning they attached to their words. I bracketed my own assumptions. The validation of the main themes was to confirm the accuracy of the data.

The third challenge was understanding theory regarding how the portrait of the study was presented. The main threat to this was ignoring discrepant data. I avoided this by reading and re-reading transcripts, revising my notes, and listening to the audio tapes looking for any comments that seemed negative or that were incongruent with the majority of other co-researchers. This process is described by Glesne (1999) as “negative case analysis,” a strategy that I used to build trustworthiness in the study.

Transferability represents the external validity of the study. It asks whether or not findings can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents (Patton, 2002). The transferability of my study was evidenced by offering a detailed description of the data collection process. This included the sampling process, interview questions and procedures, and thick descriptions of context and co-researchers. Dependability refers to the reliability of the research and is communicated through a dependability audit trail (Erlandson et al., 1993). An audit trail included documentation such as interview notes, personal communications with co-researchers, transcripts, and main themes generated from the data. Confirmability is determined by the degree to which the findings can be

confirmed by others (Patton, 2002). To address confirmability in my study, I used the triangulation process, personal journaling, and the review of interview notes and data analysis by the co-researchers.

Ethical Considerations

It is critical for researchers to adhere to ethical standards by making every effort to protect participants. It was critical in my research to strictly comply with the standards set forth by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Protection of Human Subjects in research at Penn State University. I informed all the co-researchers involved in my study of the purpose of the study, the use of data collected, confidentiality rights, and the voluntary nature of participation. In addition, I provided each co-researcher with an informed consent form that explained the study procedures. The consent form addressed issues such as confidentiality, that there were no anticipated risks to the participants, withdrawal from research, audio-recording consent, and the right to obtain research results. This is consistent with Patton's (2002) recommendation that "the interviewer needs to have an ethical framework for dealing with such issues" (p. 406). All co-researchers signed the consent forms and I reviewed the consent form with each co-researcher prior to the interviews. Once the study was underway, there were no concerns raised about the interview process by co-researchers that would have necessitated them to withdraw from the study.

Summary

The main purpose of this chapter was to present the research methodology that best addressed the research questions of my study. The chapter presents heuristic inquiry, a phenomenological perspective, as the primary research methodology used. Phenomenological design allowed me as the primary researcher to explore the lived experiences of the co-researchers (non-traditional, adult Black African international students) while heuristic inquiry allowed me to bring forth my personal experiences and insights. This qualitative research paradigm was the major method of data collection and analysis. The data was collected through an extensive interviewing process with participants and focus group discussions.

Information about and the process of selecting the participants in the study were considered essential, complimenting the data. This chapter describes how the data was analyzed. Sampling methods, validity and trustworthiness of the study were other important contents addressed.

CHAPTER 4

Contextualizing Adult Life in the United States

Considering the fact that my study is focusing on adult learners, recognition of those profiles that identify and describe nontraditional adult learners (such as age, prior experiences, adult roles, responsibilities, etc) are critical in understanding the general background of subjects under study. There is a major debate in the literature regarding how best to define non-traditional age students and how they are different from traditional college students. Some scholars define non-traditional age by age for example, those over 25 years old (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Edwards & Person, 1997; Graham & Donaldson, 1999; Kasworm, 2003; Sissel, Hansman, & Kaswaorm, 2001; Senter & Senter, 1998) while others define non-traditional age students by the subcategories they represent: married, divorced, widowed, raising children, working or unemployed, retired, commuter or part-time students (Graham & Donaldson, 1999; Kasworm, 2003b; Kinsella, 1998; Rogers & Gottlieb, 1999; Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001). Traditional students in contrast are defined as students who are under the age of 19 years, who enroll in college directly upon high school graduation, and who attend college full time (Christie & Hutcheson, 2003; Edwards & Person, 1997).

This chapter opens by providing demographic characteristics of the 13 co-researchers who met the criteria for this study. The next section introduces and

describes the subjects who participated in this study by providing characteristics that are attributed to them as non-traditional age students.

Demographic Information

This section provides the demographic and characteristics of participants for this study. The participants' descriptions are presented in terms of country of representation, gender, age, marital status, academic level, and the length of time one attended U.S. higher education system.

Country Representation

This study is about Black adult international students from African countries. Thirteen Black Africa adult international students who participated in this study represented 8 African countries. Of the 13 international students the largest number ($n = 4$) were from Kenya, followed by Botswana ($n = 2$) and Nigeria ($n = 2$). Tanzania, Liberia, Ghana, Uganda, and Zimbabwe each had one ($n = 1$) participant. All the participants entered the United States with student visas (F1). Of the 13 participants 4 students had previous international education experience; 2 students from Botswana had their master's degree from Canada and Australia respectively, 1 from Nigeria had a master's degree from Italy, and 1 from Kenya had a master's degree from Belgium.

Gender, Age, and Marital Status

Among the 13 co-researchers in this study, 6 were female and 7 were male. The age range of these participants at the time of the interview was from 38 to 53 years with a mean of 44. In regards to marital status, 2 female students were

single (by virtue of their religious order, nuns) and 1 male was single. Ten co-researchers were married and living with their spouses and only one did not have children at the time of interview.

Academic Classification

The 13 co-researchers in the study represented various areas of academic orientation: 2 male students had completed their PhD programs, 5 (2 male and 3 female) were doctoral candidates, 2 male had completed their master's degree, 1 female had completed her law degree, and 3 were master's degree candidates. Those still in progress were enrolled in a full-time class load and all lived off campus.

Length of Time Attended U.S. Higher Education System

The international students' length of time attended the higher education system in the United States ranged from 3 years to 12 years. Among the 13 international students 12 had not lived in the United States prior to their admission to U.S. schools and only 1 had a summer visit prior to attending the university in the United States. The table at the end of this chapter provides detailed demographic and characteristic information of the 13 co-researchers.

Description of Co-researchers

This section introduces the co-researchers in the study and provides the description of those sub-categories and roles that characterizes and defines them as non-traditional age adults' students. It includes entering higher education at an older age (as compared to traditional college freshmen), returning to higher

education after having stopped at least once, being financially independent, or being married, divorced, widowed, and/or a parent as described by Roger and Gottlieb (1999)

NDORO

Ndoro, (who asked to be identified by his real name), is a Black male from Tanzania whose primary language is Jita and his second language (the official and national language) is Swahili. English is his third language. Prior to coming to the United States, Ndoro attended primary school (elementary school) for 7 years in Tanzania. Although the Tanzanian system of education calls for all students to attend high school immediately after completing primary school, Ndoro took a break for 3 years contemplating what to do with his life. At the conclusion of those 3 years he decided to enroll in a 4 year Bible school, serving what to him was the equivalent of attending high school. Upon graduation in 1987, Ndoro worked for a local church as a pastor for 2 years. He became very interested in the ministry to the extent that he desired to pursue more education in the same discipline. In September of 1989 Ndoro was admitted to Nassa Theological College in Tanzania and in 2 years time he graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Bible. Upon graduation, Ndoro was hired by the church to serve as an editor at the church owned company (Scott Press) where he served for 4 years. In 1996 Ndoro was asked by the church to fill a faculty position at Nassa Theological College. During his tenure at Nassa Theological College, he found a need for furthering his education. He expresses this:

...there was a need at the seminary. The church asked me to go back to teach. Although teaching had already been my desire for a long time, so when I went there because I had only undergraduate education, I saw myself... if I had to do well and effective in my teaching career, then I needed to go for further training... There was a need for further training not only for seminary need for more trained people, but also there was this need and I saw myself I needed more education.

Because of his desire to teach the word of God, Ngoro started exploring the possibility of furthering his education in theology. He knew specifically that he wanted to study in the United States and therefore he applied to several colleges. Of the 3 colleges that offered him admission, he chose to attend a theological college in a mid-Atlantic state. Ngoro graduated from this college with a Masters of Divinity in 2001. In this school there was less emphasis on biblical languages such as Greek and Hebrew, and therefore he decided to pursue another master's degree elsewhere to gain such knowledge. Therefore in August of 2001, Ngoro was admitted to a second theological college and subsequently graduate with a Master's Degree in Theology in May, 2006. At the time of this study, Ngoro was preparing to return to Tanzania.

FRANK

Frank (a pseudonym) is a 42 year old Black male from Kenya who received most of his education in his home country. He reported that Kenyan education was modeled from the British system during his time in school

however, since then the system has changed into an American system. Frank attended nursery school for one year, primary school for 7 years (standard 1 through 7), high school for 4 years (Form 1 through Form 4), and advanced level (post high school) for 2 years (Form 5 and 6). After having successfully passed the Kenya Advanced Certificate of Education allowing him admission to university in Kenya, Frank attended and graduated from the University of Nairobi with a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry. Upon graduation, Frank was hired as a high school chemistry teacher for 1 year and later served as the head of the high school's science department for 3 ½ years.

Frank excelled in his position and gained popularity with the students and teachers as well as those in the community surrounding the school. Despite all his achievements as a teacher, Frank decided to go back to University of Nairobi for his graduate studies. Two years later, he earned a Master of Science degree in environmental chemistry and was immediately hired to teach at the University of Nairobi.

Frank as an ambitious person had for a long time desired to have an international education experience. In his own words he expressed that...

It's a dream I have always had to get my higher education and go for my doctorate right for a long time and obviously it was a kind of easier to come to the States because I could get into particular field I was interested in personally for chemistry and .. Just basically education to come and study and gain more knowledge. It is something I desired for a long time.

Frank started doing some ground work searching for more information about the United States by talking to his peers and other professors who had attended schools in American universities. Frank made several visits to the United States Educational Center in Nairobi to search for American universities that were offering PhDs in his area of interest in chemistry. There were several choices but Frank chose to apply to a university in a New England state because it offered him a teaching assistant position. In 1993, Frank was admitted to this university as a full time student. His teaching assistantship not only provided Frank with a stipend but also covered the cost of his tuition thereby eliminating the financial burden of attending school. Consequently, Frank was able to complete his PhD program in 5 years and thereafter completed a 2 year post-doctoral program. Frank married a Kenyan woman during his post-doctoral program. He is currently the head of an environmental chemistry department at one of the state universities in the East coast of the United States.

JOHN

Given this is a heuristic study I have included my life experiences in chapter 1. I include my educational and work experience in this chapter as part of the data in this study. In order to maintain consistency of the data collection methods, I was personally interviewed by one of my dissertation committee members using the same questionnaire I used with the other subjects in this study.

I was born and raised during the struggle for independence in Kenya. I grew up under the care of my maternal grandmother since my mother was

imprisoned by the British colonial government for her anti-British political views. Unfortunately, I do not have any recollections or memories of my father. As Kenyans embarked on building their new nation after acquiring its independence, the need for education became paramount. Many families realized that in order to escape generational poverty, educating the oldest son or daughter was critical to the survival of the family. In light of this my grandmother sent me to a missionary school where I started my primary school education.

Kenya adopted the British system of education. Because of my age, I did not attend nursery school but I started with primary school and proceeded all through to high school. Due to financial difficulties, I did not move to advanced high school but instead, attended a two-year teachers' college. Upon completion of my two-year teacher's college program at age 23, I was hired by the Nakuru Municipal Council as a primary school teacher (the equivalent to elementary school in the United States). My ambitious spirit pushed me to pursue an advanced diploma outside a formal educational setting, and within 2 years I passed the Form Six the Kenya Advanced Certificate of Examination, reflecting formal higher education studies. Subsequently, I was appointed as the deputy headmaster of a primary school. A year later, at age 27, I was promoted to the position of headmaster (principal) of a high school. As headmaster in this public school, I was responsible for more than 2000 students, 40 teachers, and 12 non-teaching staff. I was in the teaching profession for 10 years prior to my coming to the United States.

My long term desire to pursue higher education in the United States started in 1975 when I was in the 2 year teachers' college. However, it was not until 1984 when I started researching American universities. Consequently in 1987 my dream to further my education required me to leave my family and my social network in my homeland, Kenya, and move to the U.S. which has long been an educational beacon to many international students.

I was 32 years old when I traveled from Kenya to the United States to attend college. I had been admitted to a small, predominantly White college in a rural, conservative region in a mid-Atlantic state. I came to the United States feeling that the education I had had in Kenya had prepared me well for additional academic work facing me in the U.S. Not only had I earned an associate's degree in education there but I had also worked as a teacher and headmaster. Because Kenya had been a former British colony, the education system in my country was heavily influenced by the British system of education, a system that is pedagogic in nature, formal, and highly structured.

Although I had some knowledge about the United States through geography and history courses taken in high school and college, what these courses provided me was not sufficient to prepare me for the reality of life and education in the United States. Several factors negatively affected my early weeks in the United States, including general culture shock, education-system shock, and the psychological loss of being separated from my family and friends in Kenya.

Of these factors, adjusting to the education-system differences was particularly challenging.

My first few weeks in the American college classroom were most difficult. First, I had difficulties understanding the American accent. Second, I had difficulties understanding the course syllabi; the teachers did not explain anything beyond the cursory “read-through” the first day of school. Third, there was no orientation to the educational resources available on campus. Finding the library, knowing how to access the materials there, using computers, retrieving microfilm resources, learning how to obtain photo-copies of materials, etc., were elements I had to discover through my own inquiry and the help of fellow students. I was then feeling a lot of tension and stress to the extent that I was second-guessing my decision to come to the United States. I felt so lost, I did not know what to do next. My support system during that difficult period was from one of my best American friends along with my fellow African students. Despite all the challenges, my overall education in the United States has been beneficial and a transforming experience.

HOPE

Hope (who asked to be identified by her real name) is a 53 year old woman who was born and raised in Botswana speaking Setswana as her primary language. Hope attended her primary school for 7 years, 4 years of high school and thereafter went to nursing school for 4 years. Upon completing her diploma in nursing, Hope was hired in her home town as a nurse, providing patient care for 5

years. Her ambition to pursue more education continued to haunt her and consequently she went back to university for a bachelor degree in nursing. Hope was hired as a nurse educator after completing her undergraduate work and served in this capacity for several years before she went to Australia for her masters' degree in counseling. Hope was in Australia for one year. Upon her return to Botswana in 1994, she was hired by one of the universities there as a student counselor.

Hope's responsibilities at the university included one-on-one counseling, group counseling and a part time teaching load. Because of her position and education background, Hope commanded a lot of respect from the community. She was often invited as a guest speaker by various groups and organizations. She belonged to organization boards, both government and non-government.

After several years of service as a college counselor, Hope was asked by her university to explore further studies in counselor education. Counseling as a discipline was becoming a critical need for the university and therefore the university wanted to increase its knowledge capacity in order to serve the student body more effectively. Hope started searching for counseling programs in United States, Australian and South African universities. After many weeks of information gathering Hope decided to come to the United States. One of the many reasons was that “.. the programs here [in the United States] are really advanced in counseling studies and I would have gone to South Africa or Australia but they [are not]– I found that America is really rich and advanced in

counseling.” In 2004, Hope left her prestigious position at the university, her comfortable social life, community recognition, and family to join a university in a mid-Atlantic state for her PhD in counseling. In the course of her doctoral program some of Hope’s family members joined her in the United States. She is currently in the process of writing her dissertation.

KWAME

As a former British colony, Ghana has replicated its education system from its former master. Born and raised in this system of education is Kwame (a pseudonym). He gained his admission to high school after passing his Common Entrance Examination which was a nationally standardized examination. Kwame attended a boarding high school for 5 years. The country’s education system called for another national examination at the end of Form 5 which served as the determinant of the entrance to Form 6. Kwame passed this Ordinary Level Examination and was admitted to Form 6. At the end of Form 6 he sat for another standardized examination (Advanced Level Certificate), and passed. Although he gained the points required for admission to a university in Ghana, Kwame decided to instead work as a bank clerk for 4 years. Thereafter he went to university to do a diploma in accounting.

Kwame has had many years of experience in the business profession. Upon completing his two year diploma in accounting, he was promoted as an assistant bank manager where he served for 3 years before he went back to the university to pursue a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration. Kwame had

a desire to explore other opportunities in various organizations other than banking and in 1999 he was hired as an accountant by a German-owned non-governmental organization. This firm promoted liberal democracy and supported small scale enterprise all over the world. Kwame served for 2 years with that organization and then came to the United States for further education. He was later joined by his wife and 2 of their children. He has since completed his master's degree in business administration and is preparing to return to Ghana.

WANJIRU

Wanjiru (a pseudonym) was born and raised in the suburbs of Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya, and educated in the British education system from nursery school (kindergarten) to Form 4 (12th grade). The British system of education practiced in Kenya during Wanjiru's time called for an additional two years post secondary school (Forms 5 and 6) in order to join the university. Because Wanjiru did not attend Forms 5 and 6 she decided to enroll in a one year secretarial junior college upon graduating from Form 4 with a Kenya Certificate of Education. After completing her secretarial training Wanjiru was hired by the Kenya Post and Telecommunications Company where she worked for 4 years until when she moved to a tourism company. She served as a secretary with the tourism company for 2 years. In 1989 Wanjiru made a career change and decided to pursue a career in church ministry. To be an effective minister, Wanjiru enrolled for a 3-year diploma program in 1991 at one of the theological colleges in Kenya which

followed the American educational format. Wanjiru served in church ministry until 1999, at which time she came to the United States.

Wanjiru's position as a church minister in Kenya placed her in a prominent position in the community. She was highly recognized as a motivational speaker and occasionally contributed to a Christian magazine on issues pertaining to HIV. While serving in this capacity, Wanjiru explored the opportunities to further her theological education in the United States. In August 1999, Wanjiru was admitted to a Christian university in the American Midwest. She left behind her husband and her 2 sons in Kenya. Soon after her arrival, Wanjiru found herself unsatisfied with the quality of education offered at this university and therefore a semester later transferred to a theological seminary (a predominantly White institution). Two years later Wanjiru's family joined her. "It was a challenge balancing my school life and the family needs" stated Wanjiru. Wanjiru graduated with her BS in Bible in 2002. In the fall of 2002 Wanjiru was admitted to a conservative Christian graduate school in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States where she subsequently graduated with a Master's of Education degree in counseling. When asked what motivated her to further her education, Wanjiru responded,

...because I believe as a woman I needed to do better because I had fought a lot of battles of discrimination because my denomination I was the first woman pastor and it wasn't easy and I realized I had a bigger vision and I couldn't accomplish my vision without further education...[the United

States] has a lot of diversity, and especially in the 21st century when it comes to issues of women and ministries, the US has a lot of diversity than Great Britain....It's not just education but even geographically it has a lot of diversity and when it comes to women in journalism it has a lot of diversity. So I can learn to do so many things at the same time of which I can not do in another nation.

Wanjiru is currently in the process of applying for graduate school for her doctoral program.

TSWANA

Participating in this study is Tswana (a pseudonym), a Black single male co-researcher from Botswana which was also a former British Colony. Unlike other formerly colonized countries like Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana whose educational system started from nursery school to Form 6 and 3 years of the university, Botswana was from nursery school to Form 5 followed by 4 years at the university. Tswana went through the educational system from nursery school to Form 5. Upon graduating from Form 5 Tswana was admitted to a university in Botswana where he studied English and history for 4 years.

After graduating from the university, Tswana joined the Botswanian military where he was commissioned to Lieutenant. He served with the military for 4 years. Tswana's long term goal was to work in higher education in Botswana, and therefore after leaving the defense ministry he joined a local university in Botswana as staff development coordinator where he served in this

capacity for 1 year. The following year, Tswana was given a two-year scholarship to go to Canada for his master's degree in Archival studies. After attaining his master's degree, Tswana returned to work with the university in Botswana where he served for 2 years before coming to the United States for his doctoral studies in 2003. Tswana is currently in the process of completing his dissertation at a mid-Atlantic university in the United States. Like many other participants in this study, Tswana chose to come to the United States to pursue higher education because of the uniqueness of the available programs in his field of interest.

XERO

After high school I spent more than a year at home waiting for my results after that I applied to go to covenant training for becoming a nun so from high school I spent a year at home then I went to nun school. It took me 4 years training. Then after 4 years I became a nun and I was assigned to be an assistant to the director to the college. I did that for 3 years. I was also in charge of finance for the institution. I was also in charge of Student Affairs. I took care of all the problems from student from staff whatever it is, family issues, financial problems, poverty, and any kinds of problems you can think of came to my office to settle it. I did all that.

Xero (a pseudonym) is a Black African woman in her early 40s who was born and raised in Nigeria. The Nigeria education system calls for one to attend nursery school (not mandatory at this level), then primary school (elementary school equivalent) for 6 years then 3 years of high school and another 3 years of

senior high school (post high school) before joining the university. Xero, however did not go through the entire process of education. She did not attend her nursery school program because her father died when she was 5 years old. Her mother at the time was not able to raise the funds needed to send her to nursery school. In light of this, Xero started her education in primary school and moved on up to high school where she sat for her national high school examination. Xero had a 1 year break while waiting for her examination results before she joined the convent training school where she was trained and prepared to be a nun for 4 years.

Xero as a nun was well respected by her community not only for her contribution to the church and the community but also as an administrator in her college where she served for 3 years prior to coming to the United States. To be even more effective in her college, Xero needed to further her education and without hesitation she chose the United States because “I am aware they speak English and I did not want to go through difficulties of going to another country to learn a new language.” Xero is currently completing her masters program at one of the universities in a mid-Atlantic state.

CHIDINMA

Chidinma (a pseudonym) is another Black Nigerian woman in her late 40s who was educated in the Nigerian system of education from nursery school to high school. However, unlike Xero, Chidinma went through an older system of education in the 1970s which required only 5 years of high school as opposed to the present-day 6 years. As today, students were required to sit for a mandatory

national examination for entrance into Nigerian universities. Despite having passed the national examination upon completing her high school, Chidinma stayed home for one year to work before starting a training program as a nun. Chidinma attended a Roman Catholic convent for 3 years and upon completing her training program she was assigned as a teacher in a high school. She taught for one year as an untrained teacher and thereafter joined a 3-year college in Nigeria where she attained a teaching diploma (equivalent to an Associate degree). Chidinma was then hired as a high school teacher where she served from 1983 to 1987. Chidinma's desire to pursue higher education was still haunting her mind and in 1987 she went to Italy to start her university studies where she did both undergraduate and masters degrees in music. During these years of study Italian was her primary language of communication.

In 1997 Chidinma returned to Nigeria where she was assigned to teach at the university level until 2000 when she was posted back to Italy by the Catholic church authority to work in Rome. Her interest in music continued and while she was working in Rome, she stated that

...a lot of music was dying away, and I was wondering how this music could be preserved and like when I was doing my masters ... that took me in a lot of libraries, you know in Europe, I went to Sangaa, I went also to Switzerland, I also visited a lot of libraries in Italy, I went to Milan and as well as the Vatican library, and then I saw manuscripts that were dated back 9th century, and there manuscripts have been kept, and then I went

and started seeing our own music just dying and I was like ---these people started---somebody started putting these things down---that is why I was able to see manuscripts of 9th century and back home my music is dying anyway... So I really thought of doing ethnomusicology.

In light of this Chidinma decided to pursue PhD programs and there were only 2 possibilities; either go to Belfast or the United States. Unfortunately the professor who was in charge of the African music in Belfast died that same year and Chidinma had only then one choice...to pursue higher education in the United States because the resources were available and the education here met her educational interests. In 2004 Chidinma joined one of the universities in a mid-Atlantic state and she was awarded a teaching assistantship to defray the cost of her graduate education.

Chidinma had held prestigious positions both in Nigeria and in Rome. She commanded a lot of respect in both communities for her contribution to the church and in the education system of Nigeria. Chidinma brings along with her a wealth of international experiences to the United States' higher education system. She is currently in the process of writing her dissertation and waiting for instructions from the Catholic Church regarding her next assignment.

TENDAI

Represented in this study by Tendai (a pseudonym) is Zimbabwe, another African country whose education system was modeled after the British system. Tendai is a Black African woman in her late 30s who was born and raised in

Zimbabwe by educated parents. She went through the entire education system from nursery school to high school (Form 6) and passed her “A” level (Advanced–post high school) examination in 1988. Because of the high competition of the university admission that year, Tendai did not go to the university as she intended but instead she went to teach as an untrained teacher in one of the local high schools. She held the teaching position for 3 months only and thereafter was offered a job by the Ministry of Information as an administrative clerk. Later she was transferred to an accounting office within the government as an accounting clerk. While still in this position, Tendai enrolled with the School of Journalism where she studied communication, journalism and photography. Upon completing her studies she was offered a position as a journalist and a year later she was promoted to Public Relation Officer. She held this position for only 2 months and came to the United States in December, 1990.

The desire for further education was still inevitable in Tendai’s mind. Even though she held high positions with the Government of Zimbabwe, her desire to attain a higher level of education was still a priority and she lived and dreamed it everyday. In her words,

I just wanted to further my education because my country would not allow me to go to university so, because I had sent myself through a commercial college, I still wanted to do the program that I had initially in mind... so I kept on my head that one day I am gonna be somebody, I am gonna get out of this country.

While in the United States, Tendai got married and at the same time started her undergraduate work in a Community College. In 1993 Tendai transferred to a 4-year university where she completed her bachelor's degree in 1996. In 1999 Tendai enrolled in law school in Michigan and completed her law degree in 2002. Tendai was raising two children while attending law school. Tendai is currently working for state government while her husband is completing his master's program.

RICHARD

Richard (who asked to be identified by his real name) is a Black African male from Liberia in his early 50s and is married and has four children. He was educated through the Liberian system of education that is modeled after the American system because many of their leaders were educated under the American system. Liberia was never colonized by the European countries and therefore did not necessarily follow any European system of education. Richard reported that during his years in school a "grade system" as what is used in the United States was followed, from the elementary to high school; that is, grade 1 through grade 12. In addition there were standardized examinations that were required in order to transit from one level to another. These exams were specifically administered at the end of 6th grade, 9th grade and 12th grade in that order. The 12th grade examination was administered by the West African Examination Council. It was also required of students graduating from 12th grade to sit for an Entrance Examination before they were admitted to the university.

Similar to the United States the undergraduate program in Liberian universities was 4 years and graduate programs (masters) was 2 years.

Richard went through 1st grade up to the 12th grade but did not attend the Liberian university even though he passed all the examinations and requirements. During his high school education Richard opted to take vocational courses in addition to his high school courses. By the time he was graduating from high school, he not only received a high school diploma but also an electrical engineering diploma with general electricity as the area of specialization. In 1984 he was hired as an electrician for 2 years. In 1986 Richard joined the World Health Organization (WHO) in Liberia where he underwent a 2-year training in biomedical engineering and thereafter worked for WHO in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Later on he was transferred to work for the Sudanese Interior Mission as a Technical Service Engineer and later promoted to General Service Engineer. He worked in this capacity until 1993 when he left for the United States for further studies.

Although Richard seemed to have had a bright future with his employer and was held in high esteem by the community he, like many other co-researchers in this study, was ambitious to advance in his education. However, he did not have opportunities to do this in his country due to political reasons. He said during the interview that:

I have always been ambitious in a passive sense. God has always placed in my heart a desire to get better in what I do and as way to improve to get

better on what you do is to improve your skills and to develop your capacities, and obviously the only way I could do that was to go to advanced studies and at the time I decided to go to college when the opportunity existed. The war was going on in my country, and I could not advance my education in a cold war where I lived at the time. The only option was to come to the West and so I explored the opportunities and possibilities and through God's grace I was able to come.

Richard was convinced at the time that he would only get quality education in the United States and in 1993 he was admitted for a 4-year degree in Engineering at one of the predominantly White universities located in the western part of Pennsylvania. He was accompanied by his wife and their four children. Upon completing his undergraduate education, Richard started his graduate studies in the same university and thereafter transferred to another university in the same city for his PhD studies.

NGINA

Ngina (a pseudonym) is a Black African woman in her early 40s from Kenya who was born and raised in a rural part of the country. Kenya's education system was a replica of the British system of education for many years until the early 1980s when the government decided to adopt the American system. Under the British system primary school was 7 years, high school was 4 years and post high school (A-level) was 2 years followed by 3 years in the university. Ngina evidently underwent the British system for primary school but attended a

missionary high school that was privately owned. Thereafter she attended a public post high school (Form 5 and 6) for another 2 years before she joined the university.

Upon completing her university program, Ngina was hired as a high school English teacher. Two years later she was promoted to deputy principal and 2 years after that she was given the leadership of the school as the high school Principal. Ngina taught for 7 years in Kenya before pursuing additional study in Belgium. Although Ngina seemed to have the comfort of her job as the high school Principal and had public status she knew deep in her heart that her job was not going to be her life particularly as a single woman in a rural area of Kenya. She clearly stated that,

My goal was to further my studies. First of all to get my master's and I had a boyfriend who was in the United States at the same time. He was about to finish his PhD and he is my husband now... and I felt if I finish if at least get a master's in Belgium where I got an opportunity: I didn't have a problem with fees or anything – you know – I can achieve a lot with that master's even if it means going back. As a matter of fact I was on salary.

The employment opportunity in Belgium became an incentive for Ngina to relocate and also to pursue her master's degree in Belgium. Ngina completed her master's degree in education in 2 years. Ngina wanted to come to the United States, not only to be with her boyfriend, but also because American education has a positive image in Kenya. Consequently, after completing her master's

degree in Belgium Ngina was admitted to the same university as her boyfriend and was awarded a teaching assistantship as a means to defray the cost of her doctoral education. The following year her boyfriend completed his PhD program and they got married. Currently Ngina has a few more classes left before starting her dissertation.

CIMIYU

Cimiyu (a pseudonym) is a Black African male from Uganda in his early 40s. Like other Black Africans in this study from countries with the British system of education, Cimiyu also went through standard 1 through Form 6 (advanced level or post high school). After passing his East African Examination (post high school) he did not go to the university but instead took a job with a non-government organization (NGO), International Christian Aid (an American based non-profit Christian organization). He worked as an untrained teacher during the day and did church ministry in the evenings and on weekends. He served in this capacity for 4 years until he left for further studies in the United States.

Cimiyu's interest for further studies was motivated by the Americans who worked closely with him at the NGO; he was influenced by their warm interaction and relationship and also motivated by hearing exciting stories about America. Although Cimiyu "had always dreamed a lot ... and always desired to come to the US" his high school education as a geography and history student inspired him even more to come to the United States. He "read about geography in America,

the prairies, the St Louis, the Niagara Falls and how the States had evolved [from] their conception, from the beginning ... to becoming a country.” Cimiya was admitted to a small Christian college in the American Midwest where he acquired his bachelor’s degree and later in the same college attained his master’s degree in theology. Cimiya is currently enrolled in a nursing school in a mid-Atlantic college. He is married with 2 children.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate that the co-researchers in this study have met the definition of adult non-traditional age student as described by Senter and Senter (1998), Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002), and Edwards and Person (1997) in terms of age. Even more, these co-researchers also meet the criterion of adult non- traditional students by their roles or subcategories they represent given that many of them were married, raising children, working, and commuters as defined by Kinsella (1998) and Rogers and Gottlieb (1999).

The table on the next page provides demographic information of the co-researchers in this study.

Participants in the Study

Name Gender	Age	Country of Origin	Years in U.S. College	Highest Degree Achieved	Professional Role Prior to Coming to U.S.	Years Employed in their Homeland
Ndoro M	44	Tanzania	6 years	M.Dv M.Th.	Pastor Editor College Teacher	2 years 4 years 2 years
Frank M	42	Kenya	5 years	Ph.D.	High School Teacher University Professor	4.5 years 1 year
Hope F	53	Botswana	3 years	PhD candidate	Nurse College Instructor Counselor	10 years 6 years 11 years
Richard M	46	Liberia	12 years	D.Ed.	Electrician Engineer	4 years 6 years
Xero F	N/A	Nigeria	5.5 years	M.Ed. candidate	College Student Services Director Clerk	3 years 1 year
Cimiyu M	46	Uganda	8 years	M.Th.	Teacher	4 years
John M	51	Kenya	10 years	D.Ed. candidate	Teacher Headmaster	5 years 5 years
Kwame M	42	Ghana	8 years	MBA	Clerk Accountant Assistant Bank Manager	4 years 2 years 3 years
Tswana M	39	Botswana	5 years	Ph.D. candidate	Military University senior staff	4 years 1 year
Tendai F	38	Zimbabwe	3 years	J.D.	Administrative Clerk Journalist Public Relation Officer	3 years 1 year 3 months
Chidinm a F	47	Nigeria	5 years	Ph.D. candidate	Teacher University Professor	5 years 4 years
Ngina F		Kenya	4 years	PhD candidate.	High School Teacher Deputy Principal High School Principal	2 years 2 years 3 years
Wanjiru F	44	Kenya	7 years	M.A candidate	Administrative Clerk Secretary Pastor	4 years 2 years 5 years

M= Male F= Female

CHAPTER 5:

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the adjustment issues encountered by non-traditional age adult Black African international students attending predominantly White institutions of higher education in the United States. I investigated the lived experiences of Black African adult international students on the basis of their descriptions, recollections, reflections, and points of view on their educational experiences in the United States. In an effort to understand the lived experiences of these students, my study has attempted to answer these research questions:

- 1) What are the academic and cultural experiences faced by non-traditional age adult Black African international students on U.S. campuses?
- 2) What is the essence of the lived experience of adjusting to attending predominantly White U.S. higher educational institutions among non-traditional age adult Black African adult international students?

The findings of the study are drawn primarily from participants' own narrated stories collected from individual interviews and also from a focus group, and are grouped into five major categories. These stories are a reflection both of the participants' preconceived notions of higher education in the United States and their everyday life experiences in U.S. institutions of higher education system. Despite the challenges reported by these participants in their educational process such as discrimination, academic and social and cultural problems, they

have affirmed received an excellent quality education in the United States. Given that the participants in this study come from different Africa countries and from different ethnic groups, each participant's experiences are unique. Themes were largely determined by using relevant direct quotes from the individual participants. Some of the direct quotes may include some grammatical errors; however, in an effort to retain the authenticity of the participants' words, they are presented as stated by the participants themselves.

The findings of the study are grouped into five main categories. Because of the complexity of this study, it is necessary to begin this chapter by providing important background information both about the education system in Africa and about the co-researchers or participants' preconceptions of what studying in the United States would be like. Thus the first area of findings focuses on their pre-arrival, and their multiple motivations to study in the United States. The remaining findings— adjusting to a new educational system; growing awareness of race; developing strategies for social and cultural adjustment- focus on their experiences and perceptions in the United States and broadening individuals' worldview and professional growth. For purposes of clarity and to aid the reader in following the discussion, a data display of the findings of the study appears in a table on the next page.

Outline of Findings

- A. Pre-arrival: Perceived Multiple Motivations to Study in the U.S.
 - 1. Background context: The African education system
 - 2. Reputation of U.S. higher education and its infrastructure
 - 3. Lack of educational opportunities in home
 - 4. Assumed positive social and educational rewards.
- B. Dealing with a New Educational System
 - 1. Language issues
 - 2. Different class atmosphere
 - 3. Different teaching and learning approaches
- C. “I Am Different”: Growing Awareness of Race
 - 1. Becoming aware of skin color
 - 2. Differential treatment
 - 3. Distrust and cultural insensitivity
- D. Living Through Socio-cultural Differences
 - 1. Loneliness: From a Communal Culture to an Individualistic one
 - 2. Loss of professional status
 - 3. The use of multiple strategies for cultural adjustments
- E. Broadening Individuals’ Worldview and Professional Growth
 - 1. Personal Development
 - 2. Cross-cultural Interaction
 - 3. Academic Advancement

Pre-arrival: Perceived Multiple Motivations to Study in the United States

In order to understand the social and academic experiences of the Black African non- traditional adult international students attending higher education institutions in the United States, it is important to be aware of their contextual background prior to coming to the United States. It is particularly important to discuss their African educational background and related academic experiences because both inform their educational expectations and experiences in the United States. These non-traditional age adult students possess a history that merits study and understanding if their American educational experiences are to be put in their proper place. Thus this section begins with a brief overview and then considers participants' multiple motivations for coming to the United States, namely, the reputation of the U.S. higher education and its infrastructure; the lack of educational opportunities at home; and the assumed positive social and educational rewards.

Background Context and the African Education System

It is important to point out that the formal education system in most African countries was started by British colonialists. However, there were some regions where formal education was founded and governed by church entities operated by white missionaries from mostly European countries. Among all the participants in this study, Ngina from Kenya was the only one who attended a missionary owned and operated school. She reported:

I went for a secondary school in Eldoret. It was a missionary school and so the missionaries would come to different parts of Kenya and conduct interviews for promising students and my dad took me to this interview.

This school is AIC [African Inland Mission] school and we are AIC background in my home and so I passed the interview.

Early scholars of African education have noted that education in Africa during the colonial period was mostly academic, educational content was abstract and based on European models (Tedla, 1995). This concept negates the adult learning principle that education did not relate to the local African indigenous environment. Even though African countries initiated education reforms since the 1960s to better meet the needs of their people (Okeem, 1990), the influence of the colonial era is still evident in their educational systems.

Although most African countries have adopted new educational structures (that is, the number of years allocated for elementary, high school and university education), most of the participants in this study were educated under the older British colonial structure of education (the exception to this is participant-Richard, who was educated in Liberia, a country which was never colonized and whose education system was modeled after the American system). For those educated under the British colonial system, the number of years taken in each stream (elementary, high school and university) differed from one country to another. For example participants from Kenya went through 7-4-2-3 system (7 years of elementary school, 4 years of high school, 2 years of post high school or

advanced level and 3 years of university). Explaining the British colonial education system, Frank from Kenya reported:

[The] education system that I went through consisted of three levels. I went to the pre-primary school that we call it *nursery school*, then 7 years of elementary school, Primary school, then I went to 4 years like a high school, and 2 years of advanced level and then to college which was 3 years.

On the other hand Nigeria (also with a historically British education system) had a different structure. Xero described the structure as “6-3-3-4 system, 6 years of elementary, 3 years secondary school, 3 years high school and 4 years for university.”

It is critical to acknowledge the common denominator existing with all the participants in the study: all started learning English from nursery school (kindergarten) or primary school (elementary). English was the primary medium for instruction in schools in the countries represented in this study. All participants spoke at least 2 non-English languages by the time they started kindergarten. Chidinma, a female from Nigeria for example spoke 3 different languages. She reported that learning 3 different languages meant “one person [being] bombarded with at least 3 different cultures.” She added, this “process can be overwhelming.”

It is worth mentioning that 7 (including myself) of the participants had at least an associate diploma (two year-college), 1 had an undergraduate degree and

another 5 had a graduate degree (masters) prior to coming to the United States. Thus it is important to recognize that the participants in this study were not only adults when they came to start a new educational program in the United States but they also had achieved a level of academic success in their own countries. Given that each African country differs from another and each country is comprised of several ethnic groups with different ethnic languages and dialects, it is no surprise that these participants' English accent also differ.

Another important factor to recognize is participants' professional and personal histories. All the participants in this study were non-traditional age adult students who had had several years of work experience prior to coming to the United States. For example Hope from Botswana reported that she was a "nurse educator for 6 years... and then changed job to go to University of Botswana where I worked in counseling center for 10 years." Some participants held very high and prestigious positions, either within the government or the private sector, and as a result enjoyed a level of status and respect from within their own communities. Wanjiru, a woman from Kenya described her status during a focus group:

I was a journalist and I was a motivational speaker and I was in my division which is Kikuyu Division I was the situational analyst of AIDS and so I was well connected with all the politicians and all the influential people and I used to speak frequently in the radio and in the television and I can say I was a household name.

During the same focus group, I related having similar experiences with my community as a principal in one of the prestigious schools in Kenya and nationally recognized for my outstanding contribution to the municipality-level Mathematics department. In addition when it came to community service, I represented my local church in the highest court of the church while at the same time I was the appointed person to broadcast English worship services live with our national radio station.

Although the primary focus of this study is to explore the lived experiences of adult Black African international students, understanding their perceptions of American life and the U.S. educational system had implications regarding understanding their lived experiences in the United States. Donald Clifton (1948) suggests that we look at the world through our own set of “spectacles” or perceptual filters, comprising what we have been taught and what we have seen, heard, and experienced. These perceptual filters are the lenses that provide a framework to understand what is at the heart of an individual’s cultural belief system or worldview. Subsequently, understanding these participants’ worldview will help one to better understand their lived experiences; one’s worldview provides the lenses through which to view self and others.

The post colonial changes taking place in African countries have focused on employment and human power needs in all private and public sectors. Consequently, like many other industrialized countries, education has become a necessity for those societies, to prepare the young people for their country’s future

economic, educational and social development. All participants voiced various factors that motivated them to seek education in the United States regardless of their professional status in their countries.

Reputation of U.S. Higher Education and Its Infrastructure.

Furthering their education has been a long-term desire as voiced by various co-researchers. For some participants, the decision to choose a specific area of study begun in their home country was predetermined by their respective college or university administration in collaboration with the indigenous government; in other words they were not given freedom in educational decision-making. If one did not like the field selected by the government, there was no other option to enroll in another program. Frank from Kenya is an example of those who chose to come to the United States because of the wide selection of major areas of study available to him:

It's a dream I have always had to get my higher education and go for my doctorate right for a long time and obviously it was a kind of easier to come to the States because I could get into particular field I was interested in personally for chemistry...to come and study and gain more knowledge.

It is something I desired for a long time.

Similarly, Chidinma chose to study in the United States because it was the only country that was offering her music specialization at the time. She stated,

...I really thought where I would do ethnomusicology---that is where United States came to mind because it could offer what I wanted, at that

moment, the only possibility could have been in Belfast but the person I could have studied with in Belfast was gone---had died---that could have been John Blakin. He studied a lot of African music [but] here in the United States---we had a lot of African specialists who were in different universities.

The positive reputation of U.S. education prompted Kwame from Ghana to do his MBA in the United States. He remarked confidently how the U.S. education would contribute to his employability by making him even more marketable in his country upon return:

I knew it was going to be a top “notch” because I mean US is leading in Industrial and in so many things in the world. So getting a MBA from the US for me will be a top notch qualification. That will help make me more marketable when I go back home.

The U.S. reputation was also a motivational factor for Ngina from Kenya who was a principal in a local high school. She wanted to move further in her career but to do so, she needed a doctorate in education and she had this to say:

I wanted to come and study because you know in Kenya being in America –you know – you get a lot of opportunities upon return– you can further your education and so on – so it had always been my dream and my desire to come here.

A good quality education in any country cannot be achieved if the basic educational infrastructure is not in place such as qualified teachers, adequate

financial support, instructional materials, and libraries. The United States' higher education system's stable educational infrastructure has portrayed a positive image in Botswana. As the professor in the counseling department, Hope wanted to move to a higher level, however, she was limited due to her lack of adequate education. In search of "advanced" education Hope therefore chose to do her Ph.D. program in the United States because of the high quality of counseling education and skills.

I wanted to do PhD here because the programs here appeared like they have really advanced in counseling studies and I would have gone to South Africa or Australia but they were not advanced [like U.S]... I found that America is really rich and advanced in counseling.

The stability of education system and the state of the art technology in the U.S. education system was a key factor to Kwame who believed that he was "going to be more technically driven, I mean with the technology computers and everything...they are away ahead of us. I knew we were going to use computers a lot more than we do back home."

Beyond technology and resources, the language of instruction was also considered by Xero from Nigeria as an important part of the educational infrastructure. For her English was a very important motivator. Along with other participants in this study it took her several years to learn English and she preferred English speaking countries for language convenience. Xero chose to come to the United States "because I am aware they speak English and I did not

want to go through difficulties of going to another country to learn a new language in as much as I am not like a child.”

Lack of Educational Opportunities

Some participants in this study had long term dreams to enhance their personal growth by improving their education. However, lack of educational opportunities in their countries prompted them to search for greener pastures in the United States. I commented on this when I was interviewed by Dr. Kareithi (one of my dissertation committee members) I identified a specific reason why I chose to come to the United States: there was no other opportunity for me to go back to university after high school. After 2 years in college I still wanted to have a 4 year degree so I had no choice but to start seeking opportunities outside my country, Kenya, for further education. Facing a similar problem is Tendai from Zimbabwe who was a Public Relation Officer in her country. The Zimbabwean educational policy at the time of her schooling did not allow those adults who had a break from school to enroll in the university. Tendai’s desire was focused on coming to the United States for further education. She reported:

I just wanted to further my education because my country would not allow me to go to university so, because I had sent myself through a commercial college, I still wanted to do the program that I had initially in mind.

Political instability in most African countries also affects the education system. For example, the ethnic war of 1990s in Liberia was a contributing factor

for Richard to seek education in the United States. During his personal interview he stated,

The war was going on in my country, and I could not advance my education in a cold war where I lived at the time. The only option was to come to the West [referring to the United States] and so I explored the opportunities and possibilities and through God's grace I was able to come.

Lack of economic resources, local government policies and political instability of African countries appear to have played a major role for the participants to search for education in the United States

Assumed Positive Social and Educational Rewards

All co-researchers in this study had a different perception of the United States prior to their arrival. These perceptions were learned from the visiting Americans, reading materials and/or popular media. For example Frank's knowledge about the United States was influence by the media. He indicated that "just things you get from the media that is what I would hear about the lifestyle."

Tswana from Botswana shared the same sentiment:

Yes you think- you know, when you are at home, we are very much influenced by the American pop culture that you find on TV screens mostly the artists and the movies so you come with certain expectations about the U.S that has been built by [media].

Some wanted to come to the United States because they thought that the education system in the United States would be much easier or comparable to that of the British system. Tswana spoke to this point, and said, “You know when you are coming from the British background there is always [this view] we are made to believe that it is easy here. That in America you can get whatever degree and get away with.” Sharing the same view was Frank who “...just thought [education in U.S.] would be kind of parallel the same thing...I thought I will come here and just fit into the program the way I did in my country.” Cimiyu had succeeded in the British system of education and was confident that “I had my mind set, well if I could understand and succeed with the British system that is very distinct then I thought I wasn’t much afraid of going to school.”

Pre-determined, social-cultural perceptions of the United States were also clearly pronounced in this study. The African culture is generally warm, interactive, relational, and community oriented. When the Americans visit African countries, they are typically given a warm welcome and in response they appear to be open and accessible. In light of this view some co-researchers who had such encounters with visiting Americans expected to be reciprocated in like fashion upon their arrival to the United States. Cimiyu who closely worked with Americans in Uganda expressed his view:

Before I came I had developed friendship with these [Americans] people. I thought everyone of them would welcome me. I mean these are people who have sacrificed to come to your country And I was working with

them so I thought if I step out of the plane they will welcome me, they will be there and if I've worked with them or go to school they would love to have me here We have opened up our doors. They have eaten our food, we have shared with them, we have – I mean agonized with them, laughed with them, so you tend to see those circles of all the people you see there you think everyone in the States is like that...

Similarly, Hope thought she would “find people like my own” while Ngoro hoped that he “was going to have people help [him] spiritually better than other countries whether this is true or has proven true or not that's another question but then that was expectation.”

In terms of resources the media portrayed the United States as “heaven” as stated by Xero where life is easy, comfortable and full of material resources. Some co-researchers developed their pre-arrival perceptions based on this concept and therefore had high hopes to have a better quality life after having grown up in poor countries. Tendai from Zimbabwe said,

...well I thought everybody in America is having an enjoyable life because the magazines I used to read is just like life is easy or that is what I was thinking. Everybody had a wonderful experience. I never expected homelessness or hunger or that much poverty. I guess I was naïve because I was young. I never really thought about that or may because the surrounding I grow up with that I was not expecting I would go through or see something like that. Especially when you are looking U.S being the

most developed country. I think that was the shock when I saw homelessness and see on the TV that other people were going hungry. Although Ndoro was somehow apprehensive he still had high hopes that his life would be better in the United States since it was one of the fastest growing societies. He said, “I knew I will probably...my life will be much better by coming here by acquiring some of the things that this country has generated.” Xero from Nigeria had even higher expectations for her life in the United States as she observed:

I just felt like somebody going to heaven. I felt like I am coming to a place, where everything is kind of easy, finance, anything you can think of, life, a more of – I had in mind I was coming to a place where I will have a better life, experience, a place where I will have more progress in my life, a place where I can brighten my future. That was my expectation.

The factors that influenced the co-researchers’ motivation to study in the United States can be described as personal enrichment, aspiration, a good job, language convenience, availability of resources, and a good quality of education.

Dealing With a New Educational System

Participants’ decision to pursue education in the United States meant countering and dealing with a series of challenges to overcome language problems and adjust culturally and socially to a different education system. These participants brought their educational experiences to the United States. Thus they brought with them many expectations regarding their fellow students’ behaviors,

their professors' teaching styles, and what appropriate relationships should be with university staff members. Because of these expectations, conflict in the learning process itself as well as numerous occasions for wider cultural misunderstanding arose as they adjusted to the American higher education system. Based on the information gathered from the participants regarding their experiences in the U.S. higher education system, the findings of this theme will be presented in 3 subcategories; English proficiency, class atmosphere, and teaching and learning approaches.

Dealing with Language Issues

Participants in this study have pointed out that language issues and American English proficiency as one of the major concerns in their adjustment process. It is important to point out that all of the 13 participants come from African countries where English is not a *spoken* language and that they spoke 2 or more non-English languages before being taught English in school. Further, 12 of the 13 co-researchers went through the British educational system for an average of 11 years where the British accent was emphasized. Although these co-researchers had learned English and considered themselves competent in that language prior to coming to the United States, they all expressed some level of frustration with mastering the American accent. For example, Xero from Nigeria not only had difficulty understanding the American accent but discovered that American students and teachers could not understand her accent.

I was very frustrated. They couldn't understand me. I could not understand anybody either. I speak and then they would tell me that they don't understand what am saying. I listened to them and I didn't understand what they were saying either. So for the first six months to a year I was living like a dumb person. Most of the time I used signs to say what I want to say... So I found myself in the midst of whites that could not understand me neither could I understand them. It was very frustrating to me.

For Wanjiru from Kenya the word 'accent' was brought to her attention by her American professor as a new vocabulary. Wanjiru had known throughout her education life in Kenya that she could speak English and be understood and also understand others:

...you know the first shock was from my professor who said I have an accent and he cannot understand me, and I have been fluent in English and writing in English for all these years... And I was a journalist and I mean...that was a slap on my face. That was a slap..., I had to come in terms with that, which was not easy...

Although Frank had to sit for Test of English as a Foreign Language he believed he had a command of the English language and understanding the vocabulary.

However, he reported experiencing difficulty with spoken English:

I realize that as much as I knew English fluently, it was different English that I was speaking and so that explain that I had to take English as a test

for second language. I considered myself very competent in language.

Indeed I could speak, I mean I could...I have good vocabularies, could do my GRE fine but when it comes to spoken, I felt different, frustrated. The accent, the accent...

The pronunciation of words including accent and American dialects that were not familiar to participants contributed to their inability to understand and to be understood by others. When participants had difficulty in understanding Americans, it was often the result of differences between American English and the British pronunciation. Wanjiru noted:

English and American spelling differ in some words and so when I spelled the British way the teacher failed me and said that is not correct English and he did not have time to understand that I was coming from a British English perspective.

Investing a lot of effort in listening to American English was time consuming and emotionally draining. The hardest thing for me was to understand the American accent. Even though I knew English, I had learned English years ago back in Kenya; but understanding the American accent was very difficult and frustrating. The pronunciation of words was different and therefore I sat in the class listening and listening and that took a while for me to get to understand that accent.

In contrast, when Cimiya was asked if he had difficulty understanding instructors he replied “No...not that it was difficulty it was just the pace...” however, his accent was not understood by the Americans. Consistent with this

view also is Richard who responded that he “did not have very much a problem as far as language is concerned because, we use English in Liberia” Similarly, Ngina responded “I definitely had a lot of issues with professors understanding me but I did understand them myself” A logical explanation that these participants did not have difficulties understanding the American English accent is because of their exposure to different English accents while they were working in their countries of origin.

Information processing has a direct effect on one’s ability to speak, read, write and comprehend. This requires the participants to translate from English into a native language for information processing. A majority of co-researchers in this study voiced the challenges that they encountered when processing information which had a direct effect on their speaking and writing. Hope was very clear about this process:

...I am thinking in my language – you know the African language you kind of talk in backward in the way compared to English language so I am trying to make it sensible and understandable to you and I take time to say what I have to say and also write...

Addressing speech rate, some co-researchers reported difficulty with both American students and the instructors whom they perceived as speaking too fast for them to follow.

Hope and Cimiya were among those who were concerned with speech rate and also the pronunciation of words. Even though Hope understood English well

from her country she said "...but they talked very fast here and the way they roll the tongue is very hard for somebody who speaks like me..." Cimiyu concurring with this challenge said "... it was difficulty it was just the pace... I used to tape some of the lecturers because they [instructors] were talking fast." Speech rate had direct implication in that there were gaps in the lectures because they missed some words or information that did not make sense to them. Ndoro said, "...I am missing some words because of the way they pronounce it is different...So I am always behind..."

A Different Classroom Atmosphere

A number of participants described the student/teacher interaction in U.S. system as casual compared to their home countries. Cimiyu observed,

...Coming from our system we do respect teachers so we tend to respect them, give them their due respect and what – so that was different when I came here the way they treat professors and their interactions are informal...

Frank viewed professors as authority figures and it was difficult to interact with them in an informal style. He was not "free to comment back and forth [like the American counterparts]. The student talk to them like their buddies...you know crack jokes, laughing with them and things of both their personal lives. Its something I didn't do with my professors [back home]."

Although class participation was expected of them by professors, participants' contribution was limited. American students spoke out more

frequently, often without being called on as noted by Hope: “I came from the community where you have to take time and give other chances to talk. I found it here people jump to talk – jump to talk so my participation level was very low to zero.” Richard comes from a culture where a student raises her/his hand to get permission to speak in class and it was difficult for him to violate these ingrained beliefs and fully participate in the classroom. He observed;

... to keep that measure of respect in your interaction...part of raising your hand as I said is allowing yourself to be recognized before you can speak but the students in this culture [referring to Americans] do not seem to be primarily aware of those differences... they do not give them [international students] opportunities to be able to speak, and in this culture if you don't talk in class, they think you are damn which is not the case...It was difficult to participate in class.

Some faculty members' negative attitude in the classroom toward international students discouraged some of the co-researchers from participating in class discussion. As adult students they felt embarrassed when they were treated with disrespect. Hope stated;

I didn't feel free to ask questions or talk in class because you kind of get an attitude that you should know some of the things you are asking – you know – an attitude like you are wasting my time. Some professors were just not willing to help and sometimes I didn't ask, I gave up gave up...

Xero was equally embarrassed as she indicated one of the faculty's attitude "He doesn't hear what I am saying every time I am speaking, he is asking the class "did you hear what she is saying, what did she say?"

The English language barrier was another factor that deterred class participation. Most participants reported the fact that their ability to understand the American accent affected their class participation. During my personal interview I commented that in terms of interacting in the classroom with professors, I had very minimal interaction at the time especially my first and second years because I could not understand what the professors were saying. Nodoro expressed fear and frustration associated with his accent when others in class failed to understand him. Often this lack of understanding conveyed the message to the African students that others felt that they were not getting the gist of the discussion. In most cases when a co-researcher found it difficult to understand or to be understood by others in the class discussions, usually one chose to be silent as indicated by Nodoro:

...there was a fear of accent and not sure if I would be understood what I was saying because it can be very frustrating especially for me if I can say a word or a statement and professor does not understand, and will be asked to repeat because of the accent that is not understood ...very frustrating and what to do...I opt to be silent.

From the examples above, class participation by the majority of participants was affected by their inability to be understood and to understand

others and the classroom culture that was informal and free contrary to African students' prior experiences.

Different Teaching and Learning Approaches

Participants in this study came from different cultures but all (except one) had experienced the British system of teaching/learning approaches in their home countries. By attending classes here in the United States, they had to adjust to new teaching and learning experiences. They generally fell into one of four areas: a focus on more classroom interaction; greater use of technology; a different assessment system; and finally, little recognition of their professional work experience.

The majority of the participants in this study reported that they were used to lecture-style teaching where class participation was less emphasized as compared to the U.S. system which promotes interaction and independent learning. Ngina stated,

All I remember about my university class is that they were very large and you hardly spoke to the professor, you just saw them in the front, and they were talking through that loud speaker, [meanwhile] you are trying to write notes and the next thing you know, there is an exam...Here [U.S. system] there is a lot of discussion. Definitely, I would like to say that...there is a lot of projects to be done by students...Here...there is a lot of presentations to be done by students in class so it's like students are teaching students because the professor will give you questions to go and

research on and deadlines and then presentation dates so of course I'm not saying it is always like that but it is real different approaches to teaching when it comes to...comparing Kenya and the United States

Secondly the participants in this study came from third world countries where resources and technology are generally limited, including in the education systems. Many of these co-researchers did not have any experiences with computers, the internet, and use of libraries. Attending schools in the U.S. higher education system exposed them to new technology and required orientation to the use of available resources. Coping up with the expectations and demands from U.S. professors to use such resources and technology as an instruction method was a challenge to many of the co-researchers. Wanjiru is an example of such student:

We also had interactions with what I call Blackboard on the computer [a platform for online teaching and learning], where you would go and post your comments and post challenges that you encountered as you were reading the materials...I realized the way they do that was very different from the way I was used to. I was kind of used to a system where a professor would sit down give notes and lecture and ask questions later on but I got now into a system that is more interactive than lecturing and more independent I...Back at home we used to hand write our papers. We had no typewriters, no computers, and nothing, but now I had a challenge

of typing on the computer. It was a big challenge for me because I wasn't used to.

Xero found the independent work to be overwhelming:

...I came here, I discovered that each class you write an assignment, everyday you came to class you must get an assignment; every week has an assignment to do. I found overwhelming, took me years to get used to that.”

Third, the process of evaluating learning in the U.S. system was another learning adjustment for all co-researchers. Most co-researchers were not accustomed to the style of examination, different academic areas to be assessed, and the frequency of testing.

Cimiyu expressed his challenge in using multiple choices questioning as a method of evaluating his learning. He reported that at the level of education he had at home, he did not use multiple choice questions but rather essay questions:

...there is no exam which was multiple choices, you have to write essays.

Economics exam was two papers micro and macro and they first gave you the first five numbers which contained short answers then you have essays questions which out of seven you would choose three essays to answer...

During my interview with Dr. Kareithi, (a dissertation committee members) I voiced my frustration with multiple choice questions. I personally was not used to multiple choices or fill-in-the-blank questions in college. Fill-in-the-blank questions for me were not even in high school in Kenya. Very rarely in my time

as I teacher would I give those kinds of questions to my students. Tswana had a similar experience: “Multiple choices were given when you are in primary and elementary not even secondary... Multiple choices at masters’ level-that was quiet something. We don’t do multiple choices”

The learning assessment was different in that most participants were only tested twice in a semester, at the middle and the end, while attending higher educational institutions in their home countries. In contrast, the U.S. system is cumulative and comprehensive in nature, focusing on multiple areas of assessment including class participation, papers, homework, quizzes and examinations. For example, Frank reported “here [U.S.] there is continuous assessment. So you read a small portion you do it and you forget about it. In Kenya there is a semester system and what you read for example in January, you could have exams in July with another semester in between.” Even though this process was different from what most participants were used to, Tendai reported that the U.S. system of evaluation favored her as an adult non traditional student:

...Here you have the opportunity to excel because you don’t have one exam like at home. At home the final exam is final. If you don’t do well tough luck but here there was so much opportunity to do well because you get quizzes, and they add up to the final grade. We had Mid-term exam, and sometimes you can even make up a test or a quiz. There was so much opportunity to advance and do well in class. So I think it was much easier

for me being older and a non traditional and a married person and having a child, for me to do well in my classes.

Finally, the participants in this study were all adult students from African countries who had achieved a certain level of education and work experience prior to coming to the United States. Most of the participants expressed that a disproportionate amount of attention had been spent on their performance within the American educational system with little or no consideration or attention given to their past experiences, a critical element in education for adult learners. Kwame who sometimes needed to relate his past experiences with the current subject matter in the class stated,

...For me there was a time I expected them [professors] to allow me to relate the course I am doing with my experience home, but surely I never got chance like that because they make you look so *green*- I have to be frank. They make you look so green, everything was U.S. based, U.S. system based. If you don't know the U.S. system you don't know anything and I felt that was short sighted...

Sharing the same concern was Xero;

I cannot imagine running a college for 3 good years [in my home country] only to come here being and treated as if I don't just know anything. This is where your life begins. What about my previous experience? It is very frustrating.

In summary, the findings in this theme supports that Black African international students experienced various areas of educational adjustment in the United States' system. Major challenges for them included English barriers, the classroom atmosphere and encountering different learning and teaching approaches. However, these problems gradually lessened as the participants spent greater time in the system.

“I Am Different”: Growing Awareness of Race

In order to understand the findings related to this theme, it is necessary to explain what influenced the participants' lack of racial awareness prior to coming to the United States. Given that most of the represented countries were colonized by European countries, it is reasonable for one to assume that these participants would have developed an awareness of race given their national histories. It is also reasonable to assume that most of these participants had an academic knowledge of the history of slavery in the United States and the more recent civil rights movement there, thus raising their awareness of racial issues. Surprisingly however, the participants did not refer to either colonialism or the historic race relations in the United States during their interviews in terms of what may have triggered their own awareness of being Black.

Instead of having to contend with racial conflict within their countries, participants dealt with ethnic differences, or what some may call tribalism. The issue at stake regarding ethnic differences was not that of race, given that there was racial homogeneity among all the ethnic groups. What provoked the

differences between ethnic groups was the variation in their underlying social/value systems. Therefore, when participants came to the United States, the subtle and often not so subtle experiences related to race and color awareness were new phenomena for them. These new experiences in the United States regarding race and color awareness were made more difficult, in part because they were often mistaken for or assumed to be African American.

Thus, it is not a surprise that most of the co-researchers in this study voiced negative experiences related to what appeared to be racially-motivated differential treatment. Based on the information gathered from the individual and focus group interviews, I have identified 3 subcategories that describe the findings of this theme: (a) becoming aware of one's skin color, (b) perceived differential treatment, and (c) distrust and cultural insensitivity.

Becoming Aware of One's Skin Color

All the co-researchers grew up and were socialized within a homogeneous group where the concept of 'minority' and the color of their skin were not conscious in their mind. Realization that they were 'Black' and a 'minority' took place when they enrolled into predominantly white educational institutions.

During the personal interview with Cimiya he noted,

...Until you get into a community where you thought you were a majority and you become a minority, then you appreciate... I can now understand because now I became a minority in terms of being [Black] we are very few Africans and second, we are very few male Blacks...and in terms of

our color we stuck out easily in a crowd...[because we] stand out different.

Concurring with Cimiyu's concept is Wanjiru. She stated, "I realized I am Black when I came to this country... I did not know I was Black till people started behaving funny around me because I am Black." Richard's "awareness" that he was Black was made known through social interaction:

...you look around you and you are the only Black person, you are forced to develop that side of your social awareness, you see, and then your accent is different, and when you speak everyone turns around and looks at you. Then people ask me all kinds of weird questions. 'Where do you come from', 'You sound nice' but sometimes I noted they wanted to tell me that I am different...

I also had similar awareness. I remember it was the first time I recognized my color when I got to my first school that I am Black. Never ever thought of my color before, being in a predominantly white school for the first time, I realized that I am Black person in a predominately white college and I became sensitive.

Although this study is intended to address participants' experiences, it is rather difficult not to consider their perception regarding race. By not doing so I would have failed to provide full treatment. The perception 'white is good and Black is bad' was evident in this study among the participants. Non-Black international students were perceived by the participants as being given better treatment than Black African students. My personal experience in one of the

colleges I attended was such an example. International students from other countries were invited by faculty or staff members to spend Christmas with them, that is, all but the three Africans who were in that college. We were left on campus all by ourselves...there was no invitation extended to us while every other international student, especially those students from European countries, received invitations to spend the holiday with faculty or staff members.

Given that all the participants in this study were Black students, it is likely that Americans merely observing them assumed they were African Americans. This assumption held until the participants began to talk, revealing their accent. Tendai's experience around this issue occurred during conversations with Americans and other international students; her perception of this mistaken-identity experience was negative:

...let's say somebody is from Russia and is talking with accent, People don't bother them, but every time I was talking with an accent...from Africa they [Americans] will ask "oh where are you from?" But my observation with the person with accent from Chinese or Russia, they don't ask them those questions. They start talking and conversing with them.

I offered a similar example during the focus group interview of my experience when buying a home. There was a home that I wanted to buy in a predominantly White neighborhood. The realtor agreed to sell it but later came to me with excuses that, that specific home was not available after all. As an alternative, the

realtor proposed that I buy a home in the city where there were more Black people. Within a few days I discovered that the home had been purchased by a White man, at a lower price than what I had offered. Eventually I succeeded to buy a home in a different neighborhood, also predominantly White. On the 2nd morning after my family and I moved in, we found that three pumpkins had been placed on our front porch, each inscribed with a “K.” While there were other immigrant families living in the neighborhood, we were the only Black African immigrant family; no other immigrant family had had this experience. Again, our neighborhood Americans merely observed us and assumed we were African Americans until they heard us speak.

These excerpts demonstrate that Black African international students are vulnerable to societal stereotypes, prejudices, and racism that have a negative impact on those students attending predominantly white institutions of higher learning. Allegations and preconceived judgments about their academic intellectual ability create additional stress in their educational endeavors.

Perceived Differential Treatment

Becoming aware of one’s racial and skin color difference was only one aspect of the co-researchers’ experience while attending predominantly White institutions of higher education in the United States. A more insidious element was introduced to their experience when they began to perceive differential treatment based on their racial identity or skin color. Perceived racial treatment from both White students and higher education administration and faculty in the

U.S. education system was demoralizing to participants and required additional effort to succeed in their academic work. Richard reflected this perceived differential treatment as he described what he had to do in order to survive in the education system stating, “there are things that you have to be forced to work a little harder [because] there are walls [and] you have to work hard to bring them down.” Xero provides an explicit example where her graduate assistantship was withdrawn and later realized that it was offered to a White female student. She stated,

The graduate assistantship was granted to me at my university in Chicago. It was granted that year for only ten students and I was the only Black among those ten. The beginning of the semester I was supposed to start classes with that graduate assistantship, at the middle of that fall semester, they sent me an email that your graduate assistantship has been terminated. [When she questioned, she was told] we made a mistake for hiring, for giving you graduate assistantship, I was like – “what kind of mistake?” you requested for my credentials and I sent them here, you invited me for interview, you went through all the protocols, and at the end you sent me a letter that I have been granted graduate assistantship only to cancel it in less than a semesters...

In my attempt to explore if Xero thought this issue was race related, Xero revealed her perception: “I know the lady they hired to replace me. My

scholarship was terminated and given to her. It's very frustrating and sometime you can't just understand it... The skin color is the obstacle.”

Some professors' demonstrated what appeared to be a double-standard in terms of their expectations of students. Participants perceived this double-standard as an expression of racial discrimination based on their race and skin color.

Tendai related such an experience after missing one week of class:

I remember one day this semester I had gone home and I came back like one week late and I was taking online class. I got this nasty email from, the head of the department of the program I was in and he said “where are you” he wrote my name and said “where are you” in a nasty email, and then, just what happened another week past, another girl just came to join online class, she really was 3 weeks late, and I was only one week late and she sent an email “Oh I am sorry, I am back now” and the person said “there is no problem”

I revealed in the focus group interview a similar experience. The most striking differential treatment I encountered was related to missing classes. Just before the end of a given semester, I requested to miss 2 classes in order to go home (Kenya). Permission was granted to me on condition I would not only read our assigned text book but that I would also write a 40-page report on the book, even though the original assignment for the other students was for them to write only a 5-page paper on the same textbook. A White student in the same class missed the same number of classes in the same month but yet was not asked to do

any extra work by the same teacher. I wondered why the professor had a double standard for students. As much as one would try not to associate such treatment with race, it seemed evident to me that there was differential treatment for Black students.

Hope identified her experience with mine during the focus group discussion. As a teaching assistant in the university she found double standard in the distribution of responsibilities:

I was given this graduate assistantship at the college. I have this little question. That is, I have had only one assignment from the department and I look at my colleagues and that they have so many assignments there are like involved in the department. I have nothing to do and I kept on asking myself what is this?.. they [other graduate assistants] were assigned to teach classes, I have never been assigned to teach any class. So I am just wondering why is it that my colleagues have so much to do in this department and they are so involved...They are all white they are so involved in the functions of the department and I have almost nothing to do.

The challenges related to race and skin color were even more compounded by religion and gender. Xero, a nun, felt that association with religion made her racial discrimination even more prevalent. Religion and the color of the skin (being Black) were factors that were perceived even more negatively:

...by being a nun is another obstacle. Yah, being a Black and a nun is double punishment for me because I feel like, (especially undergraduate level and associate degree level), they [professors] just me feel like I am out of place... because that time I used to wear my nun habit a lot in school. Once you are like that they keep you in isolation... The professors kept telling me, especially in my department you can't be coming to class with this religious attire...it is not meant for classroom place.

Perceived differential treatment based on race went beyond the educational setting into the community and work place. Tendai reported receiving less pay compared with Americans even though she had the same level of education:

[Being] Black and also coming from Africa, employers when they are negotiating salary for you, they want to give you the lowest salary, yet especially with my last job when I was in Washington DC. I knew and I could tell I was making 15,000 to 20,000 less than other people in my position. So that is what made me so mad that I had to leave. Why should I work so hard when some people are making certain amount when I am making 15,000/20,000 less because I am Black and because I am African?

Differential treatment from professors toward Black African students in the class was perceived by several co-researchers. According to participants in this study, the differential treatment based on race was fueled by racism; while this may indeed have been the case, other factors within the context of their

experiences may more clearly support or negate this claim. Nevertheless, the participants' experience with differential treatment was consistently perceived negatively and as such, only strengthened their awareness that they were "different."

Distrust and Cultural Insensitivity

Distrust and lack of cultural sensitivity were associated by participants as racial challenges in the education process. The participants noted the ways they were not trusted and otherwise experienced cultural insensitivity that had racial undertones. All the participants in this study had a certain level of education and work responsibility prior to coming to the United States. However many were faced with frustrations when the faculty and administration did not trust their competency. For example, Frank always felt that the Black African students were the first suspects if something went wrong in the laboratory:

...when you work with instruments in sciences, something would go wrong, we [Black African international students] are to be aware because, suddenly you will be the first suspect and I think you have to be aware of that. If something went wrong, you will be the first suspect... so always had to be conscious... and then I felt there was an element of distrust because of something went wrong ...

Richard was working on campus as a graduate assistant. He had been an engineer in his country prior to coming to the United States and had many years of experience. In fact it was even known by the department that he had extensive

knowledge that other American students at his level of education did not have. Nevertheless, he was micromanaged by the supervisor and therefore associated this with the sense that the supervisor did not trust him:

...Here [at the university] people knew that in my department there was no one who knew what I knew [referring to other students], nevertheless the level of trust and confidence was too low... and sometimes the supervisor would give me a problem to work on and I knew exactly what I was doing...but wanted to keep his eyes on me, micromanage as though I could not be left alone to do the job and do it professionally...which shows your part of lack of confidence in my sense of responsibility and expertise.

The stereotype communicated by faculty members that Black African international students could not perform in the class like other students was felt and expressed to Ndoro. During the focus group he stated,

One teacher told me after presentation in the class- I did not expect you to perform... to present your paper at the level that you did. Another said 'actually most African students don't do well here' and it is very hard when you- you enter a school and you find such a context stereotyping people who don't expect you to do much. It kills you...

Lack of cultural sensitivity during class and out of class interaction with Americans was exhibited by the nature of questions posed by American students. Participants described those kinds of questions as uncomfortable. I personally

voiced those concerns during my interview that the kind of questions I was asked were embarrassing. I really experienced even more open negative things in public colleges. I could not understand adult students, even the faculty, when they would ask me kinds of questions like ‘did you wear clothes when you got here?’ In fact I felt embarrassed that I didn’t even want to answer some of the questions.

Sometimes I felt just angry and would be rude or just keep quiet or used the words, “I don’t know.” Richard had a similar experience:

I remember at one photo studio, with my family and were well dressed and when I spoke the fellow, a photographer first thought I was an African American but when he heard my accent, he asked ‘where do you come from’ Africa---“you are well dressed, do you guys dress like that in Africa?

The fact that the participants in this study came from Africa, a continent that is associated with third world countries and where the media has always depicted a “dark continent,” that Americans would be inclined to ask such insensitive questions.

Living Through Socio-cultural Differences

This section of the findings reveals the lived social and cultural experiences encountered by the Black African non-traditional age adult students attending U.S. higher educational institutions. Because of differences in cultural and ethnic backgrounds these students found themselves wrestling with the social relationships, beliefs, and cultural differences between themselves and the U.S.

culture. The findings of this theme are presented in three subcategories stemming from the data: 1) social relations, 2) loss of professional status, and 3) strategies for cultural adjustments.

From a Communal Culture to an Individualistic One

The phenomenon of social isolation in the participants' experiences in higher education was marked by feelings of loneliness and conflict regarding value systems. Leaving what was typically a community-oriented social life back home contributed to significant feelings of loneliness. The idea of being alone as an adult in the midst of many people was a confusing experience for Hope from Botswana. She said,

...the thing that really bothered me is sitting in my apartment and talking to nobody but watching T.V. by myself and I would pip from the window to see [if I would see someone to talk to] I don't know [whom I was looking] but I couldn't understand the situation when there would be so many people all around you but nobody to talk to, you know that is one thing that really hit me hard, and when I tried to talk to people, I saw that they didn't want to talk to me.

The notion of feeling "left out" in the social gathering was also expressed by Wanjiru, a female from Kenya. She reported,

... I remember when I was in grad school in Indiana, [American students] they would come in the morning and greet one another and it was like I

was not existing no body would say hi to me, was alone. I felt left out in the whole seminary.

Although there were minimal interactions between participants and American students, building and maintaining true friendships was a challenge to some participants. According to Frank social interaction with American students was different:

...socialization was not like the one I was used to... people [Americans] would come to me and we would talk a little bit, asking about Africa and we would talk a little bit this and that, however, I did not feel like I was making real friendships such that we can go beyond just being in the dorm.

Kwame, a male from Ghana had the same observation as did Frank: “here, the people in the class that you are with... interaction were not free, but you can talk to them but the response wasn’t the way I would have wished... I saw that people were not forthcoming to me.”

Forming friendships with Americans was deterred by distant interpersonal relationships between participants and the Americans. Cimiya, a male from Uganda noted, “It took me a while to get into an American family, I think the first American family I went for...the interaction was more reserved for the American.” Similarly,

Chidinma, a female from Nigeria described Americans as “individualistic” when addressing their social interaction. Her response was:

People were very individualistic--- that was different from what I know at home or even in Italy you know. The rule that I know of whereby anybody can meet you and strike a conversation, you meet friends and (most of my friends you meet them on the streets), but here one was tended to be careful and not to step on peoples' toes and things like that, so that was basically more of things that I felt strange about and I had to adjust.

The feeling of isolation was even more exacerbated if one wore religious attire in the classroom setting. Xero, a female from Nigeria described how she was “left alone” when it came to group discussions in the class:

...Sometimes you group students...the professors ask the student to form groups for presentation and will ask them to make choices who they want to be in the group with. Sometimes they will make their choices and I will be left alone in the class. So when they ask students evaluation they said that they kind of scared away by my religious habits.

Although Wanjiru's feelings of isolation may not have been affected by religious attire, she had similar experiences in the class setting. She reported, “if we had to be divided into groups of two or three, I always had a hard time because it was not many people wanted me in that group.”

Cultural values or beliefs are often used to identify specific ethnic or cultural groups or differentiate among them. These values have important implications for the groups' continued existence, particularly for defining the characteristics of these groups. Coming to a foreign country meant encountering

people with different value systems and this caused one to experience a certain level of disconnect and confusion. For example, for Black African students *respect* for elders is highly emphasized in their countries of origin. Older people and those in authority are given special respect within their communities. The definition of this concept was seen as different in American culture by Hope:

...there is no particular way of talking to this older person. It's just the same, and I even I see it when they talk to the lecturer and to me. I don't call lecturer by his first name. I wouldn't do that- but they do. I call him Dr. so and so. I can't go with the first name like that. And here I have gotten to be called by my first name, which I feel very funny about it.

Richard from Liberia had a similar view: "we will respect the individual particularly if one is older than you." Given that participants in this study were much older adults than traditional students in their classrooms their expectation that they would be respected based on their age was flawed. In reality, they were not disrespected but it was an example of a conflict of cultural values between the Americans and participants.

From these participants' excerpts it is evident that the feeling of loneliness and isolation was a cultural shock and a confusing experience. The inability to form friendships and experiencing distant social interactions as a consequence of the American cultural value of individualism contributed to this feeling of isolation.

Loss of Professional Status

All participants in this study were non-traditional age adult Black international students who had a variety of work and educational experiences. The time range that these participants spent in the workforce of their country of origin before coming to the United States spanned 4 to 27 years. Most of them worked with their universities, governmental entities, or non-government organizations holding high rank positions and in turn were held in high esteem by their communities. Given that there was little preparation provided about life in the United States, the co-researchers arrived with certain expectations that their status in the workforce and in the community would remain the same. When this did not happen, they were faced with considerable cultural and social stress.

The loss of professional status and identity was revealed from participants' narrative stories during individual and focus group interviews. For example, Xero from Nigeria had worked as a college administrator for 3 years in her country prior to coming to the United States. She felt frustrated when she was "being treated as if I don't just know anything." Xero further added:

It was like humiliating because I was in charge of students who lived in the dorm in the past. I had authority to express myself to them if they broke some of the school rules depending with situations. Now I found myself living in the dorm was humiliating, it was humiliating to some extent.

Similarly, Wanjiru was a journalist and a senior pastor in her home country before she came to the United States. She echoed the same concern, “I was not able to maintain the same standard [as in her country]. Nobody is interested to know whom you were in Kenya, what you did, what social status you held. Nobody is interested, you are dismissed – period.” For Cimiya who was also a pastor in Uganda, joining the workforce in the United States was a new beginning. He said that “this is a new experience we’re just like back to elementary school nobody cares who you were... its frustrating.”

Hope from Nigeria was a professor in her country prior to coming to the United States. Although she did not expect to be a professor in the United States upon her arrival, she had high expectations that her work experiences would be at least considered when she sought employment. On the contrary, Hope was forced to take a job that had nothing to do with her experiences resulting in low self-esteem and “*I am nothing*” mentality. In her words she said,

Working “odd jobs” contributed to a low self-concept and low self-esteem.

I wake up, I go to my job, I go to my job, I go to this older woman change everything that needs to be changed, clean her house and cook for her and then I go to supervise these students who said they have been working for family network or rehabilitation center or other community agencies and I look at them and feel like these girls are superior to me because I am doing lesser job or what I call dirty jobs and I am supposed to suddenly

change to be the supervisor of these girls—that doesn't work for me, very difficult. I felt very inferior... that was very humiliating...I felt like *I am nothing* ... I came from home where I was such a respectable person. The experience drove my self-esteem to nothing, and I only had to be strong to stay and continue with my education.

It was not unusual for Black international student to be given handyman-kind of jobs while American students would work in the libraries, bookstores, or in the administration offices. My perception (as I indicated during the focus group interview) was that the college assumed that Black Africans did not have the skills to do such jobs. The nature of work given to me by the college such as cleaning the bathrooms, sweeping the floors and mowing the grass was demeaning because those jobs were performed by my subordinates back home. A high school principal could not do such work. Frank, a former professor in his home university had a similar experience. Regarding performing such jobs as I describe above Frank said that he “felt somehow like *stepping back* in social order so to speak because I am back down there.” Tswana from Botswana concurred with Frank. He said “performing odd jobs was devastating mentally...[it felt like a] *social demotion*.”

The various strong phrases emphasized by participants in this study denote the individual's loss of professional identity. Examples of such descriptions were from Hope who said “*I am nothing*,” from Frank, “*stepping back in social order*,” and from Tswana as “*social demotion*.” This loss of professional identity

resulted in the loss of self confidence as stated by Kwame from Ghana “when people [referring to Americans] begin to treat you as though you do not know what you are doing, you are not capable in whatever you do, that creates impact or affects you even your confidence you see and that will not translate well at this level...”

Strategies for Cultural Adjustments

Given that the participants in this study have encountered various socio-cultural and new educational experiences, developing coping strategies was critical if they were to succeed in their educational process.

Forming friendships with other international students. Participants generally reported that they sought their social support from international students. Many co-researchers reported that they did not receive a good orientation to their respective higher education institution and to compensate, relied on others specifically from African countries who had preceded them for educational, campus-related, and social experiences. Frank reported that much of what he learnt, he was taught by other fellow Black African students.

I had friends who taught me who were ahead of me... they were telling me- you know some of the steps to expect this and that, how long its gonna take for me to graduate and things like that.. how to choose your advisor, it was a very good advice there. There wasn't a structured way [in the university]... But then I know, and of course I did the same to people coming...new people who were coming in and I kept telling and sharing

my experiences... without that, I would not have succeeded and somehow it would have been more difficulty. So I learnt a lot from my peers.

Hope voiced the same approach for her support system

.... this other guy was in my program and was ahead of me so he was very helpful to let me know how to go about things, and anything I did not understand I could ask him. But others were in the masters program and I could relate to them when we started visiting each other and talking to each other and made things better and I began to know a lot more about people through them.

I also can relate with Frank and Hope regarding their support system approach. If at any time I was not sure of what the teacher said I would often look for other international students, particularly from Africa, to share their ideas with me.

Participants' search for support extended beyond their own ethnic background. The study indicated that Black international students interacted with other international students from other countries because there was commonality by virtue of being international students. Kwame from Ghana explained:

... we shared common sentiments. These are Turkish from Turkey and I am from Africa but we shared common sentiments, some many things we shared in common and we were close. I was closer to them than to the American students because of our experience were similar we kind of bonded easily.

Cimuyu explained the relationship between Black African students and other non-African international students. He reported that they “bonded so well with them even those who were like from Europe who were white...[we] came together and I think because we are all foreigners, immigrants, there was a bond there and we clicked together.” Interestingly there was an interaction among those co-researchers who could not interact back in their countries because of their skin of color, as reported by Tswana from Botswana who lived among White Africans:

...White South Africans who never interacted with me [back home]; they were equally lonely so it was easier to interact with them here. Once we are both in America, even though we never had any contact back home in South Africa but here we found comfort in each others arms because in mainstream America, they couldn't integrate as much. So once you come from Africa and they realize you come from Africa now it's no longer matter if you are Africa or white. We are all the same- its that commonality.

I also stated during the focus group that I found myself interacting so much with other international students, for example, I had a friend from Haiti. I found myself interacting with international students more because I guess we had something in common together.

Cultural identification. Another strategy for coping with adjustment to the U. S. higher education institutions was through cultural identification. The study revealed that Black African students preferred forming their closest relationships

with members of their ethnic group. During the focus group, Ngoro stated that “there was common language that we shared, culture, and common way of thinking which is quite different from people from the west.” Frank said one of the reasons he identified with other Kenyans is because they had common problems. In his own words he stated “we kind get along to share...we had common goals, common problems. ...so I socialized with my fellow Kenyans.” For Chidinma identifying herself with Nigerian students was even more intimate. She said, “It was like coming in [new country] but also meeting your sisters there at a place.” Wanjiru also described the role that her fellow Kenyan students played with each other in the adjustment process, that is,

...the role of encouragement. We were there for one another, and if they were succeeding, I will succeed also. And you know when it was tough we stayed together for one another. When we were misunderstood, we were for one another. We were a pillar of strength to one another.

Relations with American students. Even though there was an emphasis found on interaction among Black international students and other international students from other countries, there were incidences where participants found White Americans as a source of support in order to ease their adjustment process. Chidinma described herself as “lucky because from the very start [she] got introduced... to American friends who supported me...Some of them remained my friends up to this day.” Ngina as a graduate assistant had also some close White American graduate assistants who were supportive: “We shared the same

office for quite a number of years with these ladies and we became very close...and we looked out for each other.” Sharing the same experiences during my interview, I pointed out that I had also White American friends who supported me and other Black students from Africa. We would go to the dining hall and look where they were and we would sit together. On Sundays we would go to the same church so it was very positive but because that was where we got our support system.

Family network. Family support was another strategy used by Black African international adult students as a means of coping with adjustment. Because Black Africans are generally family oriented, they also relied upon their families for support. Despite the distance, Wanjiru still depended on her husband for support:

My support system was my husband even though he was in Kenya for a couple semesters, then he came over with my boys, and also God. [They] were my source of strength. When I communicated with my husband, he could understand what I was going through, and he always believed in me and always reminded me you will make it. You will make it.

Ndoro, a male from Tanzania also agreed with Wanjiru. He depended on his family for socialization. He said, “to have my family my wife and kids here was a supply of fellowship, and a supply of social life” Likewise, Chidinma from Nigeria reported “I have some of my family here and I have some of my family back home. My family has been very supportive.”

To sum up the findings of this theme, the study found that students from African countries tend to have intense social contact with those from their respective countries while they are in the United States. This forms a replica of their home social culture and also as a source of support during their adjustment process. Although participants indicated that White Americans eased their adjustment process, identifying themselves with other co-nationals was the most critical and necessary strategy for coping with the adjustment process. The participants in this study also revealed that they sought their support from their family members who lived abroad and in the United States.

Broadening Individuals' Worldview and Professional Growth

Attending school in the United States has had a level of impact on the Black African international students in this study. In order to discover this impact, it is critical to answer these two questions: What did the Black African international students learn from pursuing education in the United States? And how were they impacted by this experience in the various facets of their life? The findings in this theme revealed from the data are presented into three subcategories: personal development, cross-cultural interaction, and academic advancement.

Personal Development

One of the ways participants in this study have reported how the U.S. higher education has expanded their worldview is by the way they perceive the world around them. Chidinma, a female from Nigeria reported that “my mode of

thinking is different. I have a different way of thinking. I have a different way of viewing the world and not being judgmental.” Affirming this perspective was Cimiyu who has learned not to be judgmental:

I look at people differently. I don't want to look at people how they looked at me when I first came on the campus – ‘he doesn't know anything, he is not going to make it’ because later on when I graduated people came to me and said, ‘We never knew you were going to make it.’

By attending U.S higher education institutions, Ngina has developed some personal appreciation of the U.S. educational system and views her country in a different way:

[Educational achievements] made me to view the world differently and learn to appreciate things in a much better way. As an administrator in Kenya I know sometimes I caned students, today I wouldn't do that...If I ever came back here [Kenya] I would never – I would never, never cane a student! And I regret sometimes when I think about it but at the same time I am grateful that I just didn't know some of the repercussions of caning. I mean there is a better way of dealing with the problem when it comes to the youth...such awakenings have come as a result of either the education I've gotten here or exposure, my interactions with other people, discussion I've had with other people and just through observations.

For Xero, U.S. education has moved her to a higher level of acculturation and adjustment. She sees the reality of life and she is able now to respond without emotional stress. She reported:

[Education] changed my perception about people in such way that it has made me to believe that there is no way ever people will treat me the way I expected. I have come to embrace the reality about that, and because of that anywhere I go now, and experience racism, it does not shock [me] any longer. It does not embarrass me any longer. It does not frustrate me any longer.

Encountering new education in a foreign country was an experience that had its own challenges. However, going through those challenges left participants in the study even much stronger. Frank reported,

I look back and think about, you know, struggles I had, all those things I have learned but they have made me kind of a stronger person now, and I know when new students come I can tell them, I went through all this and I encourage people a lot that it is just matter of time and this will come to pass then you will be able to move on.

Cross-cultural Interaction

Participants in this study developed their cross-cultural interaction and understanding from being in the U.S. educational system and from frequent interaction with other students from other countries. Chidinma expressed some of the cross-cultural attitudes she has developed:

First of all my interaction with both students and people of other cultures especially in the United States has taught me to be very patient. And also my relationship with others I have seen many people have racial problems and so on, so it has awakened me to be sensitive to other people especially to other races around. I was not like very conscious about it because it was not an issue in my country and Italy.

Frank stated that he has “learnt to be more open, you know, that now I appreciate everybody’s differences and I kind of learnt through that there are some kind of those differences that are there to live with and people have to accept it” Wanjiru takes a step further and reported that education in the United States “has changed me because I am able to extend grace to people, I am able to understand people.”

Similarly, Xero has developed the concept that all people are equal and all should be treated with respect. She reported, “I realize from education that, no matter from where they [people] are coming from as long as they are human beings, they deserve to be respected and treated well.”

Academic Advancement.

A major impact acquired from the U.S. educational system by participants in this study is academic knowledge in their fields of study. Chidinma had “always wanted to be a writer [and] just had an article published.” She continued to affirm that “that is one of the thing I thought I will be able to develop in the United States.”

Academic achievement has improved participants' self confidence and given them a sense of accomplishment. Frank for example stated,

Education has made me more, I believe more confident and I can look back and say the struggle was worth it. It has given me a sense of accomplishment because this is a goal I had for a long time, so I just feel a sense of satisfaction.

Richard expressed the same concept of self-confidence. He reported that educational achievement has created a sense of belonging, and stated,

When I am in the context with my peers or education scholars community, I feel like I belong...and my confidence level has just skyrocketed, I feel comfortable talking about something I know, and I know how to handle arguments.

Cimiyu concurred with Frank and Richard, "my goal was to come to the U.S. to go to school and achieve an education and in three years I had gotten [a] Bachelor's."

Attending U.S. higher education institutions has also given the participants the opportunity to rectify some of their perceptions of the U.S. education system.

Ndoro reported,

I think I have appreciated the education here, the education is good, excellent, BUT it is tough, it is time consuming. I do not see myself as having lost my time here. I think I have gained.

Ngina from Kenya describes the education in the United States as “competitive” and it will make her competitive also in the field. Wanjiru argued that the benefits of attending schools in the U.S. higher education system outweigh the hardships one encounters:

I have achieved my dream. I have achieved whatever brought me here and I don't regret coming here because through it all, through the experiences I have gone through, different hardships that I have gone through still U.S. education is good system. I would say I have achieved more than I could have achieved my own country.

The background of most of the participants in this study is marked by poverty and ethnic wars in their home countries. Educational achievements have been received as a humbling factor as Cimiya notes:

They have humbled me because here I come from nobody, no family, no- if you ask people who know my family they're not so big [not economically or politically big] but to come here and spend four years, three years of education and to make it, that's an achievement...[this] has given me a boost in my life that if I aim on something and put my feet and teeth on it, I can do it.

The impact of attending U.S higher education institutions has had a significant contribution in the lives of the participants in this study. All participants reported positively as to how their education has increased their self-confidence, self appreciation, and contributed toward their career advancement.

Furthermore, despite the constellation of educational, social, and cultural challenges, participants voiced their satisfaction with their academic and personal growth. Indeed there was a consensus that their achievements were worth their challenges.

Chapter Summary

The themes presented in this chapter mirror widely lived experiences that the participants encountered through their educational pursuit while attending predominantly White educational institutions in the United States. Many of these Black African international adult students voiced various factors that motivated them to seek education in the United States regardless of their professional status in their countries. Lack of educational opportunities and the positive reputation of the U.S. education system and its resources were among the factors that participants in the study voiced.

As international students from *non-English speaking* countries faced with a vastly different educational system, certainly they had several challenges. Language issues, particularly understanding the American accent were voiced by participants as the major challenge in their education process. In addition class environment, teaching and learning styles were inconsistent with what these participants were accustomed to.

Coming from a racially homogeneous group, the concepts of the terms “minority” and “color” were new phenomena to participants. The data revealed that these participants became aware of their skin color for the first time during

their educational journey to the United States. As a result they perceived being treated differently from White students. Social and cultural differences have been found to provide explanations for the struggles that these participants faced. Such challenges included loss of professional identity, difficulty interacting with American students, and feelings of isolation – all which were evident throughout the narratives. To overcome these challenges, participants developed their own coping strategies. Participants often sought support from their families and other Black African students on campus.

What participants in this study underscored is that their decision to relocate to the United States did not include a fore-knowledge of what they would be giving up in terms of their social status. What they found instead was a new system and culture that limited them as Black African international adults, at the same time that it provided access to education that generally not available in their home countries . Their expectations of life in general in the United States were that they would be able to contribute to the U.S. education system as well as to the society in general given their many years of work experiences. The findings in the study indicate that when such expectations were not met, the participants were faced with emotional disturbances. Despite all the challenges the participants encountered during their adjustment process, they all admitted that their educational achievement was a worthwhile experience in itself. The next and final chapter will discuss the implications for the themes presented in this chapter, conclusion, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of non-traditional age adult Black African international students attending higher educational institutions in the United States. I applied a qualitative heuristic inquiry to answer research questions which I used as the compass for data analysis and subsequent findings in the previous chapter. I chose to do a heuristic phenomenology for it allows me as a researcher to be present in the investigation as a co-participant, to give voice to my own experience.

My personal interest in addressing the issues affecting non-traditional age African international students first stems from my experiences and hearing and observing what other similar students have gone through as they attended universities and colleges in the United States. Second, often lived experiences of marginalized groups are ignored or silenced in discourses of education. In this study I provided a forum for marginalized voices (Black African international adult students) to be heard and understood regarding how they have survived within the academic institutions that are predominantly White.

The two research questions that guided this study are: (a) What are the academic and cultural experiences faced by non-traditional age adult Black African international students on U.S. campuses? And, (b) What is the essence of the lived experience of adjusting to attending predominantly White U.S. higher

educational institutions among non-traditional age adult Black African international students?

In this chapter, I first concisely revisit the theoretical framework that directs this study. Second, I provide a summary of the findings followed by major discussions of each set of the findings. Third, I discuss theoretical implications of the present study for the field of adult education. Fourth, I outline recommendations for future areas of research and conclude this study with some brief closing reflections.

Revisiting the Theoretical Framework

In an attempt to answer the research questions for this study, I employed three intersecting theoretical perspectives as the foundation for understanding experiences faced by Black African international students: Critical Race Theory (CRT), sociocultural learning theory, and Jandt's adjustment theory. Underlying Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman's CRT are five tenets that are integral components in the field of education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). The first tenet of CRT is the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism in the United States, thus bringing race and racism to the center of discussion. This tenet reflects how racism is so embedded into everyday life that it often appears to be natural and normal to many people within the American culture (Rolon-Dow, 2005). The second tenet in CRT challenges the dominant ideology (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). It addresses the existing inequality in the society and thus, CRT

educators challenge the “dominant social and cultural assumptions regarding culture and intelligence, language and capability, through research, pedagogy, and praxis” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 2).

The third tenet is the commitment to social justice (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Solorzano, 1998). A CRT framework provides compelling support for social justice and the elimination of racism, class, gender, and sexual orientation discrimination in education. The fourth tenet emphasizes experiential knowledge recognizing that such knowledge of the people of color is legitimate in understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racism in education (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). The last tenet of CRT argues that race and racism in education can best be fully understood by incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

To understand the context and the learning environment I relied on sociocultural approaches specifically based on the work of John Ogbu and Franz Fanon, as well as adult educators including Alfred (2002), Guy (1999), Johnson-Bailey (2001), Sheared and Sissel (2001), and Tisdell (1995, 2001). These theoretical approaches were relevant to my study since they not only explicitly attend to culture, ethnicity, race, class, and gender that affect Black African international students in the U.S. system of higher education but they also focus on power relations. Since the emphasis on international students’ adjustment in current literature has focused on the *process of adjustment*, I drew from Jandt’s

acculturation model (2004) to elucidate that process in an attempt to understand their levels of adjustment.

Much existing literature regarding adjustment of international students stems from the psychological discipline (Constantine et al, 2005; Poyrazli, et al. 2004; Yeh, 2003; Zea, et al., 2003). The focus of these adjustment models is to *help* students adjust regardless of their cultural background and tend to treat all international students as a monolithic group. Consideration of culture, class, power and gender factors is generally minimized. However, lacking in the adjustment models are theoretical approaches that have potential to address differences among international students on issues of concern (class, gender, power, race, etc.) and indeed these factors impact the international students' adjustment into the U.S. educational institutions. Thus the examination and analysis of the findings are discussed from the Critical Race Theory (CRT) and socio-cultural lenses. These two perspectives recognize that the lived experiences of people of color are often marginalized or silenced in educational discourse. CRT particularly does value counter-storytelling and narratives and considers them legitimate in understanding the racial subordination in the United States. (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Similarly, I also contend that the sociocultural learning lens is useful in understanding the lived experiences of Black African international adult students in American higher education institutions in that it addresses culture and its relationship to the individual.

Summary of Findings

To set the stage for discussion on the findings for this study, it is important to outline the general findings based on the data analysis and interpretation. Five themes emerged from this research that constituted the experiences of Black African international adult students. First, the perceived motivations that influenced Black African adult international students to study in the United States were discussed. Clearly, participants in this study indicated that two main factors contributed towards their decision to study in the United States: the positive reputation of the U.S. education system and the fact that there were limited opportunities for further study in their home countries.

The second set of findings focused on the challenges encountered by participants as a result of facing a new educational system. These challenges included language issues particularly the participants' personal responses to the first-time awareness of having an accent and the American students and faculty reactions to participants' accents. Another challenge was adapting to a new classroom setting and atmosphere. Participants in this study found conflicting cultural norms in the classroom environment. For example interaction between teachers and students was perceived to be informal, a style that was uncomfortable to participants in the study. Encountering new teaching and learning styles were additional challenges to participants. Methods and frequency of academic examinations, use of new technology as a means for instruction and

emphasis on independent learning were among the new instructional approaches that participants had to adapt to.

The third set of findings focused more specifically with participants' growing awareness of race. Overall, the participants' realization that they were 'Black' and a 'minority' took place when they enrolled into predominantly white educational institutions. Resulting from this racial awareness was the introduction of a more insidious element to their experience when they began to perceive differential treatment. This differential treatment was based on their racial identity or skin color as perceived from both White students and higher education administration and faculty in the U.S. educational institutions. In addition, distrust and lack of cultural sensitivity were seen to be racial challenges in the education process according to participants.

The fourth set of findings concluded from this study was dealing with the realities of being in a new culture. This experience was marked by a feeling of loneliness, of moving from a communal culture to an individualistic one. Participants reported feelings of being "left out" and felt segregated from American students during social gatherings. Another finding related to living in the new culture was the loss of professional status. Participants in this study were adults who had been in the workforce for many years prior to coming to the United States and who as a result enjoyed a level of positive status within their community. However, upon arrival to the United States they found that they could not maintain the same status, thus resulting in feelings of low self esteem and

frustration. Developing strategies to cope with cultural adjustment was another finding in dealing with the realities of being in a new culture. Such strategies included forming friendships with other international students, identifying with other members of their ethnic group, maintaining family support, and forming close relationships with Americans who indicated interest in the participants.

The last set of findings focused on post-arrival experiences in the United States educational journey. Overall participants in this study reported being satisfied with their U.S. education. In fact they reported that attending U.S. higher educational institutions broadened their worldview and fostered professional growth. Personal development was one of the indicators of their achieved knowledge. In fact participants reported having developed a different “mode of thinking” and a “different way of viewing the world and not being judgmental.” Learning to interact with other students from other cultural backgrounds was another indicator of the participants’ increased worldview. This was marked by new ways of learning: to be “more open, [and to] appreciate everybody’s differences.” Lastly, academic advancement was found to be an indicator of participants’ professional growth. This achievement was found to be a source of “self confidence” and provided “a sense of accomplishment” to all participants in this study.

Discussion of the Findings

Given now that we have a general understanding of the findings for this research, it is important now to consider plausible explanations for these findings. The section that follows presents each of the five themes described above in light of the literature.

Multiple Perceived Motivations to Study in the United States

There were two primary factors that were discovered to be the key influences for Black African adult international students to study in the United States. First, was the reputation of the U.S. education system. These adult students shared a belief that the American higher education system had a tremendous variety of educational programs and thus students would be able to find a program that would be consistent with their career aspirations. Constantine et al. (2005) found that such freedom to choose one's academic area of study influenced students' decision to study in the United States. Sandthu and Asrabadi (1994) and Sodowsky and Lai (1997) spoke to this notion indicating that generally graduate international students often have high expectations of academic life when they move to the United States. Other scholars have specifically addressed the *quality* of graduate education programs as being an important criterion for one's decision to study in the U.S. (Altbach, 1991; Clark, 1995; Mauch & Spaulding, 1992; Wang, 2004). The current study however found that the decision making for participants regarding whether to study in the United States entailed more than the quality of the anticipated program; it was mainly influenced by their more global

needs as adult learners. This finding corresponds to Senter and Senter's (1998) argument that educational and professional needs of adult students are generally different from those of traditional students in terms of adults having specific aspirations for career advancement and to maintain a high degree of control over their learning activities.

The belief that the United States would have a better form of education was not participants' perception alone but also that of others in their native country. The nationals' perception that the quality of U.S. education would contribute to the employability of those Black African adults who attended U.S. schools by making them even more marketable in their country upon return was consistent with Wang's (2004) findings in his study with other international graduate students.

Second, many participants in the current study sought education in the United States due to lack of educational opportunities in their home countries. Although the economic and political factors may have contributed to the lack of education facilities (Altbach, 1991; El-Hassan, 2000) the participants reported that the major issue was that some of the countries' educational policies barred or limited returning students to the universities, particularly if one had missed one's chance to attend university immediately post high school; in other words, they did not favor non-traditional age adult students at that time. The current study found that there were limited opportunities for adult learners to return to formal education in African countries during the time when these students were seeking

more education. Due to educational reforms this may not still be the case in some African countries.

Responding to a New Education System

Generally when international students travel to the United States to engage in intensive academic work they must go through an adjustment period (Al-Sharideh, & Goe, 1998; Pardue, & Haas, 2003; Tomich, McWhirter & King, 2000). One of the findings that emerged from this study was the adjustment to a new education system. Dealing with a new education system in the United States was tantamount to wrestling with a series of challenges. Particularly salient issues that arose out of this study were language accent issues, and differences in classroom and instructional culture.

Language and accent issues. Language difficulty experienced by participants was consistent with previous studies on international students (Hinchcliff-Perias & Greer, 2004; Wang, 2004; Zehtabchi & Houck, 1996). An alarming if not appalling observation is that these studies have failed to take into consideration that many international students (particularly those from African countries) were using the English language as the primary medium of instruction in their home countries prior to coming to the United States.

Further, most previous studies on international students focus on *traditional*-age students (Christie & Hutcheson, 2003; Edwards & Person, 1997; Senyshyn, Warford, & Zhan, 2000; Stoyloff, 1997), failing to acknowledge that some international students are not only adults but are professional adults who

were accustomed to conducting their daily business using English as the official language of communication in their countries prior to coming to the United States. Frank from Kenya and a former Chemistry university professor in his home country reported that “I considered myself very competent in language. Indeed I could speak, and I have good vocabularies.” Although the participants in this study came to the United States knowing English well, both in terms of comprehension and conversationally, the most prominent language related factors they encountered with the American education system was that of accent and contextual understanding. Hence, my study elucidates the issues between *spoken* and *written* language proficiency.

Sanner, Wilson, and Samson (2002) attempted to address the issues related to accent, describing it as a reason for international students to feel isolated. These authors assumed that having a “heavy accent” is related to international students’ language deficiency but that is not necessarily the case, particularly with African students. *Spoken* language is one of the many factors in the English language. My study takes a step further in that “heavy accents” is not an accurate indicator of language deficiency as it relates to international students and in fact may be an inappropriate description of their language proficiency. In relation to the participants in this study, they did not have problems in written English language but had difficulty with *spoken* English because of unfamiliar accents from American students and faculty staff. Wanjiru reported that she had known throughout her education life in Kenya that she could speak English and be

understood and also understand others. However the concept of ‘accent’ was introduced to her by her professor: “the first shock was from my professor who said I have an accent and he cannot understand me, and I have been fluent in English and writing in English for all these years.”

This study also concluded that the unfamiliar English accent has a direct implication with class interaction. Most of the previous studies on international students attributed lack of classroom participation to their lack of English speaking abilities (Huntley, 1993; Sanner, Wilson, & Samson, 2002; Wang, 2004). My study however moves beyond the generalized concept of ‘English speaking abilities’ to specifically argue that participants in this study had English speaking abilities but fears related to not fully understanding the accents of others and also not being understood by others deterred them from full participation in class discussions.

Responding to a different classroom culture. The adjustment to a new educational system in the United States is made difficult for many international students due to the fact that the structure and process of American higher education is different from what they are accustomed to (Sharif, 1994). The study found that the student/teacher interaction in the U.S. system is casual compared to their home countries, a finding that is consistent with previous studies (Tompson & Tompson, 1996). A possible explanation of this behavior as found in this study is attributed to value systems in which participants in this study were socialized.

In fact participants viewed professors as authority figures and it was difficult to interact with them in an informal style.

Most of the previous studies on international students have emphasized the need to help international students adjust in the classroom (Senyshyn, Warford, & Zhan, 2000; Sharif, 1994; Tomich, McWhirter, & Darcy, 2003) but have failed to emphasize the need for faculty also to accommodate to these students. This study found that what was perceived as some faculty members' negative attitudes in the classroom toward international students discouraged those students from participating in class discussion. For example, Hope reported "I didn't feel free to ask questions or talk in class because you kind of get an attitude that you should know some of the things you are asking. Some professors were just not willing to help and sometimes I didn't ask." Faculty's prior orientation and preparation regarding working with international students was found to yield academic success and eased their adjustment process (Pardue & Haas, 2003; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). In other words faculty members are instrumental to the academic adjustment of international students.

Adjusting to a new educational system for international students usually results in various differences in teaching/learning approaches between the United States and many foreign countries. A previous study indicated that the majority of international students learn through the lecture method (Ladd & Ruby, 1999). Although my study focused on adult Black African international students, participants in this study affirmed those findings. What did emerge as a new

finding however is the use of technology (use of internet, computers, libraries, etc.) as means of instruction. This use of technology and new resources fostered independent learning, a concept that was not familiar to Black international adult students. Consequently, participants in this study reported a significant level of frustration when the faculty used technology as a means of instruction.

All participants in this study have had prior experiences in higher education in their countries of origin and are well grounded in those educational approaches. The need to incorporate the students' past educational experiences into the new learning process is an important practice for adult students (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). A key finding in relation to teaching/learning styles is the disproportionate amount of attention given to the present American educational system with little or no attention to the past experiences of African international students, a critical element in education for adult learners. The adult learning approach is characterized by creating a supportive learning environment, to use learners' experience as a resource for learning, to promote self-directed learning, and to encourage and foster collaboration in the learning process (Brookfield, 1986).

"I Am Different": Growing Awareness of Race

Addressing race and racism in higher education is one of the most emotionally charged and sensitive issues in the United States. Thus the findings related to this theme are to be interpreted with caution and are not intended to be generalizable. Many scholars of international students generally have not given

maximum attention to issues of race and the implications race has on international students' experiences in U.S. higher education. The work of the few scholars who have made mention of race and discrimination issues particularly in reference to Black African international students seems to be treated the issues as serendipitous secondary findings in their studies, that is findings that just happened to emerge in their studies (Constantine et al., 2004, 2005; Senyshyn, Warford & Zhan, 2000; Sadowsky & Plake, 1992; Tomich, McWhirter, & King, 2000). In this study, I made every effort to understand the lived experiences of Black African international adult students from the Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens. Two major findings emerged from this theme: participants' awareness of skin color resulting in differential treatment and growing distrust, and cultural insensitivity towards Black international students.

Becoming aware of skin color. The literature dealing with race issues and international students in the United States is indeed sparse. One study by Tomich, McWhirter, and Darcy (2003) indicated that differences in skin color and other physical features often intensify the perceived prejudice experienced by international students. What the Tomich et al. study does not disclose is that those with Black skin color suffer more prejudice from White people than do others with any other skin color as indicated by Smith-McLallen, Johnson, Dovidio and Pearson (2006). My study took a step further and found that even though Black Africans have grown up in cultures where Blackness is the norm they were not aware of this Blackness until they entered predominantly White

educational institutions. Fanon (1967) spoke to this concept when addressing Blackness in the African American community in the United States and said “as long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others” (p.109). This study therefore concluded that because participants’ experience prior to coming to the United States was in primarily racially homogeneous environments, race awareness was not salient prior to coming to the United States. This awareness is raised as a result of living in a predominantly White society (Phinney & Onwughalu, 1996).

Drawing from the works of Alfred (2002) on sociocultural learning theory one could argue that cultural influences such as social relationships, beliefs, social environment, and cultural context cannot be separated from learning experiences. Thus there were two contexts in which Black African international adult students developed personal color awareness. First, Tendai, Richard, and Cimiyu had experiences that suggested to them that others noted they appeared different, whether in school or in a community setting, conveying the message that they stood out as different.

It is important to explain why blackness is less salient to Black Africans than to African Americans in the United States. For African Americans, the awareness and consciousness of race is likely to be prominent because historically in the United States skin color has been used to compartmentalize and degrade persons. Phinney and Onwughalu (1996) speaking on this concept similarly argue

that the history of race in this country has played an important part in this consciousness in that African Americans have wrestled throughout their history with racism. From the CRT perspective racism is a permanent component of American life and therefore is embedded into everyday life (Rolon-Dow, 2005). In contrast, despite colonialism, Black African indigenous people and their cultures prevail, unencumbered by color stigma as experienced by African Americans.

Perceived racial discrimination treatment. Previous studies have documented that Black African international students perceive prejudice considerably more than do the European international students (Alidou, 2000; Sadowsky & Plake, 1992; Tomich, McWhirter & King, 2000). The current study found that participants perceived differential treatment based on the skin of their color from both White students and higher education administration and faculty in the U.S. education system. Participants gave examples of being passed over for a graduate assistantship and dealing with what appeared to be discriminatory treatment from faculty based on skin color or accent. This affirms the previous findings that White Americans often show preferences for the lighter skinned people over darker skinned and particularly to Blacks with lighter skin color (Smith-McLallen et al., 2006).

The study also found that the perceived differential treatment among Black African international adult students extended beyond race and skin color. This disparity was compounded by religion and gender. Five of the six women in

this study expressed having experienced differential treatment as compared with two of the six men. The two nuns who participated in the study felt that association with religion made their differential treatment even more prevalent. Xero stated that “being a nun is another obstacle [and even] being a Black and a nun is double punishment.” Although Sodowsky and Plake (1992) indicated that Catholics seem to be less associated with the White U.S. society than do Protestants, a possible explanation for Xero’s differential treatment may be attributed more to conspicuous and unique religious attire than to religion per se.

Distrust and cultural insensitivity. This study further found that there was a relationship between distrust and perceived prejudice. Participants noted the ways they seemed not to be trusted and otherwise experienced cultural insensitivity that had racial undertones. Smith-McLallen et al. (2006) argue that negative associations with the color black and positive associations with the color white are often strengthened through social interactions and contribute to racial prejudice. Frank for example always felt that the Black African international students were the first suspects if something went wrong in the laboratory. Similarly, Richard, despite his extensive knowledge and experiences compared to American younger students at his level of education did not have, felt his supervisor’s micromanagement was associated with a lack of trust in his ability.

The study also found that the faculty members appeared to hold stereotypical attitudes that Black African international students could not perform in the class like White students. Ngoro from Tanzania quoting his professor

reported, “I did not expect you to perform [and] to present your paper at the level that you did. [Another said] actually most African students don’t do well here.” While there may be other factors that influenced this professor’s comments, for example, their perception of Ndoro being from an undeveloped and hence, uneducated country, or that his accent may have interfered with the professor’s understanding of the material Ndoro was presenting, the issue is that Ndoro’s *perception* was that the professor’s comments were racially driven. This finding is consistent with a previous study that investigated the relationship of skin color and perceived stereotypes among members of the African American community (Maddox & Gray, 2002). This study concluded that African Americans perceived stereotypical behavior from American Whites based solely on the fact that they were Black. This demonstrates that race is the common denominator between African Americans and Black African international students.

Previous studies have minimized the implication of cultural insensitivity toward Black African international students. In this study I found that lack of cultural sensitivity during class and out of class interactions caused significant discomfort and humiliation among participants. This insensitivity was exhibited by Americans through the nature of questions posed to participants. Co-researchers in this study who shared such experiences indicated that insensitive questions provoked feelings of embarrassment.

To conclude this theme on race it is important to emphasize that race and accent play a significant role in relation to the adjustment of Black African

international students in the United States. Race is a prevalent issue for many of these African international students particularly for those in predominantly White institutions (Adeleke, 1998; Molestsane, 1995), and this perceived racial differential treatment impacts their adjustment difficulties.

Dealing With the Realities of Being in a New Culture

This study investigated multiple aspects of Black African adult international students' experiences in pursuing higher education in the United States. The sociocultural differences of living in the United States are another area that this study attempted to explore. The participants' narrative stories yielded some of the same findings that have been discussed in other studies, such as difficulties and adjustments stemming from isolation (Sanner, Wilson & Samson, 2002; Constantine et al., 2005), and transitioning from a communal culture to an individualistic one. Yet, in some instances some of these factors were more significant, probably because these are adult students. Yeh and Inose (2002) provide a rationale for this difference in that younger traditional international students seem to have greater amount of contact with host nationals.

Encountering new social and cultural norms and lifestyles also surfaced in this study. Culturally and socially Black Africans are primarily relationship-oriented and community oriented. Coming to a foreign country for Black African international students meant encountering people with different value systems and this caused them to experience a certain level of disconnect and confusion. For example, for Black African students *respect* for elders is highly emphasized in

their countries of origin. Older people and those in authority are given special respect within their communities. This finding corresponds with a previous study by Riley (1992) noting that African international students were consistently polite and respectful of authority. Participants in this study revealed that this respect for authority figures, for example, professors, was not as evident to them in the U.S. culture. While other researchers have noted these experiences of international students, given the fact that these were also older students who had professional status in their home countries, this study brought to the fore the loss of professional status, and the use of multiple strategies for cultural adjustments.

Loss of professional status. There is a plethora of studies that have addressed cultural identity (Phinney & Onwughalu, 1996; Sodowsky and Plake, 1992; Sodowsky, Lai, & Plake, 1991) but the loss of professional identity has been rarely addressed in the past studies particularly on international students. A possible rationale for this gap in literature on international students may be attributed to a lack of studies on non-traditional age adult international students. An emerging finding from participants' narratives is a devastating loss of professional status upon arriving in the United States. Accompanying the prevalent loss of professional identity were feelings of humiliation, loss of self-concept and a significant degree of desperation. Relatively close to this finding are the experiences of wives of international students who held professional jobs and left them to accompany their husbands to the United States (De Verthelyi,

1995). De Verthelyi found that those working wives who interrupted their careers felt deprived of an important feature of their personal identity.

Lack of thorough pre-arrival preparation appears to be blamed for this loss in that participants in my study had student visas with work restrictions which meant changing from professional life to a student life. However, even when the restrictions were waived and participants were allowed to work, their previous work experiences were never considered; hence, they were given what they call “odd jobs” on and off campus. This loss of professional identity was described by Tswana as “social demotion” and by Frank as “stepping back in social order.” This feeling of loss is consistent with that described by De Verthelyi (1995) for relocating spouses in the United States.

The use of multiple strategies for cultural adjustments. Moving to the United States for the pursuit of higher education can pose several challenges particularly if one’s expectations are not met (Sodowsky & Lai, 1997). Participants in this study found this to be so and consequently developed adaptation mechanisms to aid in their educational and cultural adjustments. Black African cultural differences in values and worldviews provide the rationale for the coping strategies identified by participants. In this study, four main sources were identified by participants as their primary strategies for cultural adjustment: forming friendships with other international students, maintaining close relationships with co-nationals, family networks, and interaction with American students.

Forming friendships with other Black African international students was found to be a source of information in light of the woefully inadequate orientation most of these students received upon arrival. This practice was particularly useful for newly admitted Black African international students who relied on others, specifically from African countries who had preceded them for educational, campus-related, and social experiences. Previous studies have demonstrated that international students from communal and interdependent cultures value interpersonal relationships (Moore & Constantine, 2005; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Nebedum-Ezeh, 1997). Thus, forming such relationships can ease adjustment.

Maintaining close relationships with other Black African international students from the same country or from the same ethnic group was found to be a tool for cultural identification. Even more profound, participants used this connectedness of shared co-national relationships as a form of compensation for the loss in being away from familiar environments. Identifying with other co-ethnic international students preserved the participants' sense of belonging. This finding supports the premise in the previous studies that having a strong ethnic identity impacts and fosters individual's adjustment (Duan & Vu, 2000; Koza, 2000; Tomich, McWhirter, Darcy, 2003; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). In other words the more similar the cultural values and customs of those within one's inner social circle the better the adjustment.

Maintaining close relationship with family members was another source of support in the adjustment process. It is no surprise that participants in this study relied on their families for support regardless of the distance. In fact scholars have documented that Black Africans' strongest social unit is the family (Constantine et al., 2005; Riley, 1992). My findings are consistent with previous results that indicate the importance of family support in the adjustment process of international students (Constantine et al., 2005; Mori, 2000; Nebedum-Ezeh, 1997).

Interaction with American students in higher education has been documented as an effective way of helping international students adjust (Shigaki & Smith, 1997; Tseng & Newton, 2002). While my study affirms and supports this premise, it however advances this finding further in that Americans' attitudes towards Black African international adult students must be positive for an effective transition. In other words, Americans' ability to self-assess in terms of their preconceived stereotypes is critical for forming sincere friendships with these students. Learning to accept one another bi-directionally has been voiced by participants in my study. Social relationships, social environment and cultural context cannot be separated from learning experiences (Alfred, 2002) Thus, adjustment does not occur simply by being in foreign country but one must interact also with others in order to gain an understanding of the host culture as well as to be understood by those within that culture.

Broadening Individuals' Worldview and Professional Growth

Despite the many challenges participants in this study voiced, U.S. higher education has had significant positive impact on them, in broadening their worldview and fostering professional growth. Accomplishments reflecting this impact as revealed in this study include personal development, cross-cultural interaction, and academic advancement.

A wide variety of new experiences and knowledge were achieved as a result of American education including problem solving skills, emotional stability, and critical thinking skills, all which enhanced participants' ability to view the world from a nonjudgmental perspective. Such personal growth is also documented with nursing international students from Israeli (Pardue & Haas, 2003). Through frequent interactions with other students from other countries, participants reported having developed cross-cultural communication skills. Participants indicated that such cross-cultural interaction enhanced their well-being, a finding that corresponds to Tseng and Newton's study findings (2002). In addition, this study found that through these intercultural interactions participants learnt to have an open mind and to be able to accept new ways of doing things.

A major benefit acquired from the U.S. educational system by participants in this study is academic knowledge in their respective fields of study. One of the fulfilling achievements revealed in the study is the development of self confidence and accomplishment. In addition, participants anticipated being able to

contribute to their countries by implementing the acquired knowledge as well as securing better jobs, and having a better lifestyle overall upon return to their home countries because of their academic achievements. Previous studies have documented similar findings (Pardue & Haas, 2003; Shigaki & Smith, 1997; Wang, 2004).

In brief, rewards for attending U.S. higher education were numerous including exposure to a new culture, a new education structure, and new technology. In addition, attending U.S. higher education institutions provided a forum for altering some of the misconceptions and distortions about the United States. These Black African adult international students admitted that despite the challenges in this educational process indeed the achievements were worth their challenges.

Implications for Theory

There are several implications for theory and practice stemming from the findings of this study. First, I discuss the lived experiences of Black African non-traditional age adult international students as found in the findings in relation to Critical Race Theory (CRT). Second, I discuss socio-cultural learning perspectives and higher education, concluding with a discussion on adjustment process in relation to Jandt's acculturation model.

Black African International Adult Students and Critical Race Theory (CRT).

Theory is an important lens to understand how international students adjust in the U.S. higher education institutions. There has been little consideration

of race and its implications for the adjustment process particularly in the literature addressing international students' adjustment. Higher education institutions have been instrumental in providing information regarding adjustment of international students into the United States' higher education system using common adjustment theories that most often focus on the process. Most often these adjustment theories come from psychological perspectives and give little or no attention to issues related to racism, classism, gender and power differences between and among groups. These issues are commonly neglected in preparing international students to go to a host culture, and in actually navigating within the host culture; to ignore them is to do injustice to international students. According to Weissglas (2003) race and class are the main controversial issues facing not only higher education institutions but the United States at large. In terms of learning, among other theories that address issues related to race, it appears Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a forum in which to place Black African non-traditional age international students' experiences; this was one of the primary theoretical frameworks for this study.

Historically, CRT was developed from the legal structure perspective by Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, both of whom primarily focused on racial reform in the United States, particularly as it regards to African Americans (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2000). These scholars argue that racism cannot be solved through judicial processes but through "creative strategies that would help African Americans live and thrive in a society" (Peterson, 1999, p.84-85) and which are

critical in resolving issues related to race. Thus, CRT addresses specifically the effects of race and racism and how they shape social life, while concurrently speaking to the hegemonic system of White supremacy on the meritocratic system (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004).

Although CRT was developed with a focus to bring the African Americans' experiences to the forefront since they have not been part of the mainstream, especially in education (Peterson, 1999), several other marginalized subgroups have advanced CRT. These subgroups include Asian American, Native American, and Latina/Latino and have addressed issues such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and gender, issues that critical race theorists have failed to incorporate in their discussions (Valencia, 2005). In light of this premise, given that Black African international students like other marginalized groups struggle with the same issues mentioned above (particularly language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, and phenotype), I argue that CRT can be applicable to Black African international students in their struggle to adjust to U.S. culture. This study concluded that Black African international adult students encountered racial discrimination both inside and outside the class environment. The CRT framework helped me as the principal investigator to recognize patterns and practices of racial exclusion and other forms of discrimination against Black international college adult students.

There are three main tenets of CRT that are relevant to my study. First, CRT recognizes that race and racism are evident characteristics present in U.S.

educational practices (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). In regard to discussions of lived experiences of international students in the United States, most authors (Lacina, 2002; Smith, Chin, Inman, & Findling, 1999) either ignore race or just reference it without in-depth consideration. Such concern provoked Johnson-Bailey (2002) to address practical views on race in adult education teaching environments, persuading individuals to be conscious of race and to make every effort to understand how their beliefs and value system shape their interactions. CRT's premise holds that racism is normal (Ladson-Billings, 2000) and permanent in American life (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). Thus, this notion that racism is a reality in the United States supports the finding in my study regarding perceived racial discrimination against Black African international adult students.

To ignore the implication of race in the adjustment process of Black African international adult students is to contradict Bergerson's (2003) concept of "bringing race and racism to the center of discussion" (p. 52) in the educational system. Most studies on international students and particularly those referencing Black African international students rarely address issues related to racism and how such experiences affect them while attending U.S. institutions of higher education. This study found that Black African international adult students experienced prejudice and discrimination. Thus, it would be a reasonable albeit faulty assumption that racism only affects African Americans, Latinos and other people of color permanently residing in the United States. Instead, one should join

Fanon (1967) in raising the question, “Is there in truth any difference between one racism and another?” (p. 86).

Second, CRT challenges the dominant ideology as held by predominantly White society such as color-blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity claims (Bergerson, 2003). The experiential knowledge of people of color is considered legitimate in the CRT lens in understanding racial subordination in educational institutions in the United States (Villalpando, 2004). Bergerson (2003) argues that this experiential knowledge is portrayed in narratives and story-telling in order to challenge the dominant position. My study provided a forum for the application of this concept of CRT, in that the Black African participants presented their experiential knowledge in stories and narratives. Their social, cultural and academic experiences could be better understood only through their narratives, scenarios, and stories of what they have experienced in American educational institutions. My study found that professors had certain stereotypes regarding Black adult international students such as assumptions that they could not perform equally well like their White counterparts in the classrooms, conveying that they were being perceived as inferior in comparison to American students, and distrust in work settings based on their race. In other words, these students were viewed as having deficiencies in the educational context. The CRT requires people of color (Black African international adult students included) *not* to be viewed as disadvantaged based on their race, ethnicity, gender, immigration status, and/or language ability (Villalpando, 2004).

Third, explicit in CRT is the concept of understanding the personal and ethnic histories of people of color attending educational institutions in the United States. Villalpando (2004) advocates the need to view policies and practices in higher education from a historical context with the present-day in view, determining how they affect people of color. Since this scholar was addressing the implication of such policies in reference to people of color it therefore also pertains to Black African international adult students. My study findings demonstrate that American professors seemed to lack knowledge of Black African adult international students' experience with previous learning and teaching styles, the role of their previous work life on their current educational experience, knowledge about their cultures, etc., and were not well prepared to work with these students. Based on these findings, I argue that American professors need prior preparation in order to ease the adjustment of Black African adult international students. Higher education policies and practices need to be revisited and evaluated to determine if they address the needs of Black African international students, a concept that is consistent with CRT.

Last, Ladson-Billings (2000) a strong proponent of CRT raises a question on construction of knowledge asserting that gender, race, ethnicity, language, class, gender and other forms of difference need to count in the production of knowledge.

Tisdell (1995) has argued that what has traditionally counted as knowledge has largely been determined by those who have power; thus 'knowledge' has been a

reflection of what the dominant group has determined is important to and for them, according to the standards that have been created by them. The findings of my study demonstrate that participants perceive that most of the educators in U.S. higher education did not value, acknowledge or even consider the previous knowledge of Black African adult international students. Until international adult students feel that their knowledge is valid, it will be impractical for them to view themselves as competent to construct knowledge. CRT has potential to challenge such ideology.

Although I have attempted to argue that CRT can be applicable to Black African international adult students attending predominantly White U.S. institutions of higher education, I also acknowledge that there exist differences between African Americans and Black African international adult students and hence not all aspects of CRT could be applicable to Black African international adult students in this study. First Ogbu and Simons (1998) provide undisputable differences between African Americans and Black African international adult students. He describes the former as involuntary minorities while the later as voluntary. In this case African American minorities fall under this involuntary minority category because their presence in the United States resulted from slavery rather than by choice. Because of their long history in the United States, it is accurate to agree with Fanon (1967) who contends that white colonialism enforces a certain false and humiliating existence upon its black victims to the extent that it demands their conformity to its distorted values. In contrast, Black

African international students are in the United States as temporary visitors and therefore it is unlikely that they would conform entirely with the mainstream culture. It follows therefore that some of the aspects of CRT that directly relate and affect African Americans may not necessarily affect Black African international students. For example, CRT argues that while on the surface it may appear that African Americans benefit from civil rights policies such as affirmative action, in reality, White women may in fact be the greater beneficiaries; in this sense, such a program would not necessarily affect Black African international adult students.

Another component of CRT that seems not to affect Black African international adult students is that of race and social issues. Historically, CRT scholars' main objective was to find the intersection of African Americans' interests and White Americans on issues of race and social justice (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Because Black African international adult students are temporary visitors to the United States, they tend to concentrate on their academic goals, expressing the importance of individual academic success and identifying such success as a means of competing with those in the dominant society (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). In contrast, because discrimination against African Americans has existed for many years, they are more sensitive to social injustices both within and outside of institutions of higher education and are more likely to react to the social injustices as compared to their Black African international student counterparts.

I have attempted to argue that CRT is a potential framework for understanding Black African international adult students' experiences in the U.S. educational settings. In spite of some of the limitations of some of the relevance of CRT to Black African international students discussed above, there are still significant implications for critical race theory and practice drawn from the findings of this study. All participants in this study were Black Africans and given the role of color bias in American history, it is not surprising that these international students also perceived issues related to race. Research has indicated that White Americans demonstrate preference for lighter skin color over darker skin color (Smith-McLallen et al., 2006). I therefore suggest the following recommendations based on this study:

First, as proponents of CRT, Solorzano and Yosso (2001) challenge educators to practice justice in higher education. Higher education policies and practices must be examined, critiqued and implemented to reflect equality and justice for all students. Peterson (1999) speaking on the implication of CRT in adult education challenges the educational system to create new programs that meet the needs of African Americans. Peterson argues that African Americans have been treated as one homogenous group failing to acknowledge or recognize other factors such as geographical, socioeconomic, and gender differences. Similarly, the findings in my study clearly demonstrate that Black African international adult students are quite diverse, coming from countries that are not only distinct in terms of geographical location, but also in terms of culture,

political system, and language. In keeping with the equality and justice for all students, Black African international adult students and others deserve educational programs that will aid them in achieving their academic goals as well as programs that will ease their adjustment process to the American culture.

Race, gender and ethnicity factors need to be visible in the educational policies and it must be determined how these social factors create inequalities in higher education. CRT reminds us that racism is perpetuated through everyday practices within institutions (Rolon-Dow, 2005). Unfortunately many of the instructors seem unaware of how their perceptions and their ways of thinking towards Black African international adult students influence their relationships both in the classroom and in the community settings.

Second, given that the fundamental differences in education expectations for both teachers and students in the U.S. educational system stem from exposure to various teaching/learning approaches, CRT challenges the dominant educational system and supports the need for implementing a culturally relevant system of education. Training in multicultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes for staff or faculty need to be a critical component in any college effort to improve the climate for what is culturally different. This form of education makes the institution more inclusive, particularly to international students and people of color. Programming, curriculum development and implementation need to be analyzed using CRT to ensure they are responsive to the issues of race, gender, class and ethnicity so that all such issues are addressed and challenged. Jacob and

Greggo (2001) recommend that higher education institutions provide staff development programs including diversity training programs where staff can learn and understand issues and needs of international students and discuss different ways of working with them. It is therefore important for adult educators to create a culturally relevant learning environment and develop programs that are inclusive (Lee & Sheared, 2002) and culturally responsive to all students, international and American students alike.

Third, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) describe storytelling as a medicine to heal the wounds of pain caused by racial oppression in the United States. Although these scholars were particularly referring to African Americans' storytelling is also applicable to Black African international students. Given that story telling and counter narratives are Black Africans' way of communicating, creating forums that would provide Black African international adult students to exercise their knowledge, voice their concerns, share stories and experiences is a concept that is inherent in CRT. The CRT framework recognizes that lived experiences of people of color are often marginalized or silenced in educational discourse. CRT values those experiences and considers them legitimate in understanding the racial subordination in the United States (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Educators can draw from CRT and use storytelling, family history, biographies, and narratives "to draw on the strength of the lived experiences students bring to the classroom" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 3). Experiential knowledge particularly of women and men of color (including Black African

international adult students) is critical in understanding racial subordination in educational institutions (Bergerson, 2003). Providing opportunities for adult Black African international adult students to share their experiences in the form of storytelling or narratives in the classroom would facilitate their inclusion in the U.S. education system.

Ladson-Billings explains the importance of “voice” from an educational perspective and suggests that it is an effective method of disseminating lived experiences particularly for those whom the system works against. Sheared (1994) speaking about “voice” from an Afrocentric feminist perspective asserts that marginalized voices, including those of black women, have been silenced. Drawing from CRT it is important that Black African international adult students (as one of the marginalized groups) learn to communicate their experiences of dealing with the realities of being in a new culture. Educators are encouraged to empower and support international students to question those dominant ideologies that work against them. In addition, empowering international students to be involved in the development of orientation programs would be beneficial to them. Traditionally international students’ orientation programs are created by those in power without students’ voices being involved in the planning or implementation of such programs. This reflects Cervero and Wilson’s (1994) position that oppression maintains a political system in which those in power create educational programs believing that they know what is best for learners, thus denying learners a voice in the planning process.

Black African International Adult Students and Sociocultural Learning Theory

It is evident that U.S. universities have a difficult task in trying to accommodate the learning needs of international students; this is due in part to the fact that these students come from diverse cultural, social, political, and educational backgrounds. It is even more difficult for non-traditional age adult international students who bring along with them professional and life experiences into the new sociocultural environment. Adult educators have addressed the importance of social environment and the influence of culture on students' learning experiences, arguing that learning experiences cannot be separated from social and cultural influences such as social relationships, beliefs, social environment, and cultural context (Alfred, 2002; Guy, 1999; Lattuca, 2002). In the case of Black African international adult students, sociocultural environment refers to the general setting in which academic adjustment takes place. These students have voiced several challenges they have encountered during their education pursuit in their new sociocultural environment. Based on this premise there are also some implications for adult educators and higher education.

First, Black African adult international students must deal with issues related to language, new classroom culture, and new learning-teaching styles, all of which influence their adjustment to the new environment. While these new issues are important and ultimately affect students' learning, Merriam and Caffarella (1999) report that one's previous experiences have significant influence

on one's learning process as well. My study revealed that Black African adult international students were not credited for their previous educational experiences at all but rather they were viewed as having deficits (stereotype) in the new context, a finding consistent with Riley's findings (1992). Guy (1999) recognizes that the United States is a multicultural society and it will continue to be a culturally diverse country; thus, adult educators in the United States are encouraged to advocate for a change in education pedagogy to reflect that of multicultural concepts and thus creating a culturally responsive adult education.

Second, living with differences in cultural values in a new socio-cultural environment is another major theme that emerged from this study that Black African international students had to learn to negotiate. Such cultural differences included transition from a communal culture to an individualistic one, experiencing different social relations and loss of professional identity. Black African international students' ethnic identity is defined by their culture. Thus, ethnic identity is an important domain of their self-concept. Adult educators have a responsibility to foster this self concept and to view their cultural background as a positive component of the U.S. culture, thus promoting equity in the educational setting. Adult educators and all those in higher education are encouraged to learn to accept and value diversity. While these students indeed need to learn to live in a multicultural environment, Guy (1999) notes that it is also important to become competent in the mainstream culture, a concept that is consistent with socio-cultural learning theory.

Third, various scholars in adult education have addressed specific sociocultural factors that affect marginalized groups in the United States. Johnson-Bailey (2002) for example has examined the treatment of race and ethnicity in adult education. She posits that race affects how a person functions in U.S. society. For example, being Asian American or African American or White in adult education settings carries a different meaning with each group. Speaking on power dynamics in the classroom setting, Tisdell (1995) observes that the existence of power dynamics between instructors and learners and also among the learners themselves, are often affected by gender and race. In other words, power dynamics tend to give voice to some learners while others are silenced. It is from this position that Alfred (2002) concluded that Euro-centric values and ways of knowing are often perceived as superior compared to those of minority groups due to the power of the white dominant culture.

Based on the discussion above, and from the findings of my study, it is logical to conclude that Black African adult international students are not immune to factors pertaining to race, gender, and power dynamics; they are evident in their lives in U.S. educational institutions. The most significant factor that the Black international students in my study had to deal with is issues related to race such as perceived prejudices, and discrimination based on skin color as addressed in this study. It is also evident from my study that Black African international students have experienced a non-acceptance attitude from both White faculty and American students. Because sociocultural learning theory advocates for total

acceptance of individuals, adult educators must advocate for social equality with its main goal being to strengthen diversity, human rights, social justice and to promote equal opportunity and equitable power distribution. Sociocultural learning framework calls for adult educators to make every effort to establish democracy in adult education and dismantle the hegemonic structures and other forces that deter democratic practices in education (Alfred, 2002). This can be accomplished by creating and vigilantly maintaining participatory practice within classroom settings where such structures can be challenged, being ever mindful of the need to anticipate and counter the inevitable resistance to such practice (Colin & Heaney, 2001). Adult educators must begin to recognize how race, gender, and power dynamics along with other factors impact Black African international students and their overall academic achievement.

My final observation regarding the above discussion is that we as adult educators need to have courage and comfort in addressing socio-cultural issues such as race and gender and how each relate to the adjustment of international students in the U.S. higher education system.

Black African International Adult Students and Jandt's Acculturation Model.

Black African international students undergo a process of intercultural adjustment, identified as culture shock (Jandt, 2004) when they arrive in the United States. Jandt's framework on intercultural adjustment and acculturation is developmental in nature. Black African international adult students like any many other international students have pre-arrival positive expectations of the

United States as they have been influenced commonly from the media. They arrive with hopes and dreams of achieving their goals. One participant described the United States as “heaven” for her. These characteristics reflect the honeymoon phase, the first stage of the adjustment model. Winkelman (1994) found that international students exhibit excitement, positive expectations, and idealizations about the new culture (Winkelman, 1994).

The finding in this study has shown that when participants’ expectations were not met, these Black African international adult students in particular were faced with frustration and anger. This anger was even more compounded by the realities of living in a new culture: alienation, loneliness, race awareness, and loss of their professional identity. In this stage an individual becomes irritated and hostile as the familiar cues of their home culture disintegrate and the differences between home and host culture become more visible. Huntley (1993) postulates that a person in this stage often find the behavior of those in the host culture unusual and starts to hate the culture. To compensate for this loss, Black African international adult students developed coping mechanisms that included forming relationships with other international students and identifying themselves with co-ethnic groups. Participants in this study reported becoming increasingly proficient in managing their life activities in the United States after two years. This stage reflects a gradual adjustment where one is able to see good and bad elements in both the home and host cultures.

Based on this discussion, there are some implications for adult educators. First, adult educators need to prepare themselves to work with international students from diverse backgrounds. Self-assessment regarding one's teaching styles, and preconceived stereotypes about Black African international adult students need to be addressed. Preparing culturally competent individuals in order to work effectively with people from different backgrounds (Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005) is critical for facilitating the adjustment of international students. Secondly, providing maximum support when these international students arrive in the United States is critical for their transition. Third, orientation of these students to the American culture, activities of daily living, and the services available at the university would also facilitate smooth transition through this stage. To respond to the academic needs of international students, adult educators are encouraged to assess critically the learning experiences of international students on their campuses so they can understand the challenges, successes, and failures these students face during their academic pilgrimage in the U.S. (Lin & Yi, 1997).

Practical Implications for Faculty and Higher Education Administrators

There are numerous practical implications and suggestions that result from the current study for professionals in higher education who are in positions to facilitate Black African adult international students' adjustment process in the U.S. higher education system. First, given that the higher education admissions' offices are often aware of their prospective international students and the

countries they represent, it is vital that the personnel and the faculty involved with international students develop a comprehensive understanding of the culture of the prospective students. This can be accomplished by conducting pre-arrival orientation programs. Faculty and administration staff can help ease the adjustment of international students if they are more aware of the students' socio-cultural experiences and prior academic background including teaching and learning styles, language proficiency, and their knowledge of technology commonly used in their respective institutions. Involving other international students who share the same cultural heritage can be an effective resource of this information.

Second, given that previous studies treat all international students as one homogeneous group (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992), it is suggested that an evaluation of the existing orientation programs in the U.S. higher education institutions be conducted to ensure their orientation curricula are comprehensive in design and inclusive of all international students. It is also documented that research on international students puts undergraduate and graduate students of all nationalities and all ages into one group, ignoring students' cultural differences and academic needs (Wang, 2004). Given that the needs of non-traditional age students differ from those of traditional students, it is critical that non-traditional age students' orientation programs address their needs accordingly.

Third, previous studies have also indicated that international students' interaction with the host country members contributed to a better adjustment

process (Jacob & Greggo, 2001; Poyrazli et al, 2004). It is therefore suggested that the higher education institutions' admission personnel and adult educators advocate and promote interactions between Black African adult international students and American adult students. This can be accomplished by peer assistant or buddy programs that can generate avenues for regular communication between Black African adult international students and adult American students.

Fourth, Black African adult international students bring along an immense wealth of life, academic and professional experiences to the U.S. higher education institutions. International students are described as “one of the most important elements of international knowledge system” (Bourke, 1997, p.327) and are carriers of knowledge across borders where in this context, the American students and faculty should benefit. It is therefore passionately recommended that curricula be inclusive to allow these Black African international students opportunities to share their stories. Further, it is recommended that the faculty examine their teaching styles to be inclusive and provide a forum for open interaction in the classrooms. It is suggested that the faculty be sensitive to the diversity of international students in their classrooms and be accommodating in their teaching approaches.

Fifth, the findings of my study have indicated Black African adult international students perceived racial treatment from White instructors and administrative personnel in the U.S. higher educational institutions. According to the literature, international students who experienced discrimination reported

more adjustment problems than peers who reported little or no discrimination (Senyshyn, Warford, & Zhan, 2000). I believe that adult educators and administration personnel have a moral and ethical obligation to maintain equal and fair practice and to provide academic support to those Black African international students who might need additional assistance in their educational process. It is therefore recommended that the multicultural departments within colleges and universities empower these Black African international students to safely challenge situations when they sense differential treatment or when they do not receive needed academic support. In addition higher education authorities must encourage and support training for all faculty and staff on multicultural education.

Limitations of the Study

It is important to acknowledge that the findings of this study may not be generalized for several reasons. First, the purposive sample represents Black African international adult students who attended a small number of predominantly White universities and therefore is not representative of all the United States' colleges and universities. Participants' linguistic diversity in terms of their native language and different accents, introduced a second limitation in that misunderstandings of word pronunciation between the participants and the principle investigator may have been possible. Third, although as the primary investigator in this study I attempted to be conscious of my biases and expectations during collection and analysis of the data, it is possible that I, as a

co-researcher, influenced the investigation. Lastly, the information provided by co-researchers comes from their recollections of experiences and therefore the accuracy of their memory cannot be guaranteed.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of Black African non-traditional age adult students attending predominantly White institutions of higher education in the United States. Twelve participants representing 8 different African countries were interviewed. Because this is a heuristic study, my experiences were also included in the findings. The findings of this study and the limitations described earlier provide the foundation regarding implications for additional research.

First, there are a limited number of empirical studies on Black African international students. The literature is even more limited on Black African non-traditional adult international students. The studies that have included African international students have put undergraduate and graduate students of all nationalities into one group, ignoring students' cultural differences and academic needs (Wang, 2004). Further these existing studies have failed to acknowledge the differences among Africans even though in reality one could consider White South Africans as "Africans" or Arab Africans in north African countries as "Africans." The present study has exclusively focused on Black African international students and was an attempt to fill this gap in the literature. Further research is also needed to increase the knowledge base regarding the adjustment

of non-traditional age adult international students in the United States, in particular, the adjustment of non-traditional age adult Black African students.

Second, most of the studies on Black African international students in the U.S. institutions have been conducted using questionnaires, which do not provide the depth needed to understand non-traditional age adult international students' experiences (Nebedum-Ezeh, 1997). Non-traditional age international students' academic experiences are comprehensive and extensive in nature and unless a questionnaire has sound psychometric properties and has been adapted to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, their experience will not be adequately captured using quantitative methods. Thus, further exploration of the meaning of non-traditional age adult international students' experiences can be better discovered by utilizing qualitative methodology.

Third, most studies on international students stem from the psychological discipline (Zea, Asner-Self, Birman, & Buki, 2003). Consideration of students' culture, class, power dynamics, and gender factors is generally minimized in these studies. Lacking in the adjustment literature are theoretical approaches that have potential to address those issues of concern (class, power dynamics, race, etc.). The current study has utilized CRT and sociocultural learning theories in an attempt to address issues related particularly to race. Given that issues of race and skin color are new phenomena to Black African international students additional research devoted to such theoretical perspectives can provide a deeper knowledge

and understanding of how race impacts Black African international adult students' adjustment in the U.S. higher education system.

Fourth, developing an appreciation for and sensitivity to multicultural education that reflects ethnic, gender, social class, and ability/disability diversity has long been the goal for adult educators (Sleeter, Grant, & Butin, 2003; Tisdell, 1995). Many international students' problems are best addressed by knowledgeable and sensitive faculty members who have invested their time in an attempt to understand the cultural and academic backgrounds of international students; such efforts have yielded positive results (Pardue & Haas, 2003). Further research on the effectiveness of multicultural education on the side of faculty and staff particularly those who work with Black African adult international students is worth exploring.

Fifth, this study found that most White professors were perceived to have negative perceptions towards Black African international adult students. Comparative studies exploring the color perception of White faculty members and faculty members of color towards Black African international adult students would be of great value. Because faculty members are a major component of the international students learning, further investigation to determine what factors influence and impact faculty members' involvement with international students may add another component to this research.

Sixth, Black African international adult students for whom English is not their primary language encounter several roadblocks as they negotiate their place

in the higher education institutions. In the effort to both accurately understand and effectively intervene in their learning process, action research, with its emphasis on problem posing and problem solving, can offer a practical tool for helping Black African international students in the real-life problems they encounter in their own adjustment process.

In conclusion, with increasing emphasis on globalization, internationalization of education will be a more prominent phenomenon in higher education institutions across the world. The most visible aspect of internationalization of higher education is the recruitment of international students. Bourke (1997) described international students as “one of the most important elements of international knowledge system” (p.327) and are carriers of knowledge across borders, therefore the sending and the host countries should benefit. The importance of understanding the experiences of international students and the appreciation of their own cultural, academic and professional experiences cannot be under-estimated. This study has attempted to understand specifically those adult Black African international students on U.S. campuses since this population of students has been marginalized and their voices silenced.

To accomplish this process, CRT and sociocultural learning theories informed the study by providing a way to analyze issues related to race and social-cultural factors within the U.S. educational setting. The findings and implications of this study have provided knowledge to begin to address the multicultural issues affecting international students in the U.S. educational

institutions. It is my hope that the application of these findings will increase knowledge for those working with international students and contribute to a better communication between international students and the American institutions of higher education.

Final Reflections

Embarking on and completing this research was a healing process for me as a Black African adult international student. This healing has occurred as a result of revisiting my life experiences and those of others like me who attended or are still attending institutions of higher education in the United States. The participants' stories had an immense impact on me and made me relive my own experiences. Their accounts of perceived discrimination, isolation, loneliness, academic struggles and loss of professional identity were at times emotionally charged for me, often provoking feelings of sadness. In retrospect, I was overwhelmed by the kindness and openness of these co-researchers in that they were willing to share their experiences with me – a person that many had not met before. In return, I realized that this study offered these participants an opportunity to have their voices heard given they are among the marginalized people of color in the U.S. higher education system.

Over the course of this study, it was unavoidable for me not to think about how this dissertation might impact my profession as an adult educator. How might this study experience influence my philosophy as a multicultural educator in the mental health discipline? Indeed, the findings of this project have made me

even more passionate about addressing those issues affecting international students and people of color in general. It is the people like my co-researchers that I want to advocate for in my capacity as a multicultural adult educator. I have learnt from this study that as an adult educator I must examine my own teaching practices and assess my cultural values because these influence my worldview and how I interpret reality. In addition, this project has opened my eyes to what has historically been a gap in adult literature on Black African international students; this research study adds to the body of knowledge in adult education, helping to bridge that gap.

Of my ten years of attending U.S. universities, my best and transformative experience has been at Penn State Capital College, Adult Education Department. I still recall just like yesterday the very first day in class when I felt for the first time that I was treated as an adult professional. My prior experiences for the first time became important and accounted for my learning. Empowerment by faculty to speak our views as adult students was a new experience for me yet one that I enjoyed consistently through every class in the program. It has truly been a remarkable journey where I have encountered some wise counsel from others like my cohort and faculty members whom I have interacted with and brought nourishment and pleasure in the process.

Through this research study, it is my intention and desire to contribute to the bodies of knowledge in both adult development and adult education. I believe

that this study along with my entire doctoral program will open up further opportunities and pathways to explore and traverse

I end by reflecting on powerful quote from African proverb: “No matter how far a stream flows, it never forgets its source.” Throughout this journey I have been reminded of where I have been and where my people have been. I have marveled and been humbled at the knowledge of God’s love for me in all the journeys my life has taken. The end of *this* journey marks the beginning of another and I have the confidence that “He [God] who began a good work in [me] will be faithful to complete it’ (Phil. 1:6).

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Appendix A

Interview Questionnaire

Project Title: IRB # 23619- Non-traditional-age Black African International Students: Phenomenological Heuristic Inquiry

1. Background information

- Student name codes and pseudonyms: _____
- Interview location: _____
- Interview date _____, Time: from _____ to _____

1. Before one coming to the United States

- Describe the educational system of your country
- Describe your educational background (high school, college and the areas of study)
- If you attended college in your country, did you enroll immediately upon your high school graduation? If not, when did you enroll?
- Describe your work experience prior to coming to the United States
- How long were you employed or self employed (prior to coming to the United States)?
- What motivated you or prompted you to further your education in the United States?
- What were your expectations of study and life in America before coming here?
- Did you have academic or other social experiences that provided you with an opportunity to have an understanding of the United States, including its culture and educational system prior to coming to the United States?

2. Experiences in the U.S. higher educational institutions-Academic and Cultural

- Describe your specific experiences in the U.S. higher educational system including:
 1. language;
 2. learning styles- classroom participation, independent learning, homework, critical thinking skills, course assignments;
 3. interaction with professors;

- 4. interaction with students;
- 5. interaction with institutional administration.
- How are these experiences different from those in your own country?
- Did you live on campus or off campus? Describe the experiences of those living conditions.
- What other cultural adjustment problems did you face in your socialization experience with other American students?
- As a non-traditional student, how do you think other traditional students perceived you? Or related to you?

3. Non-traditional Black African international students' perception

- Describe your interaction with other international students as a Black African non-traditional international student.
- Describe any differences you recognize between you and other international students (academic, social, and cultural)
- How would you perceive your experience to be different from other international students from other countries?

4. The essence of the lived experiences

- How would you describe your overall learning from pursuing education in a cross-cultural context?
 - 1. did you meet your expectations/objections?
 - 2. What were your shortcoming/positives?
- How has that achievement changed you?
- How do you apply those changes in:
 - 1. other social contexts
 - 2. familial roles
- What do you think your institution and your academic department should have done to help you better adjust to the new academic and cultural environment (if at all)?

5. Are there other issues that you would like to share with me?

6. Principal Investigator's reflections and general impression of this interview

Appendix B

Screening Initial Questionnaire

Project Title: IRB# 23619- Non-traditional-age Black African International Students: Phenomenological Heuristic Inquiry

Student name codes and pseudonyms _____

Home country: _____

Primary language: _____

Did you learn English language prior to coming to the United States? (Yes No)

If yes, for how long? _____ years. Age: _____

Gender: (circle one) Male Female

Marital status (circle one) Single Married: Number of children _____

University/College attended in the United States _____

Year attended U.S. university/college: From _____ to _____

Type of student visa at the time of enrollment: F1 J1 Other (specify) _____

How long were you employed/self-employed in your country prior to coming to the United States? _____

Have you stayed/studied in any other English-speaking countries before you came to United States? (circle one) Yes No

If yes, what country _____, Date _____ length of stay _____

Purpose of visit _____

Do you have a primary care provider?

Appendix C

Focus Group Questions

**Project Title: Non-traditional-age Black African International Students:
Phenomenological Heuristic Inquiry**

The two main purposes of the focus group interview are (1) to create the opportunity for participants to share their experiences that might not have been shared during one-on-one interview and (2) to share my own personal experiences as a non-traditional Black international student with the group since the study is heuristic in design.

The questions include:

- You all have shared aspects of your experience at length with me. Have you thought of other things regarding your experience since then that you would like to share with the group?
- When you reflect on your experiences, how do you think you were perceived by American faculty members and American students? (Be specific)
- At this stage I will share my personal experiences with the group and thereafter raise a question, that is, what are the similarities or differences between your and my experience?

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: IRB# 23619- Non-traditional-age Black African International Students' Experiences: Phenomenological Heuristic Inquiry.

Principal Investigator: John N. Mwaura, Graduate Student
215 Lemon Lane
Leola, PA 17540
(717) 656-4318; xjm2@psu.edu

Advisor: Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell
Penn State Harrisburg
777 W. Harrisburg Pike
Middletown, PA 17057
(717) 948-6640; ejt11@psu.edu

1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived adjustment experiences of non-traditional-age Black African international students attending or who have attended predominantly White higher educational institutions in the United States. (Phenomenology describes things as they appear in our experience, the way we experience things, and/or the meanings things have in our experience, while a heuristic research perspective recognizes the personal experience and insights of the researcher.)
2. **Procedures to be followed:** Subjects will participate in one interview with the principal investigator and one focus group. Both sessions will be audio taped. They will also be asked to review transcribed data to make sure their ideas have been recorded accurately. In addition, they will be requested to bring any piece of art or other cultural artifact that is personally meaningful to their cultural identity or significant to them.
3. **Duration:** The interview and focus group will each last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The review of transcription will take less than 60 minutes.

4. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Both individual interviews and the focus group interview will be audio taped. The ONLY persons who will listen to the tapes are my advisor (a faculty member at Penn State-Harrisburg), my transcriptionist, and me. No one will know participants' identities except me. However, members of focus groups will know each others' identities, but will not have access to any of the one-on-one interview. If you speak about the contents of the focus group outside the focus group, it is expected that you will not tell others what individual participants said. The tapes and the transcripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home and will be destroyed 2 years after this study is completed; that is May, 2009. If the study is published, no information will be included that will identify participants.
5. **Right to Ask Questions:** You can ask questions about this study. Contact John Mwaura at (717) 656-4318 or via email at xjm2@psu.edu with questions. You can also contact Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell (my advisor) at (717) 948-6640 or by email ejt11@psu.edu if you have any question about this study.
6. **Payment for participation:** Participants will NOT receive any monetary compensation for participating in this study.
7. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this study is voluntary. You can terminate your participation at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 25 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you consent to participate in this study and the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Principal Investigator Signature

Date

Appendix E

The Pennsylvania State University- Harrisburg Adult Education Program

Explanation of Research for Participants

Project Title: IRB# 23619- Non-traditional-age Black African International Students: Phenomenological Heuristic Inquiry

My name is John Mwaura and I am a doctoral candidate at Penn State University, Capital College Harrisburg. As part of my course work requirement, I am conducting a research study that explores the lived experiences of Black African international non-traditional-age students during their study in predominantly White institutions of higher learning in the United States.

To participate in this study one must meet all of the following criteria:

- be a Black African international over the age of 25;
- have lived in the U.S. a minimum of 3 years;
- have (or had) been enrolled in a predominantly White higher educational institution in the United States for a minimum of 2 years;
- had previous employment in one's country of origin for at least 4 years and chose to re-enter college with the goal of advancing one's career after having at least one break in one's formal education; and
- have a current primary care provider.

Also, if one did NOT have a F-1 or a J-1 visa upon entry to the United States, one may not participate in this study.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Please be advised that potential participants should not feel obligated out of friendship to participate in the research. If you choose to participate in the study, you do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. You can also terminate your participation in the study at any time.

The study calls for participation in the following ways. First, participants will have a one-on-one interview with me that may last approximately 90 minutes. The interview will take place at a mutually agreed upon location that will provide privacy. Participants will be asked to review their transcribed interview to ensure the accuracy of information. Participants will also be invited to participate in a focus group interview. For the focus group, participants will convene together to

share their experiences, ideas, and insights. For those participating in the focus group, I will ask each participant to bring any piece of art or other cultural artifact that is personally meaningful to your cultural identity or significant to you. Discussion of these items will provide deeper exploration of your personal experiences and will be discussed during the focus group session. The focus group will take between 1½ -2 hours at a convenient location that will be agreed upon by all participants.

Both individual interviews and the focus group interview will be audio taped. The ONLY persons who will listen to the tapes are my advisor (a faculty member at Penn State-Harrisburg), my transcriptionist, and me. No one will know your identity except me. The tapes and the transcripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home and will be destroyed 2 years after this study is completed. If the study is published, no information will be included that will identify you.

There may be minimal psychological discomfort in expressing one's experience of being a non-traditional international student in the United States. For that reason each participant must have access to a primary care provider who can refer to other mental health support if needed. If you participate in this study, you might deepen your understanding of what it means to be a Black African international non-traditional-age student in a traditional educational environment as well as being a minority from African country in a predominantly White educational institution in the United States. You will also be assisting in my effort to address the needs and concerns of Black international students from Africa whose voices have been given minimal attention in the literature particularly in the field of adult education.

Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated. If you would like to participate in the study or if you have any questions about participating, please contact me (John Mwaura) at (717) 439-3516, or via email at xjm2@psu.edu. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell at (717) 948-6364, or ejt11@psu.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

Sincerely yours,

John Mwaura

Curriculum Vitae

John N. Mwaura

Education:

Pennsylvania State University, D. Ed., Adult Education, 2008
Millersville University, Master of Education in Counselor Education - 991
Lancaster Bible College, Bachelor of Science in Bible - 1989
Mosoriot Teacher's College, Kenya, P1-Teacher Education-1975

Professional Experience:

Director: PA Healthcare Research & Training Institute, Leola, PA
Project Director: PA CASSP Training Institute, Harrisburg, PA
Therapist: Philhaven Behavioral Health Services, Mount Gretna, PA
Headmaster: Freehold School, Nakuru, Kenya

Presentations:

Mwaura, J.N., Hansen, M. & Jones, G. (1999). "Applying Systems of Care Principles to Clinical Practice: Parents as Co-Trainers." Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health, Portland State University, OR.

Mwaura, J.N. (2001). "The Use of Mental Health Services by Racial and Ethnic Minorities: What Families Can Do To Influence Cultural Competence in the System of Care." Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, 13th Annual Conference, Washington, DC.

Mwaura, J.N., Hansen, M., Jones, G., McCammon, S., Spencer, S., Walker, D. (2002). "Approaches to Training Professionals to Work in Systems of Care." Presented at the National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health, Georgetown University Child Development Center Conference, Washington, DC.

Lechtenberger, D., Mwaura, J.N., Hansen, M., Garza, V., Salls, M.M. (2004). "Workforce Development Through Collaboration with Universities." National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health, Georgetown University Child Development Center Conference, San Francisco, CA.

Hansen, M., Mwaura, J.N., & Carter, D. (2006). "Providing Collaborative Services to Meet the Mental Health Needs of Youth in the Juvenile Justice System." National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health, Georgetown University Child Development Center Conference, Orlando, FL.