A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF NIGERIAN COUPLES IN THE UNITED STATES: EXAMINING EMOTIONAL REACTIVITY AND THE CONCEPT OF DIFFERENTIATION OF SELF

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty of The University of Akron

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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December, 2013
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF NIGERIAN COUPLES IN THE UNITED STATES: EXAMINING EMOTIONAL REACTIVITY AND THE CONCEPT OF DIFFERENTIATION OF SELF

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the Study is to examine emotional reactivity of Nigeria couples in US in line with the concept of differentiation of self. This is very important because some Nigerian families’ emotional reactivity in the U.S. had caused numerous divorces and separations, as well as physical, emotional, and mental abuse of spouses and children.

The main research question the researcher sets out to answer in the study is (a) what role does emotional reactivity play in the marital stability within the family system of Nigerian immigrants in the U.S.? The following sub-questions helped to answer the main research question. (i) What are the difficulties and consequent stressors? (ii) What is perceived as different from life in Nigeria? (iii) What is the nature of change and adaption to life in the U.S? (iv) What is the impact on marriage and family?

Five Nigerian couples that are struggling to hold on to their marital union were used for the Study. A phenomenological research approach was used to understand the effects of their emotional reactivity on the stability of their marriages. This approach emphasizes the meaning participants derive from their life experience and validates their individual and social construction of reality.

Through the analysis of the couples’ interview the following themes emerged (a) Role Reversal/Adaptation (b) Financial stress (c) Lack of support network (d) Experience of Discrimination in places of work. The study also made the following
findings that a good understanding of the Bowen differentiation of self (togetherness and individualism) will help Nigerian couples to master their emotional reactions in the face of stressful daily life in the US.

Suggestions for future study in the area of the study and researcher’s personal recommendation were discussed
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the eternal memory of my beloved elder sister, Emilia Adanna Njoku, who was shot dead on 21st April 2010 the same day I submitted the IRB application for this research work. Also I dedicated this dissertation to the memory of my beloved parents, Chief Pius Okparaibeneme and Ezinne Alice Okparaibeneme, and finally to the memory of Gloria Uhlik.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The long journey of completing this dissertation and the PhD program has been very challenging and daunting. I wouldn’t have finished it had it not been for the love and support of many wonderful people who encouraged and supported me. First I must acknowledge the tremendous contributions of my Advisor Dr. Patricia Parr, who mentored me during the earlier stages of my research but died before the research work was finished. I would also like to thank Dr. Karin Jordan and Dr. Suzanne MacDonald who helped me to finish the remaining chapters of my research work after the death of Dr. Patricia Parr. I am also thankful for the input of the other members of my dissertation committee – Dr. John Queener, Dr. Rebecca Boyle, Dr. Cynthia Reynolds.

I would also like to thank my Bishop Most Rev Augustine Ukwuoma, the Catholic Bishop of Orlu, Nigeria for allowing me to finish this program and also I am thankful to his predecessor Bishop Gregory Ochiagha, The Bishop emeritus of the Catholic diocese of Orlu Nigeria who sent me for further studies in the US.

My unreserved gratitude goes to my special friends, Dr. Ed and Mary Ann Cosentino and also Eleanor Campana. My special thanks go to Brenda Jones, Msgr. Bill Connell, the entire members of St Mary/St Benedict Parish Canton Ohio and Holy Family Parish Poland Ohio. Finally I am thankful to my family for their love and
support, and to my numerous friends in Nigeria and in the U.S for their friendship, love and concern.
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## CHAPTER

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Studies on the mental health of many immigrants indicate that their mental health problems are related mainly to the stressful acculturation and transition process (Franks & Faux, 1990; Kuo & Tsai, 1986; Rotter & Hawley, 1998; Shin, 1994). The same studies point out that immigrants have more stressful life events than members of the majority or dominant culture. Also most of these immigrants are culturally not comfortable with discussing their mental health or mental disease issues because mental disease is regarded by many as a social stigma.

It is no longer a secret that many Nigerian families in the U.S. are dysfunctional. With each passing moment domestic disputes among these families are becoming violent and sometimes, deadly. The simmering is now seeping out and with this phenomenon at play, only one incident could have the potential to form a deadly mix that would change a family forever (Orabuchi, 2005). Nigerian Newspaper – The Vanguard of August 18th 2010 reported one of the many of such incidents of Nigerian husbands killing their wives in the US.

Nigerians, like other immigrants to the U.S, rarely make use of the services of mental health professionals due to some obvious reasons. Immigrants in general face many challenges in their adopted countries of domicile. They are exposed to a new culture through transition and the acculturation process. This is a stressful process
because of issues like: identity crises, value differences, and language differences.
Although one could argue that Nigerians speak English language in their home country;
but then their English accent is different from what is spoken in the U.S. Immigrants also
experience some difficulty in finding appropriate jobs related to their educational level.
Many of them have to retrain to fit in the labor market. Coupled with the above
challenges are the financial demands from their immediate nuclear family and extended
families back in their home countries. These challenges from occupational and family
role expectations put enormous stress on the individuals (Amatea, Cross, Clark, &
Bobby, 1986).

Another issue that often poses a challenge and thus a source of stress is racial
discrimination. For example, most Nigerian immigrants never experienced racial
discrimination before they came to America. Immigrants’ experience in their native
countries was that of being the dominant culture. Other challenges most immigrants
face include lack of social support and a generational cultural gap between parents and
their children born in the U.S. (Kim & Rew, 1994; Kuo & Tsai, 1984; Rotter & Hawley,
1998; Shin, 1994).

**Nigeria and Its Demographics**

In their article on International Encyclopedia on Sexuality Uwem Edimo Esiet et
al gave the following information on Nigeria and its demographics. Nigeria is located on
the southern coast of the horn of northwest Africa. Its 356,667 square miles makes it
about twice the size of the State of California. Benin lies to Nigeria’s west, Niger to the
north, Chad and Cameron to the east, and the Gulf of Guinea to the south.
Geographically, the country is divided into four east-to-west regions. In the south is a
coastal mangrove swamp 10 to 60 miles wide; in the north is a semi-desert. In between are a tropical rain forest 50 to 100 miles wide and a plateau of savanna and open woodland. Nigeria is currently made up of 30 states plus the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja; 16 of the 36 states are situated in the northern Muslim-dominated part of the country and the other 14 in the predominantly Christian south.

Like all African nations, Nigeria’s boundaries are the capricious result of European colonial conquests and power struggles that ignored ancient tribal and ethnic distributions. To understand marriages, customs, and behavior in Nigeria, one must be aware of the diversity of tribal, ethnic, and religious traditions among its 140 million people. Nigeria has over 250 distinct tribal groups. Slightly over 29% of Nigerians are ethnic Hausa/Fulani, 20% are Yoruba, 20% Igbo, while the remaining one third belong to other ethnic minorities. Half of the population are Muslim and live mainly in the north; 40% are Christian mainly concentrated in the south. Ten percent of Nigerians practice one of the indigenous religions.

Nigeria’s 2006 estimated population of 140 million was predominantly rural, with 40% living in the urban centers. By the year 2020, more than half of Nigeria’s youth are expected to live in cities, searching for better living and job opportunities. The United Nations estimates that the population in 2005 was at 141 million, and predicted that it would reach 289 million by 2050 and then will be the eighth most populous nation in the world. The people are decidedly on the young side, with 45% under age 15 and 57% under age 24. Slightly over half of all Nigerians are between ages 15 and 65, and only 3% are over age 65. In 2006, metropolitan Lagos and Kano, the two largest cities, had an estimated 9.1 and 17 million inhabitants, respectively (Nigeria 2006 census data).
In 2000, the average life expectancy at birth was 51.58 for males and 51.55 for females. Birthrate was estimated at 40.2 per 1,000 population, the infant mortality rate at 74.2 per 1,000 live births, and death rate at 13.7 per 1,000, giving a natural annual population increase of 2.9%. In 2000, the number of births an average Nigerian woman was predicted to have (Total Fertility Rate) was six. Education is compulsory between ages 6 and 15, with about 42% of the youth attending elementary school. In 2000, over half of the population was literate. English is the official language, but Hausa, Yoruba, and Ibo are also widely spoken.

**Brief Historical Perspective**

The general notion or misconception in some quarters that Africans had never developed any institutions or cultures, nor anything else of any worth and that future advances could only take place under the direction of Europeans or European institutions is false and baseless. In the centuries before 1500, the world’s known great civilizations included those from Africa such as Kush (in present-day Sudan), Axum (in present-day Ethiopia) and Great Zimbabwe. (http://www.understandingslavery.com/). The history of African continent before the transatlantic slave trade was one of great empires and kingdoms. They had established systems of governance. Some of African States governed through councils of elders or while others by kinship- or age-based institutions. Religious and philosophical beliefs concentrated on maintaining communication with ancestors who could intercede with gods on behalf of the living and ensure the smooth functioning of society. (http://www.understandingslavery.com)
The International Encyclopedia of Sexuality 2006 edited by Raymond j. Noonan, gave an in-depth account of Nigeria one of the African States, as one of the richest and most advanced ancient civilizations in West Africa. Around 1000 A.D., the Muslim Kanem civilization expanded into northern Nigeria. By the 14th century, the amalgamated kingdom of Kanem-Bornu took northern Nigeria as its political center, dominating the Sahel and developing trade routes that stretched throughout northern Africa and as far as Europe and the Middle East. During the 15th and 16th centuries, the Hausa Songhai Empire rose to power. The Hausa Songhai were overthrown by the Fulani Muslim leader Uthman Dan Fodio, who created the Sokoto caliphate. At the same time that the Muslim Kanem civilization expanded into northern Nigeria, around 1000 A.D., southern Nigeria was dominated by the Yoruba, whose Oyo kingdom was centered at Ife. The Oyo kingdom gave rise to the Benin civilization, which flourished from the 15th to the 18th centuries. The Benin culture is famous for its brass, bronze, and ivory sculpture.

The Portuguese established trading stations on the Benin coast in the 15th century. Initially, the contact and trade relations were cordial, and Benin became well known in Europe as a powerful and advanced kingdom. However, with the rise of the slave trade, which began with the cooperation of the Benin kings who brought slaves from the interior, relations became hostile, and Benin declined under European pressure. The Dutch, British, and other Europeans competed strenuously with Portugal for control of the slave trade. Britain seized the port of Lagos in 1861 during a campaign against the slave trade, and gradually extended its control inland with the exploration of the Niger River until about 1900. By the end of the 19th century, because Britain had suppressed
the slave trade, they transported the slaves they captured aboard European ships to Freetown in Sierra Leone.

In 1861, Nigeria became a British colony. Despite native resistance, the colony was expanded in 1906 to include territory east of the Niger River, which was called the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. The two areas were administratively joined in 1914. During the 1920s, Britain began to respond to Nigerian demands for local self-rule. In 1946, the colony was divided into three regions, each with an advisory assembly. In 1954, the colony was reorganized as the Nigerian Federation, and the regional assemblies were given more authority. Nigeria became independent on October 1, 1960, and a republic on October 1, 1963.

**Nigerian Population in the U.S.**

No one knows the exact number of Nigerians living outside the shores of Nigeria, but it is estimated that as many as 15 million Nigerians live outside their country. This number includes those living in neighboring countries across the African continent, in Britain and throughout the Commonwealth nations, in other European countries, and in many Asian and North American countries as well (Booker & Minter, 2003). The estimated number of foreign-born Nigerians living in the U.S. in 1990 was about 87,000 (1990 census data), although some analysts said that that number was underestimated. They put it between 200,000 and 300,000 including the children born to these Nigerian families in the U.S. In the year 2000, the number of documented foreign-born Nigerians immigrants living in the U.S was more than 134,940, while the documented statistics for the total number of all African-born individuals residing in the U.S. in the same year (2000) was about 880,000. This showed an overall increase of
142% since 1990, when there were only 363,819 African-born individuals outside the
U.S. who were residing in the U.S. This census data shows that Nigerian immigrants
accounted for about 15.3%, of all African immigrants’ population in the U.S. in the year

The following regional representation of African population in the U.S. in 2000 shows an exponential increase of African immigrants’ population to the U.S. from 1980 through 2000. These regions are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. African Regional Countries

---

**Eastern African regional countries are:** Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mayotte, Mozambique, Réunion, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe

**Middle Africa regional countries are:** Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe,

**Northern African regional countries are:** Algeria, Egypt, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, Western Sahara.

**Southern African regional countries include:** Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland

**Western African regional countries are:** Benin, Burkina Faso Cape Verde Côte d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast) Ghana Guinea Guinea-Bissau Liberia Mali Mauritania Niger Nigeria Saint Helena Senegal Sierra Leone The Gambia Tog.
Figure 1 shows a steady increase in the population data of these African regions in the U.S. from 1980 to 2000. This regional representation of the African population in the U.S. in 2000 shows an exponential increase of African immigrants population to the U.S. from 1980 through 2000.

Figure 1: Immigration statistics based on origin of birth location

**Nigerian Immigration in the U.S.**

In the Journal of Education for Library and Information Science edited by Dr. Kwasi Sarkodie-Mensah, the following history of Nigerian immigrants in the U.S was given. Nigerian immigration to the US is relatively new when compared to other
minority ethnic groups in the U.S.; although this does not take into account the history of slave trade, which when considered shows that some Nigerians were brought over to the U.S. as slaves as far back as the 18th century.

Before Nigerians started to explore the U.S. territory for the American system of western education, Nigerians were educated by the British according to the British educational system. The original intention of the British, Nigeria’s former colonial master, was to educate their Africans colonies and territories on an African-based education with emphasis on rural development. This educational curriculum continued until some of their African colonies wanted to expand and broaden their educational horizon. This new search for a system that is not exclusively British took them to different countries of the world in the early 20th century.

The first generation Nigerians that were educated in the western system of education were influenced by the ideologies of the likes of Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. DuBois’ Pan African movement. Marcus Garvey and Amy Ashwood co-founded the Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association and African Communities League. The association became known as the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Garvey’s ideology was a creation of racial purity and separatism. He sought to organize blacks throughout the world. He also wanted to establish an independent black economy based on capitalism. W. E. B. DuBois’ Pan-African movement attempted to liberate all Africans. The Pan-African movement examined methods for these countries to obtain independence and self-rule. These ideologies were a big catalyst to the issue of racial identity for many Africans and as such, the colonial
powers in Africa feared that the strong ideas of identity and freedom preached by both Garvey and Dubois would turn the Africans against their colonial masters.

First generation Nigerian nationalists, who later became the revolutionary leaders and force behind Nigerian self-rule and independence, were men and woman of this era. They were attracted to the U.S., and some of them who came to the U.S. to study at that time saw the white person in the same light as a black person, unlike what the European colonial masters had led them to believe. They saw that the white people were subjected to the same grandeur and malaise of human nature and were not different from black people. One of the most prominent and revered Nigerians symbolizing the spirit of this age of freedom and human respect was the late Chief Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the first President of Nigeria after Nigeria’s independence from Britain, and first indigenous governor-general of Nigeria. Zik, as he was referred to affectionately, arrived in the United States by boat in 1925, and registered as a student at Storer College. He later transferred to Lincoln University and Howard University.

Zik’s experience was not different from the experience of an average Black man of the 20’s and 30’s of the U.S. He experienced racial prejudice and worked as a dishwasher, a coal miner, and a boxer to survive the difficult times in America. However, he later became a professor at several prestigious American institutions.

Two other Nigerians of Zik’s generation who also benefited from American education were Professor Eyo Ita and Mbonu Ojike. All of these men could rightly be referred to as the Nigerian immigrants’ forerunners in the U.S. They graduated from American universities and returned to Nigeria where they became very influential
leaders in the national politics and played an invaluable role in Nigeria gaining independence from Britain in October 1960.

Dr. Kwasi Sarkodie-Mensah identified the 1970s as another period Nigerian immigration history in showed an exponential increase in number. This was the period of the oil boom in Nigeria (i.e., when the Nigerian economy was very strong because of money from Nigeria’s oil industry). During this period, Nigeria was one of the wealthiest nations in Africa. Money from the oil industry made it possible for families to comfortably send their children to acquire an American education. Either the Nigerian government or their parents and relatives from Nigeria sponsored most students who came to the U.S. at that time.

Data from “Open Doors” indicated that in the late 1970s and 1980s Nigeria was among the top six countries that sent students to study in the U.S. This number declined in mid 1980s and early 1990s because of the interregnum in Nigerian leadership. From late 1990s, the number continued to increase. The editor of “Open Doors” wrote about this in a paper titled, “Value of International Education for America” which said:

Despite decreases from many Asian places of origin and an overall decline of 3%, Asia remains the largest sending region by a wide margin - almost 57% of international students studying in the U.S. still come from Asia. There were substantial declines in the numbers of students from Europe (down 5%) and the Middle East (down 9%). However, these declines were partially offset by increases in student enrollments from North America (Canadian enrollments were up 2%). Nigerian enrollments rose for the eighth year in a row (up 6% from the prior year), bringing it into the list of top 20 sending countries. (Open Doors data, 2004)

**General Concept Family and Culture**

The concept of family is intricately interwoven with culture. It is the window through which culture is thought, learned, and shown to the big society. It could be
called the smallest unit of organization within the society, much akin to the atom in

science. Culture, on the other hand, could be defined as:

The complex pattern of learned behavior, values, and belief systems shared
by members of a designated group such as a tribe. These patterns of learned
behavior are generally transmitted through succeeding generations, creating
a blueprint for experience, thought, and action. (Edward & Olatawura, 2001;
The American Heritage Science Dictionary, 2002)

Culture is the totality of life, and regardless of the specific types of culture, some basic
characteristics are encompassed. “It is shared, and it is learned and not genetically
transformed” (Olurode, 1989).

Cultural traits and modes of behavior are learned through the process of
socialization. These cultural traits are usually learned within the family. It is the process
of becoming a social being. The “modal personality” is the constellation of behavior
patterns as well as ways of thinking and feeling, characterized by members of a specific
cultural group. Culture includes the societies’ rules as well as the way in which these
rules are enacted, experienced, and transmitted (Louw, 1991; Swartz 2000).

Human beings are generally influenced by a variety of forces, ranging from their
immediate family and environment. The environment that includes school systems,
health care systems, political influences and the mass media is, therefore, biologically
and socially constructed (Sinclair & Monk, 2004; Swartz 2000). Alternatively, a family
generates its own culture by creating their own patterns of communication and
interaction for mutual involvement, which can include affection and antagonism, and
conflict and support (Handel, 2001).

Families can be categorized into three different types:
(a) A nuclear family – a two-generation family consisting of a father and mother and their children or a single, possibly widowed, parent and his/her children.

(b) Extended family – a three-generation family consisting of a father and other, a married child, their spouse and their children, with a single line of authority, either patrilineal or matrilineal. In a patriarchal culture the extended family may include, the aging parents and one or more of their usually married male offspring and unmarried female children. Authority is through the male line. A matrilineal example would include the parents, the married daughters and their spouses, and the grandchildren. (Oyekanmi, 2001; Onyemaechi & Arbor, 2000)

(c) A lineal family – this term describes the families of several married siblings who are linked to their common family of orientation, that is, to the family of origin. Such a family dissolves with the death of the parents and may become a laterally extended family, where links are maintained or split into individual nuclear families. They do not necessarily live together (Bloom & Ottong, 1987; Omokhodion 1996; UNESCO 1992; Wusu & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2006).

Figure 2 shows a typical U.S./Western monogamous nuclear family. It is a family of a man, his wife, two sons, and two daughters. The round figures in the diagram depict a female, while the square figures depicts a male. Parents are on the first line while children are on the second line.
Figure 2. Typical U.S./Western monogamous nuclear family

Figure 3 is a typical monogamous family in an extended family formation in a patrilineal culture such as Nigerian. It is shows a three-generational family, with the first generation being the husband and wife and the second generation being their two unmarried daughters and their two sons and their wives, while the third generation is their six granddaughters and two grandsons.

Figure 3. Monogamous family in a patrilineal culture
The complexity of the family structure plays an enormous role in how family relations, and couple relations in particular, are perceived and understood. In a study done by Gottman and Notarius (2002) on marital research, no evidence was found to support the question of whether some personality traits may be more ideally suited to marriage than others. Rather, they found that in unhappy marriages, people tend to endorse almost any negative aspects about their partners, while in happy marriages; individuals tend to endorse almost any positive item about their partner. This type of disposition may well filter down to the family as a whole. Although Nigerian families are not totally different from the structure of families in other cultures, there are a few added nuances based on three kinds of family structure that can be found in Nigeria, these are: the indigenous family structure, the Islamic family structure and the Christian family structure.

The Indigenous family structure consists of more than one wife. This is a type of family structure is found with traditional African religionists. This practice started with the quest for a large family because Nigeria was largely an agrarian economy. Owing to low level of technology prevailing in agricultural sector/mechanized agriculture and the communal land tenure in practice, especially in the rural areas, emphasis was strongly on large family size to help out on the farms (Orubuloye 1995). Indigenous family structure is practiced by less than 10% of Nigerian population.

The Islamic family structure does not allow for more than four wives at a time. This type of family structure is found among Moslems. Moslem religion allows believers to marry more than one wife but not greater than four at a time. Muhammad, who himself had 11 wives, allowed marriage for up to four wives, the Holy Koran 33:51,
states: “Of women who seem good in your eyes, marry but two, or three, or four; and if ye still fear ye shall not act equitably, then one only. Islamic family structure is still practiced by about 50% of Nigerian population and mostly in the predominant Moslem dominated Northern Nigeria.

The Christian family structure, which is practiced by over 40% of the population, mostly consists of only one wife and one husband at a time. This is the type of family structure that is obtainable among Christians based on the teaching of the Holy Bible in gospel of Matthew:

The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate. (Mt:19:3-6)

Figure 4 shows a typical Nigerian traditional polygamous family or typical indigenous family structure. It is a diagram of a man with two wives and their children (3 boys and 3 girls). The first wife has one boy and two girls while the second wife has two boys and one girl.

![Diagram of Nigerian polygamous family](image)

Figure 4. Nigerian polygamous family or typical indigenous family structure
Figure 5 shows a typical Islamic family structure. It is a diagram of a man with four wives and their children and grand children.

![Typical Islamic family structure](image)

Figure 5. Typical Islamic family structure

**Bowen Theory of Differentiation of Self**

The examination of the high rate of family conflict and emotional reactivity requires a theory that would have meaning for Nigerian families in dealing with their family mental health issues. Such a theory that fits this criterion is Murray Bowen’s Family Systems theory and the construct of differentiation of self. Families live within an emotional system that contributes to the dynamic of interpersonal relationships and psychological symptoms (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1998).

Bowenian Family Systems theory has played an invaluable role in the development of the field of marriage and family therapy (MFT). Bowen’s theoretical
descriptions and explanations of intergenerational family processes have made major contributions to the development of systems theory as a clinical perspective (Home & Hicks, 2002; Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). His model of differentiation of self is the ability to remain true to oneself in the face of group influences; especially the intense influence of family life. Bowen’s model also considers the thoughts and feelings of each family member as well as the larger contextual network of family relationships that shapes the life of the family.

Bowen thought that we tend to react to situations better when we can become autonomous and independent and yet remain connected to the family mainstream. For a Bowenian, differentiation is the level at which we acknowledge our own emotions, feelings and intellect. The higher the level of differentiation, the more we think before we react and the lower the level of differentiation the more we react before we think. Bowen believed that psychological symptoms were more likely to occur when individuals and relationships were characterized by high levels of emotional reactivity (Kerr and Bowen 1998).

**Significance of the Study**

Our daily lives are fraught with different stressors. These external stressors, coupled with internal demands, are experienced as mentally, physically, or emotionally disruptive. Inability to effectively deal with these disruptions often opens the way for conflict to occur between partners, regardless of how stable relationships are (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). It is also believed that developmental life tasks or events will interact with one’s emotional system to produce adjustment or dysfunction (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989). Research shows that in normal adult development and family
functioning, a variety of adaptive responses, rather than one single response pattern. These show multiple influences across life span these include family structural patterns, individual personality effects, sex roles, and socio cultural impacts (Walsh, 1982, 1989).

Conflict is not necessarily negative, and does not always have an aggressive result (Christensen & Walczynski, 1988). It offers us an opportunity to dialogue and understand ourselves better. The need to have mature and positive ways of dealing with disagreement and handle our stresses are important in order to maintain emotional stability both in the self and in relationships. In learning to deal with conflict we learn who we are and then have the opportunity to develop more suitable skills on how to cope better with the increasing challenges the day-to-day activities put on us. These challenges can either make our relationships stronger or put our relationships in disarray. From Bowen’s (1978) point of view, differentiation is linked to being ourselves and still being connected with our families in a healthy manner.

Bowen held that differentiation of self is linked to the development of the family’s emotional system (Bowen, 1978). Bowen’s theory suggested that one’s emotional system or level of differentiation would certainly be a contributing factor to adjustment in the critical stages of life developments. Therefore, it is important to examine a population (such as Nigerian families in the U.S.) that has never been studied, The crisis many Nigerian families experience is evident, and this study will help to set the groundwork for better mental health options in the future. In addition, I feel obligated, as a mental health clinician of Nigerian extraction living in the U.S. who has witnessed how stress has impacted the emotional reactivity of Nigerian families on a daily basis to proffer a model that will be beneficial to them in their mental health needs.
This study will take into cognizance the Nigerian cultural underpinnings and at the same time be applicable to the Americanized Nigerian needs.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the Study is to examine emotional reactivity of Nigeria couples in US in line with the concept of differentiation of self. This is very important because some Nigerian families’ emotional reactivity in the U.S. had caused numerous divorces and separations, as well as physical, emotional, and mental abuse of spouses and children.

Challenges faced by immigrants in their day-to-day family and work life can be so daunting that they can easily be overtaken in the face of these challenges. Studies of ethnic minorities in the United States of America show that immigrants face challenges about the new way of life as they settle in the United States. They are exposed to a new culture through transition and the acculturation process. This is a stressful process because of issues like identity crises, value differences, and language differences.

The above challenges pose great risks to the mental health and family stability of immigrants. Studies on the mental health of immigrants related to the stressful acculturation and transition processes; show that immigrants have more stressful life events than members of the dominant culture, as well as pervasive depressive symptoms (Franks & Faux, 1990; Kuo & Tsai, 1986; Rotter & Hawley, 1998; Shin, 1994). In the midst of these daily challenges and the attendant stresses, these immigrants seek little or no help from mental health professionals. One reason for this lack of openness could be cultural. For instance, Nigerians are not open with their mental health status because of a cultural stigma that is attached to mental illness. However, as research has shown,
refusal to seek help from a mental health professional does not obliterate the fact of the need to seek help during a mental health need. Recent developments amongst Nigerian immigrants in the area of family health and stability, has called for an urgent reassessment/evaluation of their mental healthy apathy.

**Research Question**

The research question the researcher sets out to answer in the study is: What role does emotional reactivity play in the marital stability within the family system of Nigerian immigrants in the U.S.?

In order to answer fully the research question, the researcher also answered the following sub questions:

1. What are the difficulties and consequent stressors?
2. What is perceived as different from life in Nigeria?
3. What is the nature of change and adaption to life in the U.S?
4. What is the impact on marriage and family?

**Delimitation**

The participants in this study are limited to those meeting these criteria:

- Canadians born and raised in Nigeria and married in Nigeria according to Nigerian statutory marital law of 1914 and the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1970, or Nigerian customary or Islamic marital laws, after which they relocated to the U.S.

Or,

- Born in Nigeria and living in the U.S. before going to Nigeria to get married according to the aforementioned marital laws and acts.
• These couples or individuals must have lived for 5 years or more in the U.S.
• All participants had at least a high school diploma and freely volunteered to participate in the Study.

**Author’s Statement**

In ancient times, Nigerian communities/people traveled far and near to consult with Oracles for solutions to their problems. These trips were given a priority when it was a problem that had to do with the safety and stability of their families or community, because strong family ties are the foundation upon which Nigerian family values are built (Kalu, 2003, p. 46). These days what some Nigerian families are experiencing in the U.S. is comparable to what could have sent our forefathers to the oracle world to seek solutions. The timeless Nigerian family values and stability are gradually disappearing and many good people are staying on the sidelines and doing nothing to stem the tide. Anecdotal data shows that one in every three Nigeria marriages in U.S. has broken up or is struggling to hold on. “Things have fallen apart and the center cannot hold”, as Chinua Achebe would say (Achebe, 1985).

There is always a blame game and name calling whenever a marriage breaks up, and some breakups have led to the killing of a spouse, the two spouses, life imprisonment of the other, and often children are left with no parent. As a Nigerian, and an advanced doctoral student working towards a degree in marriage and family counseling, I would want to challenge my fellow Nigerians to go beyond the normal blame game or name calling. I would want us to do an in-depth study on the underlying cause/s of these problems and possibly proffer a scientific solution or at least a base for future studies.
Therefore as a person of Nigerian descent living in the U.S. and as an advanced level MFT trainee, I plan to apply Bowen concept of differentiation of self as a theoretical frame work to study the effects of emotional reactivity of Nigerian couples/individuals on the stability of their marriages in the U.S. My choice was based on the special appeal Bowen’s concept of differentiation of self makes on togetherness and individualism. Nigerian culture, where these Nigerians were born and raised, and the American culture, which has become their adopted culture, are two cultures that are very distinct from each other.

While Nigerian culture emphasizes collectivism and collective choice (umu nna bu ike), American culture on its part puts higher premium on individualism, choice, and personal liberty. Therefore, I feel that there should be a balance of togetherness and Individualism and this is what Bowen theory of differentiation of self brings. It is a theory that is based on interpersonal ability to maintain connections with others while achieving an autonomous self (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Differentiated adults are thought to be more capable of reflecting on, experiencing, and modulating their emotions, and are less emotionally reactive than their less differentiated counterparts (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). According to the theory, such persons are better able to take “I” positions in their important relationships, to preserve a solid sense of self, and thoughtfully adhere to their own opinions and beliefs. Likewise, more differentiated adults are thought to be more comfortable with strong emotions and better able to adapt to life stressors, cope with uncertainty and ambiguity, and remain relatively calm in intimate relationships (Bowen, 1978). Conversely, less differentiated persons tend to get overwhelmed by their emotions and have difficulty maintaining a solid sense.
of self in their relationships, leading to greater psychological distress (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). Therefore, a balance of intricate human tendencies of togetherness and Individualism Bowen’s concept of differentiation will be most appropriate to use for a study of Nigerians in the U.S. who were born and raised in a culture of collectivism and collective choice (umu nna bu ike), but now reside in the U.S with a culture of individualism, personal choice and personal liberty.

Summary

This chapter summarized a historical and statistical excurses of African immigration in the U.S. with a focused on the ideologies that catalyzed the earlier movement of Nigerians to U.S. Also discussed was the general concept of family in line with the three traditional concepts of Nigerian families (Christian, Islamic, and traditional).

Finally, in this chapter, the researcher introduced the Bowen concept of differentiation of self which is the theoretical frame work for the study, also stated were the significance and the purpose of the study. The significance of the study is the development of a model that will be appropriate to work with Nigerian population in the U.S. while the purpose of the Study is to examine emotional reactivity of Nigeria couples in US in line with the concept of differentiation of self.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

A review of literature shows the frames constructed by researchers and other professionals on the subject understudy. The researcher is aware that no study has been done on how the emotional reactivity of Nigeria families in the U.S. affects the stability of their marriages, and therefore has chosen to approach this chapter in three stages. The review of the literature will include a link to study Bowenian family systems theory, and specifically differentiation of self as the foundation for the study. This section concludes with a detailed critique of Bowen’s differentiation of self and the application of differentiation of self to different studies.

The second section starts with a brief historical insight on the political, religious and cultural origin of marital laws in Nigeria. The researcher discusses in detail the three kinds of laws that guide marriage and the three types of marriage that can be contracted in Nigerian society. The shortcomings of these laws and grounds on which these three types of marriages can be contracted or dissolved will be discussed next. The researcher intends by this, to acquaint a non-Nigerian reader with the issues that form the cultural worldview of a Nigerian who is now living in a different culture, specifically in the U.S.

Finally, in the third section of the chapter, the researcher reviews marriage in the U.S. and the challenges that confront marriages in the U.S. such as high levels of stress,
materialism, and competition. Others include lack of time for oneself and one’s family, increasing use of child care outside the family, a high divorce and remarriage rate, sex as a national obsession, the Internet and its effects on human relationships, changing gender roles and power issues in marriages and families, financial problems, overspending, poverty, and the global economy.

**Murray Bowen (1913 – 1990)**

Murray Bowen was born on January 31, 1913, in Waverly, Tennessee, to a family that had been in middle Tennessee since the American Revolution. He was the oldest of Jess Sewell Bowen’s and Maggie May Luff Bowen’s five children. He attended primary and secondary schools in Waverly, earned a B.S. degree from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in 1934, and an M.D. from the University of Tennessee Medical School, Memphis, in 1937. He then interned at Bellevue Hospital in New York City in 1938 and at the Grasslands Hospital in Valhalla, New York from 1939-41.

In 1954, he became the first director of the Family Division at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). He further broadened his attachment research to include fathers and developed the concept of triangulation as the central building block of relationship systems (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998.) In his first year at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), he provided separate therapists for each individual member of a family, but soon discovered that this approach fractionated families instead of bringing them together. As a result, he decided to treat the entire family as a unit, and became one of the early founders of family therapy.

Apart from his involvement with the National Institute of Mental Health (N.I.M.H) earlier, and later with Georgetown University’s Department of Psychiatry, he
was also a Visiting Professor in a variety of medical schools including the University of Maryland, 1956-1963; and part-time Professor and Chairman, Division of Family and Social Psychiatry, Medical College of Virginia, Richmond, from 1964 to 1978. While at the Medical College of Virginia, Richmond (MCV), he pioneered the use of closed-circuit television in family therapy. Television was used to integrate family therapy with family theory.

Murray Bowen was a scholar, researcher, clinician, teacher, and writer. He worked tirelessly toward founding a science of human behavior, one that viewed man as apart of all life. He served two consecutive terms as the first President of the American Family Therapy Association. His activities and prolific writings led to many awards and much recognition. He has been credited as being one of those rare human beings who had a genuinely new idea and had the courage to go against the psychiatric and societal mainstream, to stand up for what he believed about human behavior (Kerr, 1990).

**Bowen’s Theory**

Murray Bowen regarded as the father of multi-generational or trans-generational family systems theory, began a conceptual approach that outlived his passing away in 1990. His ideas have been carried on by a number of influential thinkers, not only in family systems therapy but in couples’ therapy (Aylmer, 1986; Gerson, Hoffman, Sauls, & Ulrici, 1993) His theories lie in the balance/imbalance of two forces, togetherness and Individualism. Fusion results from togetherness being the stronger force. Unresolved emotional attachment to one’s family prevents differentiation. He distinguished himself from the more behaviorally oriented family therapists because he emphasized the
importance of theory and insight as opposed to action and technique (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998).

Clinicians believe that Bowen’s therapy is an outgrowth of psychoanalytic theory and offers the most comprehensive view of human behavior and problems of any approach to family therapy. Bowen was a firm believer in relational causes of psychological and psychiatric problems even though that was in total contradiction from his formal training. Bowen would always differ from other clinicians in his preferred clinical format. He would always work in a relational format with a couple, even when the presenting problem was not marital conflict, but only a symptom of one’s partner or even of a child. He focused on emotional reactivity with nuclear families across three generations, even when his systemic family therapy contemporaries were highlighting observable present day interactions. He identified three important levels of functioning (emotional, feeling, intellectual) How we are able to separate the three is based on the level of our differentiation, which is the core of his theory (Klever, 2003).

It is an understatement to say that Bowenian family systems theory has played an invaluable role in the development of the field of marriage and family therapy (MFT). The intergenerational perspective in the field of marriage and family is his brainchild. His theoretical descriptions and explanations of family process have made major contributions to the development of systems theory as a clinical perspective (Home & Hicks, 2002; Klever, 2003; Nichols & Schwartz, 2001).
Major Concepts

Bowen’s theory has eight major concepts, all these concepts have individually and collectively a huge influence on the functionality of the system; and a negation in one of them could lead to the dysfunction of the whole system. These concepts are: (a) Differentiation of self, (b) Triangles, (c) Nuclear family emotional processes, (d) Family projection process, (e) Multigenerational transmission process, (f) Sibling position, (g) Emotional cutoff, and (h) Societal emotional process

Differentiation of self. Differentiation is a multidimensional construct comprised of an intrapsychic capacity to distinguish thinking and feeling systems, and an interpersonal ability to maintain connections with others while achieving an autonomous self (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). On an intrapsychic level, differentiated adults are thought to be more capable of reflecting on, experiencing, and modulating their emotions, and are less emotionally reactive than their less differentiated counterparts (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). According to theory, such persons are better able to take “I” positions in their important relationships, to preserve a solid sense of self, and thoughtfully adhere to their own opinions and beliefs. Likewise, more differentiated adults are thought to be more comfortable with strong emotions and better able to adapt to life stressors, cope with uncertainty and ambiguity, and remain relatively calm in intimate relationships (Bowen, 1978). Conversely, less differentiated persons tend to get overwhelmed by their emotions and have difficulty maintaining a solid sense of self in their relationships, leading to greater psychological distress (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). Bowen identified two aspects of the differentiation process, the first one is the ability of adults to adequately differentiate themselves from their families of origin and
the second is the ability to differentiate feeling processes from intellectual processes (Becvar & Becvar, 1996; Prochaska & Norcross, 2003).

**Triangulation.** Bowen theory postulates that triangulation, similar to symptoms among spouses and marital distress, serves to “bind” anxiety. The major influence on the activity of a triangle is anxiety. When it is low, a relationship between two people can be calm and comfortable. When anxiety increases, a third person becomes involved in the tension of the twosome, creating a triangle. This involvement of a third person decreases anxiety in the twosome by spreading it through three individuals (Bowen & Kerr 1988).

Although triangulation serves to diminish the anxiety in the marital relationship, Bowen asserted that it would increase the anxiety of the third party, very often a child. Bowen believed that the child who is the focus of the projection of this anxiety would have a lower level of differentiation than the parents and would exhibit distress (Bowen, 1978, Miller, 2004).

**Sibling position.** Bowen stated, “I believe that no single piece of data is more important than knowing the sibling position of people in the present and past generations” (Bowen, 1978; Bowen & Kerr 1988). The basic premise of birth order is that there are fixed personality traits that are associated with one’s position in their family of origin (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). According to Bowen (1978),

> The profiles are so accurate that they can be used to reconstruct the family emotional process of past generations, to understand the emotional process in the present nuclear and extended family and to make postulations about the future. (p. 206)

**Multigenerational transmission of emotional processes.** Bowen theory assumes that multigenerational trends in functioning reflect an orderly and predictable
relationship process that connects the functioning of family members across generations. This includes emotions, feelings, and subjectively determined attitudes, values, and beliefs that are transmitted from one generation to the next. (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

Bowen in his writings suggests that this transmission process occurs through two general pathways. First, he argued that the general level of functioning is relatively stable between generations, with “trends in functioning in a multigenerational family” (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Bowen stated that it is a simple fact that individual and family functioning are similar across generations: “Much of the generational transmission appears to be based simply on prolonged association,” and “most of it seems linked to the deep inclination of human beings to imitate one another” (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 315).

**Nuclear family emotional system.** The concept of the nuclear family emotional system describes four basic relationship patterns that govern where problems develop in a family (marital conflict, dysfunction in one spouse, impairment of one or more children and emotional distance). People’s attitudes and beliefs about relationships play a role in the patterns, but the forces primarily driving them are part of the emotional system. The patterns operate in intact, single-parent, step-parent, and other nuclear family configurations. Clinical problems or symptoms usually develop during periods of heightened and prolonged family tension. The level of tension depends on the stress a family encounters, how a family adapts to the stress, and on a family’s connection with extended family and social networks. Tension increases the activity of one or more of the four relationship patterns. Where symptoms develop depends on which patterns are
most active and the higher the tension, the more chance that symptoms will be severe and that several people will be symptomatic (Kerr, 2004).

**Family projection process.** The family projection process describes the primary way parents transmit their emotional problems to a child. The projection process can impair the functioning of one or more children and increase their vulnerability to clinical symptoms. Children inherit many types of problems (as well as strengths) through the relationships with their parents. But the inherited problems that most affect their lives are relationship sensitivities such as heightened needs for attention and approval, difficulty dealing with expectations, the tendency to blame oneself or others, feeling responsible for the happiness of others or that others are responsible for one’s own happiness, and acting impulsively to relieve the anxiety of the moment rather than tolerating anxiety and acting thoughtfully. If the projection process is fairly intense, the child develops stronger relationship sensitivities than his parents. The sensitivities increase a person’s vulnerability to symptoms by fostering behaviors that escalate chronic anxiety in a relationship system (Kerr, 2004).

The projection process follows three steps: (a) the parent focuses on a child out of fear that something is wrong with the child; (b) the parent interprets the child’s behavior as confirming the fear; and (c) the parent treats the child as if something is really wrong with the child. The parents’ fears and perceptions so shape the child’s development and behavior that he grows to embody their fears and perceptions; and these fears are transmitted early in the child’s life and continue (Kerr, 2004).

**Emotional cutoff.** The concept of emotional cutoff describes people managing their unresolved emotional issues with parents, siblings, and other family members by
reducing or totally cutting off emotional contact with them. Emotional contact can be reduced by people moving away from their families and rarely going home, or it can be reduced by people staying in physical contact with their families but avoiding sensitive issues. Relationships may look “better” if people cutoff to manage them, but the problems are dormant and not resolved.

People try to use the “avoidance” method to avoid emotional reactivity; they reduce the tensions of family interactions by cutting off, but risk making their new relationships too important. For example, the more a man cuts off from his family of origin, the more he looks to his spouse, children, and friends to meet his needs. This makes him vulnerable to pressuring them to be certain ways for him or accommodating too much to their expectations of him out of fear of jeopardizing the relationship. New relationships are typically smooth in the beginning, but the patterns people are trying to escape eventually emerge and generate tensions. People who are cut off may try to stabilize their intimate relationships by creating substitute “families” with social and work relationships (Kerr, 2004).

**Societal emotional process.** The concept of societal emotional process describes how the emotional system governs behavior on a societal level, promoting both progressive and regressive periods in a society. Cultural forces are important in how a society functions but are insufficient for explaining the ebb and flow in how well societies adapt to the challenges that face them. Bowen’s first clue about parallels between familial and societal emotional functioning came from treating families with juvenile delinquents. When treating these families he began to see the influence of society played out in the families. The parents in such families give the message, “We
love you no matter what you do.” Despite impassioned lectures about responsibility and sometimes harsh punishments, the parents give in to the child more than they hold the line. The child rebels against the parents and is adept at sensing the uncertainty of their positions. The child feels controlled and lies to get around the parents. He is indifferent to their punishments. The parents try to control the child but are largely ineffectual.

**Differentiation of Self**

The cornerstone of Bowen’s carefully worked out theory is his notion of the forces within the family that make for togetherness and the opposing forces that lead to Individualism, autonomy, and a separate self (Kerr & Bowen, 1976, 1978). To Bowen, the degree to which differentiation of self occurs in an individual reflects the extent to which that person is able to distinguish between the intellectual process and the feeling process (emotions) he or she is experiencing. Thus, differentiation of self is related to the degree to which one is able to choose between having his or her actions, relationships and life guided by feelings or thoughts (what part of me is running my life, my gut or my brain? Who is in charge, my feelings or my thinking? (Farley, 1979; Kantor & Lehr, 1975)

The concept of differentiation, as defined by Bowen (1976, 1978), is often misinterpreted in the family therapy literature and equated with individuation or autonomy. Although similar in some respects, separation-individuation is not equivalent to differentiation of self. Individuation, from an object relations perspective (Bios, 1975; Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975), involves the achievement of independence and a unique sense of identity. Differentiation of self is the capacity to maintain autonomous
thinking and achieve a clear, coherent sense of self in the context of emotional relationships with important others.

Those individuals with the greatest fusion between the two function most poorly. They are likely to be at the mercy of involuntary emotional reactions and tend to become dysfunctional even under low levels of stress. Just as they are unable to differentiate thought from feeling, such persons have trouble differentiating themselves from others and thus fuse easily with whatever emotions dominate the family. This is codependency wherein one literally cannot tell the difference between their thoughts and feelings and those of another person (Bowen, 1978).

Bowen introduced the concept of undifferentiated family ego mass, derived from psychoanalysis, to convey the idea of a family emotionally “stuck together,” one where “a conglomerate emotional oneness exists in all levels of intensity. For example, the symbiotic relationship of interdependency between mother and child may represent the most intense version of this concept; a father’s detachment may be the least intense. The degree to which any one member is involved in the family from moment to moment depends on that person’s basic level of involvement in the family ego mass (Friedman, 1991). Sometimes the emotional closeness can be so intense that family members know each other’s feelings, thoughts, fantasies, and dreams. This intimacy may lead to uncomfortable “over-closeness,” according to Bowen (1976, 1978), and ultimately to a phase of mutual rejection between two members which leads to fights, slammed doors, phone hang-ups, etc. In other words, within a family system, emotional tensions shift over time sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly in a series of alliances and rejections. (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1990). Differentiation allows flexible boundaries in
relationships, permitting for emotional intimacy without fear of engulfment or loss of self (emotional fusion) or the need to detach too much (emotional cutoff) (Bray, William & Malone, 1984; Carpenter, 1990; Cebik, 1988, Craddock, 1983; Fleming & Anderson, 1986; Maynard, 1997; Papero, 2000; Skowron, 2001).

The more differentiated an individual is the more balanced the individual is in handling stressful situations, while the less differentiated are prone to chronic anxiety (Carpenter, 1990; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Skowron & Friedlander, 1988). In our stress laden challenging work environment it is very imperative therefore that managing oneself and functioning at a high level requires a strong sense of self. Also, a high level of functioning in a relationship system and work place depend on emotional maturity of the individuals in the system or the level of the individual’s differentiation. Bowen (1976, 1978) used the biological science to explain his point, he likened emotional development of a newborn to that of a cell. A cell in a fetus divides and becomes two interdependent cells that remain in contact and divide again and again, differentiating along the way to eventually function as brain cells, liver cells, heart cells, etc. One cell becomes two interdependently functioning cells that remain in contact to cooperate in making the organism survive. Similarly, a baby not only grows physically to adulthood but it also matures emotionally by differentiating in relation to the mother to eventually function as a separate and independent, but connected person. The mature adult remains a part of the family unit and joins other types of social units to cooperate in ways that make our species survive. (Miller, 2004; Davis & Jones, 1992; Haber, 1984).

Applications of differentiation of self. Despite the contribution Bowen made with his concept of differentiation of self because of its appeal to common sense
everyday living; the concept has encountered some hiccups in its application in the clinical field of Marriage Family Therapy (MFT). The empirical examination of his theory has been dependent on the development of a valid and adequate measure to test the concept of differentiation. The development of a psychometrically sound measure of differentiation has been a delayed process (Miller, 2004). Bowen himself discouraged this effort by claiming that differentiation could only be accurately measured after months of interviews and interaction (Bowen, 1978). He suggested that clinicians could use a differentiation-of-self scale ranging from 0 to 100 (Horne & Hicks, 2002). However, he provided few guidelines to help clinicians reliably and accurately assign an appropriate score. Indeed, he claimed that the concept was not quantifiable for researchers. Consequently, Bowen’s scale has been useful only as a theoretical tool; clinical outcome literature has failed to find any controlled outcome studies that have tested the effectiveness of Bowen theory (Baucom, Shoham, Mueser, Daiuto, & Stickle, 1998; Johnson & Lebow, 2000; Miller, Johnson, Sandberg, Stringer-Seibold, & Gfeller-Strouts, 2000).

Williamson (1981) theorized that differentiation of self is characterized as well by the presence of personal authority in relations between parents and adult children. Williamson’s (1982) concept of personal authority in the family system refers to “the achievement of peer-like intimacy in interactions with all persons, including parents, while maintaining an individuated stance” (Harvey & Bray, 1991). Individuals with greater personal authority in their relationships are thought to be more able to achieve individuation while experiencing emotional intimacy with others. Williamson (1981) argued that personal authority is achieved when adult children manage to renegotiate
their relationships with parents on the basis of mutual respect, collaboration, and choice, rather than based on obligations, fusion, or the use of intimidation or fear (Harvey & Bray, 1991; Rabin, Bressler, & Prager, 1993). This renegotiation process is thought to occur in adulthood (i.e., fourth decade of life), and focuses on a shifting of the power structure in parent/adult child relationships, thus enabling a mutual, peer-like relationship to emerge (Williamson, 1981). Conversely in his theory, Bowen (1978) made no specific predictions about the role of age in the development of differentiation, except to suggest that levels of differentiation are rather immutable, with differentiation levels achieved in adulthood remaining essentially similar to those experienced in childhood within one’s family of origin. On the question of gender, Williamson like Bowen posited no relationships between gender and the ability of adult children to achieve personal authority in their relationships with parents and partners. However, some research (e.g., Garbarino, Gaa, Swank, McPherson, & Gratch, 1995) suggests that, at least among young adults, women may have greater difficulty than men in developing personal authority in their families of origin.

Two early studies used “I” and “We” statements to measure differentiation. Weinberg (1978) and Citrin (1982) used open-ended interviews to rate the ratios of “I” statements and “We” statements used by couples. This measurement strategy was based on Bowen’s contention that differentiated people use more “I” statements in their conversations. However, these measures have not been psychometrically tested. Kear’s (1978) Differentiation of Self Scale was another early attempt to measure differentiation. He developed a 72-item scale, but subsequent attempts to demonstrate validity were not successful (Haber, 1984). Consequently, the scale was never widely used.
In the last decade, two measures have been developed that more closely adhere to Bowen’s concept of differentiation. Both of these scales were developed and validated specifically to measure the concept of differentiation using standard psychometric methods. The first scale, Haber’s Level of Differentiation of Self Scale (1993), was developed over a 10-year span. The final version consists of one scale containing 24 items that focus on emotional maturity. Items include “I make decisions based on my own set of values and beliefs,” “What I expect of myself is more important than what other people expect of me,” “When I have a problem that upsets me, I am still able to consider different options for solving the problem,” “I can decide on my own whether or not I have done a good job,” and “When important decisions need to be made, I consider all possible options.” Content validity was established by having two experts in Bowen theory rate the relevance of the items in the scale. The scale significantly correlated with chronic anxiety and psychological distress, which is consistent with Bowen theory and, thereby, demonstrating construct validity. The scale has an alpha coefficient of .90, indicating adequate internal reliability.

Another scale is Skowron’s Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). This scale originally consisted of 43 items and reflects the multidimensionality of the concept of differentiation by having four subscales. These subscales are:

- Emotional Cutoff (“I need to distance myself when people get too close to me” and “I would never consider turning to any of my family members for emotional support.”)
• “I” Position (“I usually do not change my behavior simply to please another person” and “I tend to feel pretty stable under stress.”)

• Emotional Reactivity (“I’m very sensitive to being hurt by others” and “At times my feelings get the best of me and I have trouble thinking clearly.”)

• Fusion with Others (“It has been said of me that I am still very attached to my parents” and “I try to live up to my parents’ expectations.”)

Two experts of Bowen’s theory reviewed the pool of questions and the definitions of the subscales to assure that they were consistent with Bowen’s conceptualization of differentiation. Construct validity was established by correlating the scale with other scales that were predicted by Bowen theory to relate to differentiation. Consistent with Bowen theory, the DSI correlated significantly with chronic anxiety, psychological distress, and marital satisfaction. In addition, confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated psychometric support for the four subscales. Internal reliability of the total scale and each subscale was tested using Chronbach’s alpha. They found that there was adequate reliability for the full scale (.88), as well as each of the four subscales.

Subsequent research has found that the DSI is not affected by current levels of environmental stress (Tuason & Friedlander, 2000), which Bowen theorized can cause changes in functional, or observed, levels of differentiation. These results suggest that the DSI measures levels of basic differentiation, which is at the core of Bowen theory.

The development of the Level of Differentiation of Self Scale (LDSS) and the Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI) has made it possible to explicitly test some of Bowen’s theoretical propositions. The result has been a number of studies that have tested many of his core assumptions and propositions. A question arose among
researchers regarding the applicability of Bowen’s theory to all cultures. Bowen (1978) argued that his theory was universal. He stated that his theory could be applied “in all families and in all cultures” (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Some scholars credited the universality of his theory only in its ability to explain family emotional processes that are appropriate for both males and females. Although others have criticized his theory for “overvaluing stereotypically male characteristics” (Knudson-Martin, 1994, p. 35) and ignoring the processes by which women define themselves (Ault-Riehe, 1986).

Several studies have compared men’s and women’s levels of differentiation, but the results have been inconsistent. Haber (1993) and Maynard (1997), using the LDSS, found no gender differences in mean levels of differentiation. Research examining gender differences with the DSI also found no differences in the overall level of differentiation (Elieson & Rubin, 2001; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998), but women had higher levels on the emotional reactivity subscale (Kosek, 1998; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998; Skowron & Schmitt, 2003), and the “I” position subscale (Kosek, 1998; Skowron & Schmitt, 2003). There were mixed results on the fusion subscale, with one study finding gender differences (Kosek, 1998) and another study reporting no differences (Skowron & Schmitt, 2003). These results provide preliminary evidence that, although there are gender differences in some components of differentiation, there are no differences in the overall levels of differentiation, as measured by the LDSS and the DSI.

As Bowen predicted, both males and females with low levels of differentiation are more likely to experience psychological problems and marital distress. Several studies have found that the influence of differentiation on marital distress is significant
for males and females alike (Richards, 1989; Haber, 1984; Skowron, 2000). Likewise, the psychological well-being of males and females is affected by levels of differentiation (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). For example, J. Bohlander (1995) studied an all-female sample and R. Bohlander (1999) surveyed an all-male sample using similar research designs. They independently found that differentiation had a significant impact on psychological well-being on females and males, respectively.

The only study that has examined the effect of differentiation on physical health found gender differences. Weiner (1989) found that differentiation had a significant positive or negative relationship on women’s health, but not on men’s. Very little research has examined Bowen theory from a cross-cultural perspective. The only cross-cultural study has been done by Skowron (2004). Skowron tried to go beyond the Western values of independence in the study that examined the cross-cultural validity of family systems constructs, differentiation of self, and measured personal adjustment, problem solving and ethnic group affiliation among persons of color. Skowron (2004) indicated that persons of color with the greatest psychological adjustment were least emotionally cut off and more comfortable with connections to family and important others. Earlier, Skowron and Schmitt (2003) looked at cultural differences within the United States, and found inconsistent results. In their study, 225 U.S. adults, reported that ethnicity and income did not have significant effects on levels of differentiation. However, they found that education was significant, with more educated people having higher levels of differentiation. Therefore even though Bowen assumed universal position for his theory, the body of literature on the applicability of his theory to all cultures falls short of this assumption, because all available literature on the concept of
differentiation shows that studies on Bowen’s concept of differentiation of self are mainly on Western values of independence.

**Emotional Reactivity**

Emotional reactivity is a term that cuts across many disciplines; among those disciplines are child development, family systems, temperament, psychology, and neuropsychobiology. The multi-disciplinary usage of the term has led, to myriads of definitions and operationalizations, but for the purpose of this study the researcher’s focus is on family systems.

Wile (1993) likened emotional reactivity to an electromagnetic field that throws off the compass of a person’s emotional and relational life. It prevents a person from being able to set his compass for a new destination and makes it harder to get past the person’s preconceptions; therefore, preventing him from getting a true reading of the compass and an eventual lost of his bearings. It is a normal and unavoidable in close relationships. People can always learn from it; for example, a person can think of his reactivity as a signal that there is something to learn about himself. But more often than not, a person who is reactive does not feel that the issue has anything to do with him. He rather feels that his partner is doing something to him that is causing him to feel that way. Therefore, his understandable response at that point is to focus all his energy on trying to get his partner to change rather than focusing his energy on himself and what he is experiencing.

Emotional reactivity is one aspect of Bowen’s differentiation of self-construct. According to Bowen (1976, 1978), differentiation of self is necessary because of the existence of chronic anxiety. Chronic anxiety is a part of existence; it is not something
that one catches. Bowen believed that chronic anxiety is manifest in emotional and physical reactivity or the responses that are “automatic” rather than thought out. Thus, lower levels of differentiation of self are manifest in higher levels of chronic anxiety, hence, emotional reactivity. Friedman (1991) suggested that “chronic anxiety is understood to be the primary promoter of all symptoms, from schizophrenia to cancer, from anorexia to birth defects. The antidote, and the preventative medicine, always is differentiation” (p. 140). According to Friedman (1991), “Differentiation is the capacity to be one’s own integrated aggregate-of-cells person while still belonging to, or being able to relate to, a larger colony” (p. 141). Within this description of differentiation of self is also the capacity to be in close emotional contact with significant others without having one’s thinking, emotions, and behavior governed by seemingly involuntary reactions to the emotional environment (Friedman, 1991). In other words, differentiation of self allows individuals to have a sense of self that is both separate from and connected to the family system. Thus, differentiation provides the individual with the ability to be a self in relation; the individual is differentiated from others, including the family of origin, but also is able to be in relationships without losing a sense of separateness.

Researcher has shown that emotional reactivity as it relates to daily life stressors and to the extent such daily life stressors elicit negative emotions. One of such studies was the one done by Mroczek and Almeida (2004). Using daily diary data from a nationally representative sample of 25 to 74 year olds, they found that older adults exhibited the greatest increase in negative affect associated with the experience of daily stressors. In contrast, using a momentary sampling methodology, Uchino, Berg, Smith, Pearce, and Skinner (2006) found the exact opposite effect with a sample of 36- to 75-
year-olds. Uchino et al. (2006) found that stress related increases in negative affect decreased with advancing age. Thus, with respect to daily stressor effects on negative affect, the evidence is inconsistent. Mroczek and Almeida’s (2004) results demonstrated age differences in the effect of daily stressors on negative affect; however, it remains unclear whether a similar pattern of results would be observed, during very old age.

One important study that has been done on cross-cultural emotional reactivity of couples was done by Tsai (2007). Tsai et al. examined the effects of depression on emotional functioning across cultures. This study surprisingly underscored that few studies have examined the effects of depression on emotional functioning across cultures. Instead, most studies of emotional reactivity and depression have been conducted on North American samples of primarily European descent. The study also stated that Depression may reduce individuals’ attention to or concern with abiding by cultural norms regarding emotional experience and expression; as a result, depressed individuals may react emotionally in ways that are inconsistent with or even the opposite of what is expected of them. If this is the case, depression should be associated with different patterns of emotional reactivity in contexts that have different cultural norms regarding optimal emotional experience and expression. For instance, depression should be associated with heightened emotional reactivity in cultures that emphasize emotional moderation and control.

Other cultures like East Asian cultures emphasize emotional moderation and control (Bond, 1991; Gross, Richards, & John, 2006; Russell & Yik, 1996). These norms are reflected in reports of emotional experience as well as in facial expressions of emotions. For example, compared with European Americans, Asian Americans of East
Asian descent report less intense positive and negative emotional experiences (Eid & Diener, 2001) and smile less intensely and frequently while reliving positive emotional events (Tsai, Chentsova-Dutton, Freire-Bebeau, & Przynus, 2002) and discussing emotional topics with their romantic partners (Tsai, Levenson, & McCoy, 2006).

These studies, however, focus on non-depressed samples. Despite the wide interest in how culture influences the expression of depression (Kirmayer, 2001; Marsella & Yamada, 2000), no studies have compared the emotional reactivity of European American depressed individuals with depressed individuals who are exposed to cultures other than mainstream European American culture. Because cultural norms function to regulate social relations, and physiological arousal is less socially visible than reports of emotional experience or facial expression, physiological reactivity may have less direct social consequences than the other components of emotion (Tsai & Levenson, 1997). In support of this notion, previous studies have found few cultural differences in physiological reactivity (Tsai et al., 2002; Tsai & Levenson, 1997; Tsai, Levenson, & McCoy, 2006).

**Nigerian Marital Law and Divorce**

Nigeria is operating a tripartite legal system on marriage institution, these are the statutory laws based on English common law, the customary laws and the Islamic laws as embodied in the Sharia law which operates among the Northern Muslims. As there are different sets of laws regulating the marriage institution, so there are different courts administering the laws. A person can enter into a monogamous marriage by marrying according to the Marriage Act, celebrating the marriage in the registry or a recognized place of worship. The laws which govern the celebration and incidents of monogamous
marriage is principally in Marriage Act of 1914, and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1970. Secondly, there is legally recognized marriage under the customary laws, which is recognized by various customary laws. Both monogamous and polygamous marriages are acceptable under the customary courts.

The third is Islamic marriage, which recognizes polygamy and allows a man to marry up to four wives as long as he has the means to provide for them. Under customary and Islamic practice, the number of wives a man takes is tied to the size of his wealth. Even though polygamous marriage is the voluntary union of one man with one or several wives, the basic notion that marriage is intended to last for life is not affected by the plurality of wives (Rahmatian, 1996).

There is always a conflict between the statutory marriage act and the customary or Islamic laws. All these marriage laws embody to a great extent different traditional and religious values that are scarcely compatible. Conflicts often arise between them, especially in the case of divorce. Customary law is the primary source of family law, for most Nigerians contract marriages under their respective customary laws, but rarely performs solely statutory marriage (Rahmatian, 1996). The extended families of the spouses would hardly recognize a marriage without any traditional foundation as valid marital union. Similarly, Muslim’s adherents will adhere strongly to Islamic marriage rather than statutory marriage. It is more common to see a combination of statutory marriage and customary marriage than Muslim marriage and statutory marriage.

**Shortcomings of Marital Law**

The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1970 was enacted to regulate the dissolution of statutory marriage. This limitation to statutory marriage only entails shortcomings in
respect of the other marriage systems (customary and Islamic marriage). All three systems, based on very different traditions, are, in principle, largely incompatible. This becomes particularly apparent when a marriage between the same persons contracted both under customary and statutory. The requirements for customary and statutory divorce are not congruous in the different concepts of the (potentially) polygamous, customary and Islamic marriage and of the monogamous, statutory marriage. There are no provisions in the Matrimonial Causes Act considering obvious conflict situations. This is a reform frequently suggested but not yet implemented.

**The Statutory Marital Law and Divorce**

The statutory law of marriage and divorce in Nigeria derives from two influences. First, Christian missionaries brought the Christian ideas of marriage and family to West Africa. In Nigeria, Protestants were active mainly among the Yoruba and Catholics among the Igbo, during the 19th century (Rinehart, 1982, Ajaji 1965). From the 1880s onward, the English colonial rulers were the second influence that shaped the statutory marriage laws. Colonial legislation on marriage appeared in a secularized form but was largely based on Christian ideas. The achievement of independence in 1960 did not considerably change the statutory law of marriage and divorce in Nigeria. The current Marriage Act states:

> Whoever goes through the ceremony of marriage, or any ceremony which he or she represents to be a ceremony of marriage, knowing that the marriage is void on any ground, and that the other person believes it to be valid, shall be liable to imprisonment for five years (Marriage Act, 45) is still virtually the colonial (Marriage Ordinance of 1914).

The Matrimonial Causes Act 1970 (MCA), which embodies the current statutory law of divorce, is, besides the fact that it was enacted only ten years after independence,
curiously enough, the product of a long evolution of English, and not of Nigerian divorce law. For the Matrimonial Causes Act is closely based on the English Divorce Reform Act 1969 and the Australian Matrimonial Causes Act 1959 and adopts exactly their principles concerning the ground for divorce.

**Catholic and Protestant Influences on Nigeria Statutory Marital Law and Divorce**

The English marriage laws, which may not apply to traditional Nigerian marriage laws, were dominated by the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches. The Roman Catholic Church considers marriage as a sacramental bond that ties and unites man and woman and is therefore indissoluble, particularly after consummation. Marriage is strictly monogamous and has to be conducted in public before an official of the Church. Divorce, that is the dissolution of a valid marriage other than by death, is impossible. “I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery” (Matthew 19:9). “But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances” (1 Corinthians 7:15). This thought, which was buttressed by some passages from the Bible as seen above, created the doctrine of the matrimonial offence.

Divorce contained the character of a penalty against the wrongdoing spouse (Eekelaar, 1991) who had destroyed a union intended to last for the joint lives. It was not the marital discord between the spouses but the attack on the social order that justified divorce. When one party violates the (religious, social and legal) institution of marriage, the other party should not be compelled to continue the marital relationship with the offender. The doctrine whereby a divorce may be granted was retained in the first secular divorce law in England 1857. Only if one of the matrimonial offenses of
adultly, desertion and, later, cruelty had been committed would the divorce be granted. The doctrine dominated all divorce laws up to the Divorce Reform Act 1969, which claimed to have abolished the matrimonial offense doctrine. Instead, the sole ground for divorce now became irretrievable breakdown of the marriage. However, this breakdown may be established only if at least one of the listed grounds (now “facts”) set out in the Act are proved. This list of “facts” contains mainly the classical matrimonial offences, partly in a modified form.

The Nigerian Matrimonial Causes Act adopted the modern English concept of divorce virtually unchanged. Section 15 provides:

(1) A petition under this Act by a party to a marriage for a decree of dissolution of the marriage may be presented to the court by either party to the marriage upon the ground that the marriage has broken down irretrievably.

(2) The court hearing a petition for a decree of dissolution of a marriage shall hold the marriage to have broken down irretrievably if, but only if, the petitioner satisfies the court of one or more of the following facts - (a) willful and persistent refusal to consummate, (b) adultery, (c) behavior of the respondent which the petitioner cannot reasonably be expected to bear, (d) desertion, (e) separation and respondent’s consent to dissolution, (f) [three years’ separation, (g) failure to comply with a decree of restitution of conjugal rights, (h) presumption of death (Esiet et al., 2001; Nigeria Matrimonial Causes Act 15,1970).

Earlier on, the 1914 statutory marriage standard stated that marriage in Nigeria is a voluntarily concluded contractual union between one man and one woman and it is monogamous without exception, and intended to last for life. Consequently, divorce, the severance of an actually existing marital bond, is solely judicial and permitted only for a few exceptional reasons which are prescribed rather precisely in the law and have to be established before the court by the party seeking the dissolution (Rahmatian, 1996).
The Matrimonial Causes Act 1970 which was enacted to make Nigerian marriage laws look Nigerian in nature by relating more to Nigerian ideas and cultures, correcting the mistakes of Statutory Marriage Act of 1914 which was purely British, eventually fell into the same mistake of 1914 Marriage Act. It not only reflects Christian ideas, but its divorce provisions are not Nigerian. It discards the old fault-based matrimonial offense principle, but lets it materialize again in a new guise. The return is achieved by founding the divorce solely on the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage in which the old matrimonial offences of adultery, cruelty, and desertion are the only admissible proof of the marriage breakdown although no longer grounds for divorce in themselves.

Under the Nigerian formula it does not make much difference in practice that the “matrimonial offence doctrine” has been superseded by the “irretrievable breakdown principle”. One has to concede that the law attempted a shift from the fault-based divorce to a divorce where the establishment of guilt has no relevance (Rahmatian, 1996).

This objective was not convincingly attained as the examples of desertion and separation. Desertion is intentionally bringing cohabitation permanently to an end with the intention to do so but without a just cause and without the consent of the deserted spouse (Bromley & Lowe 1992). The deserter must not be justified by the behavior of the other party especially cruelty (Nwogugu 1974). This is the old fault-based matrimonial offence of desertion. However, separation is a fault free facts when there is the clear intention of one or both spouses not to return to the other, the separation has lasted for at least two years, the respondent consents to a decree, the marriage will be dissolved. Thus, the facts which exclusively prove the irretrievable breakdown are fault-
based and fault-free conditions side by side. It is, in effect, still possible to obtain a divorce on the basis of fault. Furthermore, the facts of a particular case do not always allow a clear distinction between desertion and separation. As a result, the establishment of guilt may still be relevant in divorce proceedings (Rahmatian, 1996).

**Nigerian Reactions to the Matrimonial Causes Act 1970**

The Matrimonial Causes Act 1970 provoked a lot of reaction and a barrage of criticisms from many quarters especially the Academia. Some of the criticisms leveled against it were: (a) the Act itself in terms of wording and structure, being a mere copy of foreign statutes; (b) neglecting traditional values and rules in African family relations; (c) possible superiority of statutory marriage over traditional marriage; (d) antagonism between monogamy and polygamy and the religious tensions; (e) the situation of women under the different laws; and (f) the still unsolved problems of internal conflict of laws. The Matrimonial Causes Act 1970 relies completely on western concepts and legal techniques of dissolution of marriages without any ‘domestic’ contribution. It was pointed out that virtually all sections of Matrimonial Causes Act 1970 were copied word for word from the English and the Australian Matrimonial Causes Acts (Ilegbune 1970; Kasunmu 1971).

One of the legal luminaries (Aguda 1971) proposed to abolish the “archaic” decree (Matrimonial Causes Act 1970) on the ground that no public debate took place before the enactment (Adesanya 1973) by military government. In a preceding public discussion not only could these points have been raised but also the fact that the Matrimonial Causes Act 1970 does not respect the legacy of indigenous values in society. This is why the Matrimonial Causes Act 1970 is often seen as an alien element

**Nigerian Customary Law of Marriage and Divorce**

Customary law, which is still the main source of Nigerian family law, is a set of rules developed and as a result of long usage socially recognized as obligatory by a given community (Rahmatian, 1996). This body of rules is embedded in religious ritual, marriage and social customs that provide the framework of a society and regulate social behavior. However customary law, is not merely custom but enforceable law. Customary law embodies aspects of tradition as well as of evolution principles and values safeguarded by implemented rules that are retained and handed down from the ancestors of the respective ethnic groups, but not unaltered. Customary law was and is never immutable. It was always changing in order to remain adaptable to new conditions of social life (Kasunmu & Salacuse 1966; Gluckman, 1969).

Nigerian customary law comprises hundreds of sets of laws, which differ both as between the various ethnic groups, and as between the various areas, even villages. Since customary law is not enacted written law, rules of customary law must be proved in judicial proceedings by the party relying upon them. Even if the rule is established, the judge can refuse to enforce it, if she finds it ‘repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience’ (Esiet; Adebajo; Bello & co, 2001).

Attempts to strengthen the weaker position of customary law compared with statutory law have been made by recording the customary laws of the respective regions. These “restatements” (i.e., systematic and comprehensive accounts of unwritten laws) were sometimes considered to be problematic. Formerly they were frequently
undertaken by, or on behalf of, colonial authorities and did not always reflect the ‘real customary law’ (whatever that might have been) but an adapted version that proved useful for the colonial administration (Chanock 1985). Some authors have taken a reserved stand on a restatement, because, in their view, customary law that is codified or partly laid down in binding judicial decisions would become static and thus become deprived of its characteristic as a law responsive to the evolving social, political and economic life (Allott 1960; 1970). However, a systematic recording of customary law substantially removes the problem of uncertainty and ensures an easier enforcement of the customary rules and what are, generally, the features of a customary marriage and divorce

**Customary Marriage Celebration**

Under customary law a marriage is traditionally constituted, as a result of negotiations, as a union between husband and wife, as well as between the two kinship groups of the spouses, entailed it is apart from the performance of marriage ceremonies and the transfer of property from the husband’s to the wife’s family (Rahmatian, 1996; Achebe, 2003). Hence, customary marriage is concluded rather between the families of the spouses than between the spouses themselves (Phillips and Morris 1971).

Among the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria, marriage is the lawful living together of man and woman of different families for the purpose of begetting children after some rites have been performed. Marriage rites have not been influenced by the modern societal changes. They keep the marriage institution and its rites as sacrosanct because marriage is regarded as a milestone in the life of a man and a woman, which will enable them to immortalize their remembrance through their children. They regard consent as
the most important element (Obi, 1966). Before marriage, a young man who loves a girl will speak to his parents about her. The parents will examine not only the girl’s physical beauty, but also her mental and moral fitness, then her resourcefulness, graceful temper, smartness and general ability to work well (“Agwa bu mma” – Beauty lies in character and attitude).

During courtship and the eventually marriage, the Igbos of Nigeria are guided by their saying that “agwo anaghi agha imu ihe ogologo”– the snake will also bear its kind. Therefore, the groom’s family will take extra time and effort to investigate the parental background and family history of the potential bride. They will inquire very meticulously of vices like murder, theft, lying, obstinate disobedience, wanton violence, and other undesirable qualities about the parents of the potential bride. If the girl’s mother is known to have been lazy, idle, gossipy, quarrelsome or wayward, it may be concluded that the daughter will have these vices. This is because of the belief that daughters usually take after their mothers. The girl’s family will also conduct a thorough investigation about the man and the family their daughter would be joining (Obi, 1966).

If either side is not satisfied with what they find, the courtship will discontinue; however, once the inquiries have been satisfactorily completed, the two families look forward to the settlement of the bride’s wealth. But before this happens, the couple can exchange visits, which are regulated by custom and supervised by the parents/guardian of either party. This is for them the occasion to learn more about each other. Since families are closely knit, courtship is not a private affair. The family of the young man invites the girl several times to stay a native week (4 days makes the Igbo calendar week and 28 days makes the Igbo calendar month) at a time with them. During this time, she
studies the man and his family, while they in turn observe and admire her. Courtship last from the first meeting, other meetings of the two people concerned, the mutual inquiries conducted by both extended families, and the state of friendship leading into the actual celebration of the marriage. This is one of the most essential requirements in traditional marriage that has endured to the present day.

**Essential Requirements for Customary Marriage**

Customary marriages could either be monogamous or polygamous, in which the man has a separate marriage contract with one wife or each of his wives, not one contract with all of them (Obi 1966). Customary marriage ends with its dissolution or with the death of the wife. As the marriage is still regarded as a union (also) between the families of the spouses, the death of the husband does not inevitably lead to the termination of the marriage. The wife can (and, at least formerly, was expected to) retain the status of a married woman in order to stay on as a member of the late husband’s family (Obi 1966).

There are some essential conditions that validate a customary marriage contract especially among the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria, these include: capacity and consent.

The parties to a customary marriage must possess the capacity to marry each other; that means, inter alia, they shall be of (in theory) a certain age and there must not be a prohibited degree of consanguinity or affinity between them. Since marriage still involves the spouses’ families socially and legally to a high degree, at least the consent of the parents is deemed an essential requirement for a valid marriage. This seems to be still the position in respect of the bride unless, according to some customary laws, the
parents refuse their consent without sufficient cause. An adult man need not necessarily have the express consent of his parents although in practice he will try to get this since his family has to make a substantial financial and material commitment towards his marriage. Today, the consent of the spouses, contrary to the traditional laws, is of great importance. The lack of their consent will render the marriage voidable (Nwogugu, 1974).

Another prerequisite for a valid customary law marriage is the marriage consideration or bride price. A marriage payment must normally be made by the bridegroom to the bride’s parent or guardian. The word “dowry” is inappropriate since the consideration is handed over to the representatives of the bride’s family, not to the bride herself. Since the bridegroom’s family has to pay or contribute substantially to these payments the prospective husband will depend on his family’s consent to the marriage.

The bride price consists of money or some other kind of property and its amount is normally determined by the family of the bride or negotiated. It has to be paid in respect of the marriage at once or by installments. Its payment is enforceable in a court. In many customary laws the ceremony of handing over the bride to the bridegroom’s family and often cohabitation are essential for a valid marriage.

Although customary marriage is intended to be an enduring relationship, divorce can rather simply be obtained in either a non-judicial or a judicial proceeding. There is no special procedure for the non-judicial dissolution of marriage in customary law. Nor is there a set of specified grounds that are to be fulfilled in order to get divorced.
(Nwogugu, 1974; Obi, 1966). If it comes to a marital conflict, a joint meeting of the families combined with an attempt at reconciliation will normally take place.

However, some of the reasons that have been adjudged to be grounds for divorce in a technical sense need not be established, in either a non-judicial, or a judicial, divorce.

In addition, the responsibility of a spouse for the failure of the marriage plays only a secondary role. Nevertheless, some reasons have become generally accepted as a sufficient justification for dissolving a marriage. These include adultery, impotence of the husband, sterility of the wife, incest by either spouse, ill-treatment and cruelty, commission of crimes (especially if repeated), lunacy, desertion and witchcraft (Obi, 1966). Although several reasons may resemble some ‘facts’ under the Matrimonial Causes Act they are not as clearly characterized and do not necessarily have the same meaning. For instance, under statutory law, only adultery, committed by either party, can lead to a divorce. However, under customary law a husband’s (not a wife’s) adultery must be compounded by some other matrimonial wrong in order to constitute a reason for divorce.

The divorce will often be initiated by a separation of the spouses, or one party may unilaterally declare unwillingness to continue the marriage. The dissolution can also be commenced by mutual consent. Such events will usually cause a meeting of the families involved, who first attempt to reconcile the spouses. If they fail, they will accept the breakdown of the marriage and enter into negotiations upon the custody of any children and upon the return of property that was brought to the matrimonial home or acquired during the marriage.
A non-judicial divorce is only effected when the wife’s father or guardian refunds the bride price to the former husband. The woman cannot redeem herself even if she is able to provide the money. In case of disputes about the amount of the repayment, the husband is entitled to invoke the assistance of the court (Nwogugu, 1974).

Where the family arbitration has failed, the spouses may resort to the court to obtain a divorce. Judicial dissolution, frequently at the instance of the wife, has become increasingly common nowadays. The court will also try to reconcile the parties but if this attempt fails it will declare the dissolution of the marriage. Then the bride-price normally has to be returned but this is not a requirement for the valid termination of the marriage (Kasunmu & Salacuse 1966).

**Islamic Marriage (nikah) and Divorce (talaa)**

Around the 14th century, the peoples of Northern Nigeria came into contact with Islam, mainly through the trade routes of Islamic merchants. The first region that appears to have accepted Islam was Kano, followed by Katsina and Zaria in the 15th century. Yet conversion to Islam was not inevitably coupled with the abandonment of traditional animism (Hiskett 1994). Several subsequent jihad’s (holy war on behalf of Islam) in the 18th and 19th century (Crowder 1966) consolidated the position of Islam in this region. Even the British colonial authorities did not interfere substantially in the Northern Emirates (Hiskett 1994), nor religion nor their application of Islamic law.

However, the sharia (law) in the form of the Maliki school which is supreme in this area was never enforced in a pure manner by the Qadis (or Alkalai, as they are also called in Northern Nigeria). There is always a strong element of local customary law within Islamic law, even a mixture between both (Anderson 1965) although some Qadis
claim to implement solely the sharia. This applies particularly to Islamic marriage (nikah) and divorce (talaa).

Under Islamic law the marriage contract is concluded between a man and a woman through offer and acceptance which has to be made within one contractual session (majlis), and as a rule before two male witnesses. Both parties must possess the capacity to contract the marriage. In particular, there must be no impediment of relationship or religion to the marriage. Since a woman in Maliki law lacks capacity to conduct her own marriage contract, her consent is given on her behalf by her guardian (her nearest male relative, usually her father). A man has the right to marry up to four women if he is able to treat them with perfect equality.

Islamic marriage is not a sacred tie but a civil contract that embodies some religious elements. From this contract emanates the obligation of the husband to maintain his wife and to pay her the dower (mahr, sadaq). The dower consists of anything that can be the object of a lawful obligation. It is according to the Malikis, a condition for the validity of the marriage. The dower is usually handed over to the bride’s father (Anderson 1954: 207) and has therefore the function of a customary.

It is a characteristic of contracts of (economic) partnership in Islamic law that either party can terminate the contract unilaterally if the harmony and co-operation of the association dwindles. This is irrespective of whether the other party has caused this development or not. In principle, this applies also to marriage. Hence, divorce in Islamic law is merely the dissolution of the marriage contract, a special contract of partnership. Therefore, Islamic law always permitted divorce at the initiative of one party or by mutual consent. The divorce can be effectuated non-judicially or by a court. However,
the right to actually rescind the marriage contract unilaterally is, in contrast to other contracts, confined to the husband. The exercise of the husband’s exclusive right of withdrawal is known as the talaq (Coulson 1984). Talaq, the most common kind of non-judicial divorce, is the repudiation of the wife by her husband. It is valid without any further formal requirements when the husband pronounces the divorce either expressly (eg by using the word talaq or a derivative) or implicitly (e.g., ‘you are not my wife’), preferably but not obligatorily in the presence of his wife and/or witnesses (Ahmed 1972).

There are, very broadly speaking, two major kinds of divorce: the proper and the disapproved talaq. In the former case, the talaq is uttered once or twice during the wife’s ‘idda period (three menstrual periods or three lunar months if the woman is past child-bearing age) and is revocable; i.e., the husband can take back his wife even without her consent. The marital status is terminated only when the divorce becomes irrevocable; that is to say, when the ‘idda is completed or the talaq is pronounced for a third time. Morally reprehensible and discouraged, nonetheless legally valid (and very common), is the talaq pronounced three times at once. This triple talaq dissolves the marriage immediately (irrevocable divorce). After the divorce, the spouses are prohibited to remarry unless the wife has concluded an intervening marriage. Suspended and delegated divorce, both recognized in Islamic law, have almost no importance in Nigeria (Anderson, 1954). Apart from some exceptions, the dissolution of a consummated marriage entitles the wife to claim the whole dower if it has not already been (fully) paid.
Marriage can also be dissolved by mutual consent (mubara’a) and by khul’ the release of a wife in consideration of a money payment. Khul’ is not strictly an agreement between the parties upon the termination of their marriage but rather a form of dissolution whereby the wife induces her husband to divorce her for a consideration which the wife pays or promises to pay. The consideration will normally equal the amount of her dower, but can be increased occasionally by expenses of the husband made in respect of the marriage (Anderson 1954). In Northern Nigeria most divorces take place at the instance of the wife either by mutual consent or by khul’. Divorce can usually be obtained by refund of the dower, at least when efforts to reconcile the spouses have failed (Anderson 1954).

Besides the non-judicial divorce by talaq, mubara’a and khul’ Maliki law emphasizes the possibility of divorce by judicial process. A woman can obtain her release with the assistance of the court. According to the Maliki doctrine the husband can be forced to agree on a khul’ divorce if two arbitrators appointed by the court recommended the dissolution after having examined the causes of marital discord and after having attempted unsuccessfully a reconciliation. This rule is accepted only in the Maliki school and results undoubtedly from the impact of customary law on Islamic law (Anderson 1965).

Apart from the compulsory khul’, the wife is entitled to demand a judicial divorce; that is, in the Maliki view, pronounced in the form of an irrevocable talaq by the Qadi on behalf of the husband, even against the latter’s will in the case of cruel behavior of her husband which makes it impossible for her to continue living with him. The wife can obtain a judicial divorce also for the failure of the husband to pay maintenance to
her. Strict Maliki law allows divorce only after one to three years’ separation and if the woman fears she will commit adultery because of the continuing absence of her husband. Thus, in Northern Nigeria a discontented wife can normally get released from her husband if she can provide compensation. The suitable refund is ordered by the court after a failure of reconciliation.

**Marriage in the U.S.**

The genius of marriage is that, through it, the society normally holds the biological parents responsible for each other and for their offspring. By identifying children with their parents, and by penalizing people who do not have stable relationships, the social system powerfully motivates individuals to settle into a sexual union and take care of the ensuing offspring (Davis 1985, p. 21).

In a not so distant time, the U.S. was probably the most marrying society in the world. The effects of that era can still be seen in the older generations. In 1990, 95 percent of women and 94 percent of men ages 45 to 54 either were or had been married (Ahlburg and De Vita, 1992). Today, marriage as an institution is in decay. Despite the fact that in recent years the number of marriages has been at record highs because of large population cohorts at the most marriageable ages, the marriage rate has been steadily declining. More people are postponing marriage to older ages, and more people are foregoing marriage altogether. The marriage rate for unmarried women ages 15 to 44 began to plummet around 1975 and by 1988 reached an all-time low of 91.0 per 1,000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993). In two decades, from 1970 to 1990, the percentage of married adults decreased from 72% to 62%. Demographers expect the marriage rate to drop still further in the future.
The current divorce rate in the U.S. is about 50% for first marriages, and 60% for remarriages (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Many observers have argued that the fast moving and competitive social environment is directly related to the high rate of marital dissolution and the increase in single-parent families and stepfamilies. Although personality conflicts and troubles within a marriage clearly contribute to marital breakdown, societal factors and values also influence people’s intimate behavior. Rather than come home from work and sit on the front porch to talk with family and neighbors, some people sit in front of the television or a computer. As a result, some people’s personal impressions come from the media. They may know more about the favorite actor’s marriage than they know about how the couple is doing next door. Some choose to live like this in the name of personal privacy. However, married life on television and in the tabloid newspapers is far different from the average couple’s life. It can be argued that the steady rate of extramarital affairs and marital conflict people see in the media helps to create a “culture of divorce” in the country.

Related to the decline of marriage is a dramatic and unprecedented increase of out of wedlock childbearing. The percent of non-marital births stood at a fairly insignificant 5.3% in 1960; today the number is over 30%. Nearly one third of all American children are now born to unmarried parents. Most of those children will live through their childhoods in single parent, mother-headed households. Similarly there is also a steady increase in divorce rate. In raw terms, the divorce rate has nearly doubled over the past three decades. Only 14% of white women who married in the early 1940s eventually divorced, whereas almost half of white women who married in the late 1960s
and early 1970s have already been divorced. For African-American women, the figures are 18% and nearly 60%. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993).

**Challenges to Marriages in the U.S**

The social environment in the U.S. presents many challenges to couples and families, and these stressors do take a toll on family well-being (DeFrain & Olson, 2004). Some of the challenges that confront the modern day U.S families and stability of the marriage institution are materialism, and competition. Other are lack of time for oneself and one’s family, increasing use of child care outside the family, a high divorce and remarriage rate, sex as a national obsession, internet, changing gender roles and power issues and financial problems, and high levels of stress.

Stress is the body and mind’s reaction to life. Stress is directly related to change and the greater the change, the higher the level of stress. The continuous cascade of new developments in society are often defined broadly as progress, but many of these developments add stress to our lives. As a society, the U.S has a great appetite for material possessions. In fact, everything has to be new, if we were to believe media sales pitches, we need new cars, new houses, new clothes. The business world is brimming with stories of corporate takeovers and downsizing. Companies come and go every day, and workers are cast off like old furniture. In this kind of consumer culture, it is not such a stretch to imagine that finding a new partner is the easiest option when there are problems with the old relationship. In fact, we believe that our high divorce rate in America is a reflection of a “consume and cast off society” (DeFrain & Olson 2004). In many elements of the culture in the U.S, people do not seem to be content with who they are as individuals, but are continuously comparing themselves to others. This
competitiveness adds to the pace of life and generates anxiety and stress. People feel pressured to do more and to have more, while grasping for all of it. The first casualty in such an environment is the individual’s sense of well-being. The second casualty is the bond affection and closeness with each other.

Researchers have found that one of the most difficult qualities to develop in many U.S families is the ability to spend enjoyable time together. Not only do people find themselves challenged by a busy and competitive social environment outside the home, but once they return home they need time to unwind from a hectic day before reconnecting with others (DeFrain & Olson, 2004). In today’s society, the boundaries between the home and work are being blurred. Work becomes more like home and home becomes more like work. Caught in the time bind, the more time we work, the more stressful home life becomes. The more stressful home life becomes, the more we want to escape back to work. Therefore we must challenge the economic and social system that invites or demands long hours at work, and focus our efforts on investing less time in the job and more time in one’s couple and family relationships (Hochschild (1997).

Another important thing that is lost in the mix of stress and work is the issue of childcare. Where are the children when both parents work outside the home? This is one of the most challenging questions the country as a whole should ask. In 1940, only 10% of American children lived with a mother who was in the labor force. By 1990, nearly 60% of American children lived with an employed mother. This sixfold increase of mothers in the workplace over a 50-year period has fueled the steady increase of childcare outside the family and the extended family (Hernandez, 1997).
John DeFrain and David Olson (2004) suggested that mothers and fathers should ask themselves these questions before they commit to childcare outside their family:

1. Do I really need to work outside the home?
2. Are two paychecks at the end of the month essential for our family’s well-being?
3. And how will it affect our child’s well-being?
4. Will I be able to develop a bond with my child if she spends so much time away from me?
5. Will I spend more money on childcare, extra clothes, lunches, and transportation than I make on the job?
6. How will the stresses of the job affect me personally and our family?
7. Can all this be balanced effectively?
8. How will our child adapt to outside care?
9. Will he receive good care?
10. Will it be as good as the care we can give him?
11. Will our child enjoy being with other children?
12. Will her social development be enhanced by these opportunities?

**Sex as a National Obsession**

Sex pervades the American social environment. It’s a frequent topic on the radio, television, billboards, in movies, at the shopping mall, in the classroom, at the office, in churches, in our daily conversations, and in government etc. Sex has been big business in American culture for some time, but today it has reached the status of a national obsession, and with the growth of the Internet sex reaches deep into our homes causing
concern about child exploitation on line (Congressional Internet Caucus Advisory Committee, 2004; Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families, 2004).

These are some statistics in the area of sexuality in American culture: 49% of women in U.S will have at least one unplanned pregnancy between the ages of 15 and 44. At current rates, 43% of American women will have had an abortion by age 45 (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 2000). More than half of all couples cohabit before marriage, and cohabitation is becoming more acceptable. Although cohabitation was once rare, a majority of young men and women of marriageable age will live together without being married for some time, and about 40% of all children under the age of 16 will spend some time in a cohabiting family (Bumpass & Yu, 1998, 2000).

Adolescent pregnancy, a long-standing social concern in the U. S, has been one of the most frequently cited examples of perceived societal decay in this country over the last decade (U.S. House of Representatives, 1996). Fortunately, the rate of births to teenagers is lower today than it was throughout much of the 20th century (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). Between 1986 and 2000 the rate dropped 22%, and fell by 28% since peaking in 1990. The teen abortion rate in 2000 was 24.0 per 1,000 women aged 15-19. From 1986 to 2000 the total abortion rate in the U.S. dropped 43%; during the same period, the percentage of teenage pregnancies ending in abortion dropped from 46% to 33% (AGI, 2004, p. 2).

The Internet and Its Effects on Human Relationships

In an effort to market technological solutions to human problems, much has been made of the computer’s potential for connecting human beings. But researchers have found that individuals who spend even a few hours a week on-line experience higher
levels of depression and loneliness than those who spend less or no time on the Internet (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay, & Scherlis, 1998). They also found that individuals who use the Internet more tend to decrease their communication with other family members and reduce the size of their social circle. The Internet use itself appeared to cause a decline in psychological well-being. According to Robert Kraut, a social psychologist, “We are shocked by the findings, because they are counterintuitive to what we know about how socially the Internet is used.” He noted that “we are not talking here about the extremes. These were normal adults and their families, and on average, for those who used the Internet most, things got worse” (Kraut, 1998 p.22).

**Changing Gender Roles and Power Issues in Marriages and Families**

There has also been a dramatic increase in the number of mothers working outside the home in the U.S. in the past four decades. This development has helped fuel an ongoing discussion of the roles of women and men in America and how power should be allocated in society as a whole and between household partners in particular. Although women have served as leaders of more than 20 countries around the world, a woman has yet to serve as president of the United States (Porter, 1999). Nevertheless, women are serving as associate justices in the Supreme Court, as senators and representatives of Congress, and in countless other positions of power and influence in both government and the business world.

With the emergence of women in traditionally male roles, particularly in positions of power, gender roles (the traits and behaviors assigned to males and females in a culture) are being redefined. Some observers argue that there is a “masculine
“culture,” which thrives on competition and the achievement of dominance, and a “feminine culture,” which aims at positive emotional connection and the creation of community. In their relatively new roles of authority, women are being encouraged to be more assertive and to let others know exactly where they stand. In contrast, males are being urged to be less aggressive and more honest and open about their feelings.

American society is openly questioning the traditional role of the dominant male and the submissive female.

Just as “supermoms” struggle to find a meaningful balance between work and family, so, too, men are challenged by their own changing world. Years ago, a man’s home was his castle; today it’s an “equalitarian haven.” Just how fairly power and work should be shared in American households is a topic of considerable discussion today. Some observers suggest that men still have a long way to go before true equality is reached in the home (Dubin, 1995). Many maintain that women have been the true pioneers of the gender revolution, arguing that wives have more quickly changed their roles outside the home than men have changed their roles inside the home. Still others question how equal we really want males and females to be in our society. They assert that females and males are biologically different and that wives should stay at home to better socialize our children. Regardless of one’s position, it’s impossible to deny that gender roles and relationship power balances are evolving in today’s society (DeFrain and Olson 2004).

Financial issues are the most common stressors couples and families face, regardless of how much money they make. Researchers have consistently found that economic distress and unemployment are detrimental to family relationships (Gomel,
Tinsley, Parke, & Clark, 1998). Over one in six children in this country lives in poverty (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999), and 4 out of 10 of all poor people are children (Rank & Hirschl, 1999). Estimates of the number of homeless people in the U.S. range from 230,000 to as many as 750,000 (Cohen & Tharp, 1999). Though the rate of hunger in America dropped during the economic boom times of the late 1990s, 27 million people, including nearly 11 million children, were hungry or at least food-insecure in 1999, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (“Nation’s hunger rate dropped 24 percent in the late 1990s,” 2000).

The number of children living in poverty is highly related to living in a single-parent versus a two-parent household in the United States but less so in other countries. In the United States, nearly 60% of the children from single-parent households live in poverty, as compared to only 11% of children from two-parent households. Data from 2002 indicated that 8.5 million children were uninsured that year, accounting for 11.6% of all children under age 18 (“Big Increase Seen in People Lacking Health Insurance: Largest Rise in a Decade,” 2003).

Summary

A review of the literature included Murray Bowen’s eight major concepts with an in-depth concentration on the concept of differentiation of self and its applications which of course formed the theoretical framework of the study. This review also provided brief perspective of Nigerian marital laws and ordinances, as well as the shortcomings of the Nigerian marital law and ordinances but dealt in detail the three types of marriage that could be found in Nigeria – statutory marriage, customary marriage and Islamic
marriage, the process of contracting these types of marriage and the grounds for their
dissolutions either by judicial and nonjudicial processes.

This chapter also discussed the social environment in the U.S. which presents
many challenges to couples and families, and the stressors that take a toll on family well-
being (DeFrain & Olson 2004). The chapter went on to enumerate some of these
challenges that confront the modern day U.S families and stability of the marriage
institution: high levels of stress, materialism, and competition, lack of time for oneself
and one’s family, increasing use of child care outside the family, a high divorce and
remarriage rate, sex as a national obsession, internet, changing gender roles and power
issues in marriages and families, financial problems and overspending.
CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the Study was to examine emotional reactivity of Nigeria couples in US in line with the concept of differentiation of self. This was very important because some Nigerian families’ emotional reactivity in the U.S. had caused numerous divorces and separations, as well as physical, emotional, and mental abuse of spouses and children.

The study will incorporate the use of demographic questionnaire and couple interviews to generate reach data for qualitative research.

Research Question

The researcher set out to answer the following research question: What role does emotional reactivity play in the marital stability within the family system of Nigerian immigrants in the U.S.?

The researcher also answered the following subquestions:

1. What are the difficulties and consequent stressors?
2. What is perceived as different from life in Nigeria?
3. What is the nature of change and adaptation to life in the U.S.?
4. What is the impact on marriage and family?
Research Design

A phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002) is utilized throughout this study. The phenomenological approach emphasizes the meaning participants derive from their life experience and validates their individual and social construction of reality. Patton (2002) provided a concise explanation of phenomenology “capturing and describing” how people experience some phenomenon such as marital dysfunction. The aim is to understand “how they lived it, perceived it, described it, felt about it, judged it, remembered it, made sense of it and talked about it with others” (p. 104). This focus on meaning making may be particularly important for people suffering from marital dysfunction where their own sense of reality may have been affected by their experiences.

Therefore, the research design is descriptive and interpretive. According to Patton (2002), the purpose of description is to take the reader into a setting without including judgments about whether occurrences are good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate, or any other interpretive judgment. The interest is simply to describe what occurred. Interpretive, on the other hand, means revealing terms that can only make sense in comparison with something else (Patton, 2002).

Participant Recruitment

Couples and individuals for the study were recruited exclusively through anonymous methods from amongst Nigerians living in the 13 counties (Stark, Lorain, Ashtabula, Trumbull, Portage Medina, Summit, Geauga, Cuyahoga, Lake, Columbiana, Mahoning, and Wayne) of northeast Ohio. The numerical strength of all Nigerian organizations in these counties is more than 2,000 registered members of all ages,
genders and professional backgrounds. The following are some of the Nigerian organizations in these counties:

1. Nigerian community in Greater Cleveland Ohio (NCGC) www.ncgc.us
2. Nigerians in metropolitan Akron and surrounding (NIMAS)
3. Nzuko ndi-igbo in northeast Ohio (NNINO)
4. Edo society (ES) (e) Anioma Society (AS)
5. Yoruba Porapa (YPP)
6. National charitable fund” (NCF) www.nationalcf.org

The National Charitable Fund is an organization whose main purpose is solely geared toward the improvement of life for all Nigerian immigrants in northeast Ohio. The goal of NCF is to help restore the dignity of mankind by promoting educational and cultural ideals, reaching out to the poor, minorities, disadvantaged groups, women and gifted segments of the population in northeast Ohio, particularly the Cleveland area. This is achieved through carefully planned programs like: job development, cultural exchange, youth programs, entrepreneurship, and scholarships. NCF is also committed to changing lives for the better; helping children achieve academic excellence, making a difference in the lives of citizens, giving hope to people, and uplifting the social and economic outlook of the northeast Ohio area.

Study Participants

A convenience sampling procedure (Patton, 2002) was utilized. Couples and individuals recruited for this study had to fit the sample parameters described below:

1. Self identified having experienced marital dysfunction, separation or divorce: Individuals (males/females) who were of Nigerian origin, married in Nigeria according to Nigerian statutory marital law of 1914 and the matrimonial causes act of 1970, or
Nigerian customary or Islamic marital laws who had lived in the U.S. for more than 5 years, and who had gone through divorce or separation.

2. Couples of Nigerian extraction who self identified as being in a conflicted marriage that continued with their relationship due to the pressures from their families in Nigeria or who were in their relationship due to the economic pressure in the U.S.

3. Couples and Individuals who fitted in the above mentioned categories must have been at least 25 years of age or above and who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

Data Collection

Initial Contact and Telephone Interview

The researcher personally went to the six locations where these Nigerian groups met for their monthly meetings and introduced his research topic. The researcher also distributed fliers for the study and asked all who were willing to participate in the study to contact him at the phone number or email address listed on the flier (Appendix 4). The researcher called all who contacted him and expressed willingness to participate in the study. He conducted initial telephone interview with them to verify if they met the criteria for the participants in the study. He sent a participant packet which contained consent forms (Appendix 5), and fliers (Appendix 4), explaining the voluntary and anonymous nature of the research for all who met the criteria. Included also in the package was a letter introducing the researcher and outlining the research project and a demographic questionnaire to be filled out by the couples. They were supplied with self-addressed, postage-paid envelopes. Researcher fixed time and location convenient for the participants for face-to-face interview.
Approximately 10 participant packets were sent to those who indicated their willingness to participate in the study. As an appreciation for their willingness to participate in the research project, each couple was given a $30.00 BP gas gift certificate at the end of the interview to cover their driving cost to the place of the interview.

**Demographic Questionnaire**

Couples/individuals who indicated interest to participate in the study were asked to fill out the following demographic questionnaire: The questionnaire asked of the couples name, age, Nigerian ethnicity, marital status, number of marriages attempted and the person’s level of education.

**Pseudonym:**

1. What is your age?

2. What is your ethnicity?
   - _____ Hausa
   - _____ Yoruba
   - _____ Igbo
   - _____ other

3. What is your current marital status?
   - _____ Married:
   - Single
   - Divorced

4. Number of marriages ______
   Number of ______ divorces

5. What is the highest grade in school or college that you have completed?
   - _____ high school
   - _____ professional course
   - _____ bachelor’s degree
   - _____ Masters/PhD

6. What is your current labor force status?
   - _____ full time paid employment
   - _____ part time paid employment
   - _____ full time self employed
   - _____ man/woman home maker
7. Counting all sources of income, what is your family income level before taxes?
   _____ under $25,000
   _____ $25,001 to $49,999
   _____ $50,000 or above

**Interview Protocol**

Semi-structured interview guides were utilized for the interviews. The interview guides used questions that were based on the research question and sub-questions to outline the primary areas of inquiry that the researcher was interested in exploring while allowing the interview to be framed as a conversation (Patton, 2002). Conducting the interviews in a conversational tone allowed participants to explore with the researcher their experience with marital dysfunction in a friendly and relaxed manner. The participants were allowed to direct the focus of the interview with the researcher. The phenomenological focus encouraged more in-depth exploration of how participants made sense of their experience in their former or present relationship.

The interview guides provided the framework, which the researcher used throughout the actual interview process to confirm that all potential research areas of interest were being sufficiently explored (Patton, 2002).

Interviews included the topics of emotional support from friends and relatives in Nigeria during the stormy times of divorce or separation and exploration of the experiences of couples who are having some difficulty with the stability of their marital union. Both members of the couple were asked to discuss how their partner’s emotional reactivity had impacted their relationship and marital needs; what they considered to be some of the risks and benefits of living in the U.S.; what specific tools Nigerian couples
need to develop for a healthy relationship in the U.S.; what they consider as necessary changes for men and women to make in their role pattern or expectation here in the U.S.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis is driven by the very specific protocol for understanding phenomenological data outlined by Carl Moustakas (1994) and emphasizes the goal of identifying significant statements, grouping them into “meaning units,” and constructing an overall description of the “essence” of the participant experience. Grasping the essence of the shared experience of participants is a hallmark of phenomenology and speaks to identifying an “invariant structure” or an underlying meaning of the experience, which is shared by those who have lived it (Creswell, 1998).

Transcripts of participant interviews were completed throughout the interview process. Initial interview transcripts were reviewed by the primary researcher and his dissertation chair to assess for completeness and appropriateness of the interview guides. It was agreed that the interview guides were appropriate and that no additions or substitutions were needed. Once the interview transcripts were completed, the researcher began a process of inductive analysis.

**Horizonlization.** The first step in this process was horizonlization of the data in which transcripts were carefully reviewed and statements that expressed participants’ life experiences with the phenomenon were identified and listed in a non-hierarchical manner with each statement being regarded as equally important.

**Clusters.** The second step was arrangement in clusters. These statements were then organized into meaningful clusters and repetitive or irrelevant information was eliminated.
Reflecting of the meaningful clusters. The third step in the data analysis process involved the researcher reflecting on the significance of the “meaningful clusters.” The intention was to consider a variety of perspectives on the data or ways of understanding conceptualizations or themes, which organized the potential structure of the meaning participants, assign to the phenomenon.

Triangulation of Data

Denzin and Lincoln (2000), Glesne (1999), and Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that the traditional positivist criteria of validity and reliability are replaced by trustworthiness and authenticity. Patton (2002) believed that through triangulation the convincing strength of the research is assured. Prior to face-to-face interviews a participant demographic questionnaire was utilized to supplement the interview data and provide a reference that enabled others to assess the applicability of this information to their own context. Finally the primary researcher’s dissertation chair and the methods specialist reviewed the raw data and the identified themes for appropriateness and thoroughness.

Risks and Benefits to the Participants

Risk to the participants. Many risks abound in a study of this nature. It was natural that there was always a blame game in a broken relationship and this was not an exception, therefore, it was expected that couples would blame each other as the cause of their problem. Also, it was a known fact that individuals who had experienced marital dysfunction, separation or divorce were always concerned on how other people saw them. Therefore given the very sensitive nature of this, participants were concerned that they would be identified by their stories. In order to address this concern, researcher
ensured that only willing participants who contacted him and expressed willingness to participate received the packet containing the consent form, the demographic questionnaire, fliers and other information regarding the study. Again, the researcher made sure that he did not start any interview with those who received these packets until he got their reply. The researcher assured all participants that all references to specific individual names would be excluded from the interview transcripts and that all voice recording would be erased at the conclusion of the study.

The intent of qualitative inquiry was to gather rich, detailed accounts of the participants’ experiences with as much thick description as possible. It was not the intention of the researcher to recreate a traumatic experience for the victims. The researcher was aware that asking the victims to retell their stories or experiences would trigger unpleasant experiences and memories for some of them. Therefore, researcher arranged for counseling at the University of Akron and at the minority behavior mental health group in Akron at no financial obligation to participants in the event that emotionally painful or traumatic memories were discussed. None of the participants reacted negatively to the interview process, while being asked to reflect on their experience or tell their story. None of the participants experienced active or distressing thoughts of self-harm or harm to another person during the research process and none of the participants requested to stop the interview.

Another thing the researcher considered as a potential risk to the participants was the undue pressure the researcher’s vocation/profession as a catholic priest and a pastor of souls would put on the participants. The researcher was aware that the results of the study would be skewed if participants came to the interview as they would in pastoral
counseling. He was also aware that some members of the catholic faith would be more open to him during the research while non-Catholic members would not be very comfortable being interviewed by a catholic priest. In order to forestall these, the researcher made it clear that the study was not a religious exercise but purely academic research that was geared towards generating results that could be applied in the scientific world.

The last potential risk to participants was inherent to the design being utilized in this study. As both partners were commenting on their perceptions of their relationship experiences, it was possible that one partner could hear for the first time something he/she never considered as a problem in their relationship and that could bring arguments and even conflict between the couple. This did not happen during the interview process, but participants were encouraged to utilize the services of the individual and marriage counseling at the University of Akron or at the minority behavior mental health group if they needed counseling in future due to what transpired during the interview.

**Benefits to the participants.** Many benefits accrued from the study. Doing this study contributed to the practice of family therapy for Nigerian population. Bowen (1976; 1978) recommended working only with the most differentiated person in a family, theorizing that change achieved by this individual will indirectly benefit the entire family system, therefore the study would help to identify the family member most likely to enter into and benefit from treatment, unlike traditional family systems therapy with all family members present (Szapocznik, Kurtines, Foote, Perez-Vidal, & Hervis, 1983).
Another important benefit was that the study helped researchers to investigate whether Nigerian couples could benefit from premarital counseling. The results of the study pinpointed areas couples needed to work on in their relationships. For example, with respect to the distance-pursue pattern frequently observed in couples and noted in the family therapy literature (Friedlander, Heatherington, Johnson, & Skowron, 1994; Guerin, Fogarty, Fay, & Kautto, 1996; Minuchin & Nichols, 1993), might the emotional cutoff in one spouse be complemented or heightened by greater fusion in the other, or vice versa? Would couples in premarital counseling, who learn about their contrasting differentiation styles in the context of communication and problem-solving skills training, supplement their skill development with a deeper understanding of one another’s characteristic styles of reacting to stress?

Finally, this study examined the emotional reactivity of a population such as Nigerian families in the U.S. that has never been studied, it took cognizance of the Nigerian cultural underpinnings and at the same time be applicable to the Americanized Nigerian needs and helped to set the groundwork for better mental health options in the future.

**Summary**

In Chapter III, the researcher talked about the purpose of the study, presented the research question and the research sub questions. He then presented a description of the design and the procedure followed recruiting participants from the Nigerian population in Northeast Ohio was reviewed. The steps followed in data collection for the study like the use of an initial telephone contact with the participants, the use of demographic questionnaire and in-depth qualitative interviews were discussed. Finally the risks and benefits of the study to the participants were presented.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Nigerian couples living in the U.S. are having issues that need the attention of mental health professionals. But due to lack of knowledge or lack of acceptance of the interconnectedness of their emotional output and the stability of their marital union on one part, some of them have chosen not to seek mental health professional help. On the other hand, the lack of knowledge of the cultural and psychological mindset of the Nigerian population has hindered the therapist from adequately addressing the needs of a Nigerian client.

This qualitative research study, therefore, is designed to address the issues mentioned above by helping Nigerian families in the United States to have a better understanding of the effects of their emotional reactivity on the stability of their marriage in the U.S. It will also help a non-Nigerian reader/therapist to have a snippet of Nigerian culture and marriage ordinances that formed the background or rather that influence the life of a Nigerian client in living in the United States. Five couples participated in the study and were asked to share information about their experiences and their struggles in keeping their marital union together. These participants shared this information by taking part in an interview with the researcher and completing a demographic questionnaire.
Thorough but descriptive analyses of the couples’ lived experiences were explored. The couples’ life journey and struggles and how these have impacted their marital union and where they are in their married lives were all explored in line with the research question: What role does emotional reactivity play in the marital stability within the family system of Nigerian immigrants in the U.S., and the four subquestions:

1. What are the difficulties and consequent stressors?
2. What is perceived as different from life in Nigeria?
3. What is the nature of change and adaption to life in the U.S.?
4. What is the impact on marriage and family?

The interview questions were woven all around the participants shared life experiences; Although the texture of the individual experiences differ, an in-depth analysis of their answers revealed similarities which testify to the broad strokes of shared cultural affiliations. Analytical interpretation to their answers of the interview questions generated the following themes:

1) Role Reversal/Adaptation
   a) House hold chores
   b) Female employment
   c) Male underemployment

2) Financial stress

3) Support System
   a) Family
   b) Society (some opportunities not available to non citizens)

4) Discrimination
a) Language / Expression / communication

5) Religion/Faith

a) Influence of faith on their daily lives.

In order to gain more insight into the lives and background of the couples, the researcher shared the life history of each of the five couples interviewed. There were circumstantial peculiarities and uniqueness in each couple, and that is why the researcher shared their stories. It was hoped that this would help the reader to understand and grasp the uniqueness and the beauty in the lives of these couples and the culture of where they come from and what might have had some influences in what they do and why they do it. This idea dovetails beautifully with what Moustakas (1994) stated that, in a phenomenological study, “a complete description is given of its essential; constituents, variations of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, sounds, colors, and shapes” (p. 34). In sharing the stories of the five couples, they were identified with five syndromes: (a) “Diokpara na Ada syndrome,” (b) “Mgabeke syndrome,” (c) “Omenala syndrome,” (d) “Obodo Oyibo syndrome,” and (e) “Otu Nwa syndrome.” The five syndromes are given based on the circumstances of their position of birth in the family, the family expectations, their level of education and sophistication, the desire to come to the United States.

Syndromes

The researcher used the term “syndrome” to describe the pattern that formed or influenced the couples’ life history. This is because each couple has some cultural uniqueness in their life history either through birth order or male and female cultural role expectations or through personal aspirations that were influenced by cultural or social
demands based on Nigerian (Igbo) culture. These cultural expectations or social aspirations usually helped to form the couple’s world view. From the stories, the couples told the researcher categorized them (couples) under five syndromes.

**Diokpara na Ada.** First son and first daughter syndrome. By this, I mean how birth order in the family may have contributed to couples stressful marital stability.

Chukwudi and Adanma was the couple identified with this syndrome. Chukwudi is the first child and the first son (Diokpara) in a family of eight children. As the Diokpara, he was expected to be a father figure to his siblings. In the absence of his father, his family and the community look up to him for major decisions as it concerns his father’s family. His father was a school teacher and his mother was a homemaker. His family sent him to the United States for studies after his high school studies. His parents intended for him to get college education then return to Nigeria and get a good paying job, in the process supporting his parents financially to raise his younger siblings. His parents encouraged him to marry his high school sweetheart, an ebony black and beautiful girl called Adanma. His parents reasoned that convincing their son to marry a girl from a good home like Adanma would make him focus and finish his studies in a record time and also would make him to be aware of the responsibilities that awaited for him at home as the first son (Diokpara).

Adanma was two years younger than Chukwudi and from a family of four children (3 girls and one boy). She was the oldest and her only brother was the youngest of the family. Adanma, as the oldest girl, played the role of a second mother to her younger siblings. Whenever her mother went to the market or had an important errand to do, she would be in charge of her younger siblings. It would be her duty to see that the
house chores were done and that every child ate their meal at the proper time. So when she married and left their house, she was sorely missed by her mother and siblings.

In the late 1970s, when Chukwudi left Nigeria for the States, the economy in Nigeria was good because of the money that came in from the oil industry. There were many job opportunities for educated people, so many families tried to take advantage of that by giving their children a better life through education. Chukwudi arrived in the States and started his studies with hope of finishing and going back to Nigeria as planned. The first year was too lonely for him. Life was different from what he was used to in Nigeria. Coming from a fairly large family, he had always had people around him but since he came to the United States, life was different. He felt lonely for the first time in his life. After the first year he convinced his parents to bring Adanma over to the States, so that she would keep him company and help him to get more focused and, most importantly for Adanma, to get some higher education for herself because of the job opportunities available in Nigeria. His parents obliged him and sponsored his wife Adanma to the States.

Initially things seemed to be good and the future looked so bright for the young couple. Due to the fact that Chukwudi and Adanma lived in the United States on student visas, they did not want to start a family until they finished their education. They were aware of the stress that would come from taking care of children and going to school as international students. Their resolve on this issue did not last long. In a short while their first child arrived and the child’s birth made their fears real. Their academic stress became compounded with childcare stress. They struggled to juggle part time jobs, studies, and childcare. Highlighting this point, Adanma said:
What we would do is we would schedule class and work so that each of us would be available to take care of the child. Going to school, going to work and having children was hard. I had my second child in 1997 and I had him on Sunday, went home on Monday, went back to school on Tuesday, went back to work on Wednesday. My employer sent me back because my stomach was still big, but what we were doing was, we would select classes in such a way that two of us would not be in class at the same time, so if I’m in class he would be home. So when it is time for his class he would put the child or the children in the car and drop them off [and] when I come out of class I would get in the steering wheel and drive the children home while he went to class because we could not afford babysitter. (1, A, p. 5).

Chukwudi and Adanma’s problem was not only from the United States but also from Nigeria. At this point in their lives, their parents had stopped sending money from Nigeria. They had exhausted the money their parents saved for their studies. They had to fend for themselves and still struggled to enroll full time at school, which is a requirement for international students in order to remain in good immigration status. They started doing all kinds of jobs and even begging for food from the school cafeteria.

Adanma eloquently and emotionally described this point

It is extremely difficult, extremely difficult. I could remember back then when we were having children there was a day we picked up 25 cents on the street and used it to buy a loaf of bread that lasted 2 weeks for us, and sometimes we went to the student union, to the student cafeteria, when we were both in school and they will pay him a $1.96 cents an hour that was back in early 1980s, late 1970s and early 80s minimum wage was $1.96. So they were paying him his with money and then they were paying me mine with food and sometimes if there was any food some students did not touch, we would eat that so the food they would give me to take home would be used to feed my children. OK so we’re eating leftovers of students’ food and some time go to McDonald’s then and buy ham sandwich and then we use the ham from inside the bread to make soup. (1, A, p. 4).

After Chukwudi and Adanma graduated, they intended to work for a while and relocate to Nigeria, but they could not find job in their area of academic specialization and so life continued to be hard. Adanma explained this point when she exclaimed:
…. I have my Bachelors and Masters degree. I got my Masters in 1982 in Education Administration and with that I was not able to get any job and I went as far as getting a teaching certificate I still was not able to get any job so I was working as a nurse’s Aid with my Masters Degree I worked as nurses Aid for 15 years.” Chukwudi on his part went back to school to retrain in another field of education so as to see if he could be employed in that area. After the retraining he still could not get employment. “with PhD, he is just doing the job of somebody with an Associate degree. So it’s been very hard. (1, A, p. 4)

After many years, Adanma eventually got a job in the field of her training and Chukwudi has not gotten a job in the area of his training. Chukwudi and Adanma are struggling to pay their bills, their family at home is making financial demands on them because the idea was to invest on them so that they can help to sponsor the younger family members or at least contribute money for the welfare of their families in Nigeria. Now Chukwudi’s thinks that it is Adanma that prevents Chukwudi from helping his family in Nigeria, but they do not know that Chukwudi depends on Adanma for practically everything because he has no job. Chukwudi feels inside of him that he disappointed his family in Nigeria and in the United States that he is not man enough to take of his family. He also feels that because he does not make money that he is disrespected at home, he confessed this when he said: “I must confess that I feel sometimes I should not have started because sometimes it’s like I have been made a cook and cleaner maybe because I do not bring enough money home” (1, A, p. 6).

This feeling makes Chukwudi withdraw into himself sometimes, while Adanma on her part feels that she does more than she should. Again, Adanma feels that Chukwudi’s family in Nigeria is treating her well because she is making all efforts to keep food on their table and roof over their head, and still Chukwudi’s family in Nigeria feel that it is her fault that their brother and son does not help them out financially. She
tried to explain this to them and no amount of explanation has been able to change the perception and understanding of those in Nigeria. Chukwudi’s and Adanma’s struggle with all these stress from Nigeria and the stress from their daily living here in the United States affect the stability of their marital relationship.

“Mgbeke” syndrome. Mgbeke is a woman’s name, but sometimes it is used as a slang to denote a woman who is not sophisticated, unpolished or uneducated. By Mgbeke syndrome, - Here I mean where the spouse’s (woman) non sophisticated influences how the other spouses sees and treats her. Obi and Nneka is the couple identified with this syndrome.

Obi is about 60 years old. During his high school years, he was academically bright. He benefited from Nigerian government scholarship grants given to few exceptionally bright students for oversea studies in the 1970s. In his family, he was the oldest of three boys and one girl. His parents were peasant farmers. The parents were not influential in the society; it was his brightness and academic excellence that paved the way for him and gave him an opportunity very few children benefited from.

When he arrived in the States and enrolled in school, he was focused on his study. He felt he was treated differently because he was from a different country. He had this to say on that regard: “…being from a different country, you know, my grades in school were affected, you know.” Although this did not delay his graduation, and when he graduated he got a good paying job even though he felt there were still challenges he encountered as a foreigner:

… at work similarly, such challenges were there, you know. I know I handled things that colleagues of mine of American origin could not handle but thinking of pay scale but mine is low compared to theirs by knowing
that this is not my primary country, I just have to accept what I have and it is
difficult knowing that the situation is like that but I have to accept it. (2, B,
p. 4)

Despite these challenges, he rose to a high position in his office. He was married
to an African American woman, Nneka, for eight years and their marriage was blessed
with a daughter before they divorced. He shared custody of their daughter with his ex-
wife. He said that he divorced his ex-wife on the grounds of incompatibility. Even
though they are divorced they have a cordial relationship because of their daughter.

As the oldest in his family after the death of his parents, he contributes his fair
share. He took care of his parents financially before they died. He helped put his younger
siblings through college. Nneka is the second in the family of six, two boys and four
girls. She is 55 years old and was an elementary school teacher. Even though she was a
teacher, she never left her village for a city life. She was an “Mgbeke,” meaning
unpolished woman, village woman, nonsophisticated or nonpsychedelic woman. So for
her to come from the village life to a life in the United States is like taking fish out of
water. Everything was foreign to her. She had never driven a car. She was thrilled when
her husband told her that she would own a car, but at the same time she was
overwhelmed with the fear of driving on the road. She never knew how to read road
signs and according to her, “all the roads looked the same.” Initially, her slow learning
of driving and getting into the groove of things frustrated her husband, but all the same
he helped to “brush her up.” He supported her to overcome her fear, as she gradually
succeeded in getting into the system.

The good and loving relationship they had changed when she wanted to take
classes in the college. She said that she was surprised that her husband, who tried to help
her to be independent before, did not want her to go school or get a job. This is how she explains her frustration:

Yes I do get mad, but what will I do. I have fought and talked this over and over again, but he keeps doing it. He said that my mother is like another child in the house, but he is the child himself. It is like he does not want me going to school or to work. He complains about it always but nobody can stop me to go to work. It is not all my financial needs he provides me with and I do not want to be seen as a burden to him or to anybody. (2, B, p. 12)

Obi and Nneka live with their two adopted boys and Nneka’s mother. The boys have no dull moments in their lives. Obi feels that taking care of the home, the boys and Nneka’s mother is enough job for Nneka, but Nneka does not feel the same way. She agrees that even though it is stressful taking care of the boys and home duties, she would like to live out her own “American dream” – getting education and getting a job. She said that she must take the classes and get a job because she has to ask Obi for money for practically everything, and that Obi uses money as a way of subjecting her to be subservient in all things. She identified finance as one of the major sources of family misunderstanding in these words:

It is a problem, we have heard issues on how to send money, either he sends without informing me and sometimes I found out later while other times, I do not. He oversees the money and complains and controls when I spend it. He is so controlling and that is one of the reasons why I must keep my job. (2, B, p. 14)

Obi denied Nneka allegations but insisted that he is fair enough and wonders that if it is his wife Nneka that is in his position and makes all the money if she would as considerate and understanding as he is. He says:

The problems, how understanding you know, how do I put it this way, with respect to lack of understanding from the one person not because of understanding where the other person is coming from, then it--it emanates primarily from one being selfish looking at what I could have had. If certain
things are different, then when something like that comes, you would be wondering, what type of thinking and when the other person thinks I should have been this way if things were different and in case you would be wondering where this type of selfish attitude comes from, so after some wondering you know…” (2, B, p. 14)

Obi and Nneka are still married but they are struggling in their relationship.

“Omenala.” Omenala is an Igbo word which translates to Tradition and Culture. By Omenala syndrome, I mean a situation where the couple’s family traditional and cultural affiliation may have influenced or caused stressful marital stability in a couple.

Offor and Ijeoma is the couple identified with this syndrome

Offor and Ijeoma are another perfect example of Nigerian couple who live in the United States of America, whose stressful life is affecting the stability of their marriage. Offor came from a polygamous family. He is the first son of his father who was an African tradition religionist (traditionalist). Offor’s mother was the first wife, or the Lolo, in a four-wife family. As the Lolo, she was highly respected by the other wives and the society; for instance, she was the only wife allowed to wear an anklet to represent her husband’s titles. She sat with her husband in a ceremonial gathering.

Offor has two brothers and one sister. He had many half brothers and sisters. His father’s second wife had four sons and three girls, while the third wife had six girls and the fourth wife had three boys and four girls. His father’s compound is fairly large, with five small houses. The four women had each a house for her and her children while his father has a house to himself and which included the obi where he received his guests.

His father had a lot of land, and with these wives and their children it meant a lot of farm land to cultivate. Even though the children had enough food to eat at home, they were not satisfied because they wanted to be like children from Christian families whose
parents laid much emphasis on education and encouraged them to go to school. Offor’s father did not lay emphasis on education, but his wives encouraged their children to go to school they paid their children school fees. There was a lot of jealousy and sibling rivalry among all the children because they lived at the level of survival of the fittest and competing for their father’s love.

Offor managed to finish high school in Nigeria and started his own business. After awhile he noticed that his business was not doing well and he sold it and used the money he realized to travel to the United States in search of a greener pasture. He did not specifically come to the United States for studies, but since it is necessary that he had to go to school and be trained for the United States labor market, he registered for classes. This is how he explained it:

…. through … hardworking I have been--I did different things, like selling- - I am salesperson by nature, you know. I did a lot of door-to-door sales. Selling student handbooks, you know then—you know, different sales and then owning my little business-- ice cream business right from school. (3, C, p. 3)

At school his focus was business, he sold anything he could lay his hands on to make extra cash. This love of money distracted him in his studies and he did not really focus or pay much attention to his studies, he reminiscence and said:

….it has held me not to get a job. Number one is there are two things that contributed to that. During my student life, I was a business man, I was making money. I never did internship you know, this is a fact. (3, C, p. 4)

Offor married an African American lady, and it was through this marriage that he secured United States citizenship. When his father and mother learned that he married an American woman, they objected to this marriage, because according to them she would not understand their culture and may do things differently. Offor later ended this
relationship and divorced the woman. After the divorce, his parents found and recommended a much younger, beautiful Ijeoma to him. He travelled to Nigeria and saw her, liked her and married her. Ijeoma had just finished high school at that time.

Ijeoma is from a good Christian family. Her father and mother were married in the church. She is the youngest of her siblings. She has two brothers and one sister. Her parents placed high premium on education. They encouraged her to make sure she enrolled in the university immediately when she came over to the States. Ijeoma kept to her parents advised and enrolled in school immediately after she arrived. She reminisced:

…. we came from a far place and the only way we can get a job easily, and start, you know making a living is doing nursing. I really do not want to go into nursing. But when two--three people told me their experiences, so I changed my career into nursing and started as an CNA and went to two year RN program and then now I have my BS and since then I have been working, you know I started as a CNA, and move into nursing student, and now RN. You know, in my workplace I am now a supervisor. (3, C, p. 7)

Offor and Ijeoma have four boys. Offor is someone who believed in the tradition of his fathers, like his father who was a traditionalist. He believed it is not a man’s duty to be at home while the woman is at work, but since this is the situation he finds himself; it upsets him because Ijeoma is at work always and he keeps the house and takes care of the boys. This is how he explained it:

In the family, naturally in our own culture the women—the kids stay with the mother most of the time. The men do not babysit. The men do not babysit. The men do the work. The men bring the food, you know support the major aspect of the family. The women raise the kids they nourish the kids. Here the reverse is the case with some Nigerians who are not completely employed like in my own family. My wife is full-time, spend more time outside, you know in the workplace. We the men, you know, spend more time inside take care of the kids. That is Number one. Number two is cooking. So, the men-we did not let our parents most of time teach us
how to cook. They teach the women because the mothers prefer their food. So we (men) who do not know how to cook wait for our wives to cook and that this big a problem. Ok, it is difficult for us to adjust maybe some people I have heard who know--had to cook and still look at it as a responsibility of the woman to cook. (3, C, p. 10)

Ijeoma on her part said that she did not mind fulfilling her home duties. The problem comes from her husband’s over bearing demands. She said that she has planned her schedule in such a way that she will be able to accomplish all she wants to do.

…Well, like I said before family upbringing is very important in one’s life and why I said that is--that the way I was raised I think I would say, I would thank God because I kind of did all of these things even before I got married. So, being a married woman, I see how my own parents lived their lives and my sister that I lived with, the way she lived her marital life. It is not really a big problem to me but I know it is a big stress but the only good thing is that I know how to plan my life. Since I know that I work 12 hour shift, I try to plan the other things like keeping the house ----- the cooking and all that, the way that will not interfere or give me some stress or try to on Saturdays and Sundays I go shopping, cook on Sunday, and keep in the fridge for the week. So even if I am not there, all they have to do is to warm the food and eat. (3, C, p. 11)

In summary the main problem the Offor is struggling with is the situation of role reversal, financial stress coming from the expectations and demands from his father’s family in Nigeria. He feels uncomfortable with his condition. Ijeoma on her part is highly stressed out, with the demands of her job and family care that her husband leaves undone and waiting for her to do it because according to him it is the woman’s role to play.

“Obodo Oyibo.” Obodo Oyibo means white man’s land. Obodo Oyibo syndrome is a situation where the unrealized desires or goals in the white man’s land have influenced or caused stressful marital stability. The couple identified with this syndrome is Obinna and Nwaka
Obinna and Nwaka are another good example of a Nigerian couple who live in the United States of America, and whose stressful life is affecting their emotional reactivity and the stability of their marriage. Obinna from a protestant family, after he graduated from high school, he went for an apprenticeship for five years before he started his own business. His business did well for a time, and during the time his business was doing well, he built a house where his whole family (his parents and siblings) moved. Things were good until his business slowed down, and it was at this time that he sold business and used the money to relocate to the United States. When he came to the United States, he did not enroll in any institution but worked as a waiter in restaurants or as a bartender, and at one time as a cab driver. When he felt he had saved enough money, he travelled to Nigeria to marry a wife.

He wanted to get married to his former girlfriend, but his former girlfriend had already married by the time he went back. His parents then recommended Nwaka, a very beautiful girl from the same village. Nwaka’s parents are devout Catholics. Her father was the parish catechist and her mother sang in the parish choir. It was usually expected that Catholic boys and girls marry Catholics while Protestant boys and girls marry from amongst Protestants. So when Obinna came for Nwaka, Nwaka’s parents refused but Nwaka agreed. When Nwaka’s parents noticed that they could not influence their daughter decision to marry Obinna, they gave the young couple their consent.

Nwaka had had always wanted to come to the United States. While in school she said that it was a dream of any girl to go to the “land of promise”— The United States. So when the prospect of going to the United States came through marriage, she did not want to miss it, and she jumped at it. Her excitement was expressed this way: “I came to
the United States in 1993—June 1993. I had a very nice reception when I entered the airport on my port of entry. Everybody was so friendly” (4, D, p. 1).

Nwaka’s excitement was short lived, because she sadly found out that the life in Nigeria and the life in the United States are totally different. She lamented:

…..not necessarily I was trying to say that the reception I received from the airport was totally different from the main system, you know like the working with the people and then juggling the family work and school. … Yeah, work, work, work. I have had a different problem with work—umm—working in the United States as a nurse has not been easy so most of the time I lose my job and loss of job and loss of income at home brings a lot of stress. (4, D, p. 1)

Nwaka’s loss of job, lack of safe net like family support as she had in Nigeria brought a lot of stress in their relationship and this affected how she related and talked to Obinna and how Obinna on his part related and talked to her. Similarly, Obinna had a job but his income was not enough to sustain them. Nwaka felt that Obinna has failed in his responsibility to provide and carter for his family, while Obinna felt that Nwaka is unreasonable in her demands. There was enough blame to go round, but the fact remains that this made Obinna to shut off from Nwaka and Nwaka on her part feels that Obinna does not care. Their relationship suffers.

“Otu Nwa.” Otu Nwa means the only child. Otu Nwa Syndrome is where the issue of being an only child has influenced or has caused some stressful marital stability.

Uchenna and Adaeze are good example of a Nigerian couple, where one of the spouse is the only child and who live in the United States of America. They were part of the study because their stressful life is affecting their emotional reactivity and the stability of their marriage. Uchenna is the only child of his parents. His parents made
him understand from his childhood that he should not wait for people to do things for him because he is an only child.

… right from home, as we were talking before—I was only child of my parents. My mother used to tell me sweep, sweep the parlor, cook, do this. I will tell her I am man—I am boy—I am not supposed to do all those things. My mom cautioned me, you are the only child. If you do not do it, no person will. So, I learned how to do some of those things quite early in life. (5, E, p. 3)

Uchenna’s mother’s saying of “Do it yourself” and “There is no person to do it for you,” guided Uchenna’s work ethics/habits. Uchenna leaves his house around 5:30 a.m. and drives close 40 minutes to work and returns to the house around 5:00 p.m. This is his schedule Monday through Friday. Even when he comes back from the office, he has a lot of paperwork he has to finish to get ready for the next day. His weekends are not left out of his busy work schedule. This offered him little or no time for himself and his family. His wife, Adaeze, is worried that if he continues at this rate he may not live long to help raise the kids. About five years ago he fell in the office and was rushed to the hospital. They found out that he had an aneurysm in his heart; it was only by special Grace of God that he survived.

Even though Adaeze felt that Uchenna was in the fast lane that will lead him to early death, Uchenna was of the opinion that he had already figured out things and there should be no need for worry. He maintained that he knew from the onset that it was going to be a tough time and therefore had prepared himself for the rough and tumble involved in the whole things. He relived what he told his wife when they were preparing to relocate to the United States:

Before I came, we-I talked with my wife. I told her about our possible problem—the problems we would be facing. I would be in school full-time and by then she has not had her college education. She will look for
admission to go to school and we have to maintain our 13 months old son. It was not easy but we planned—I knew what we were going to face. We took the challenge. I was in school full-time. My wife came and then went to school. (5, E, p. 1)

Adaeze agreed that even though they knew that it was going to be tough, but she did not expect it to be what she experienced. She said:

….it was really very difficult it is like, just you know, We did not actually have full-time job, we did not have job. He, by the time they were going to school, he just doing ordinary things he could lay his hands on and myself I did baby-sitting at night. (5, E, p. 3)

She insisted, however, that the way her husband embraced his job without making time for himself, and brings the job to their home, is affecting their relationship. They have little or no time for each other and their communication has deteriorated. She insists that there are financial demands from Nigerian family members, but she has learned to prioritize, that their bills must be paid before anything else. Uchenna, for his part, feels that if he does not do what he as to do, there is no one to do it for him. But in the meantime their marriage suffers.

**Themes**

Moustakas (1994) advised that the invariant constituents of the experience that are related into thematic label should be clustered. The clustered and labeled constituents are to form the core themes of the experience. The following themes were identified and clustered from the stories the couples told. (a) role reversal/adaptation, (b) financial stress, (c) support system, (d) discrimination, and (e) religion/faith.

**Role Reversal/Adaptation**

Nigeria is a society where gender role is distinctly separated. Men are seen as providers while women are seen as homemakers and nurturers. The role of women as
educators of children through storytelling and behavior help to educate and socialize the children and inspiring in them the curiosity about social values, relationships and the human condition. The stories the women tell help to develop the artistic consciousness of the children and it is entertaining to them. Chinua Achebe, in his timeless book *Things Fall Apart* (1958), described in detail these gender roles in his presentation of two men (characters). Even though the two men were related as father and son, but their two distinct personalities explained and captured (Nigerian) Igbo “Nwoke” a real man and an “Agbala”, which is used to refer to women as well as to men who have not taken a title. He focused first on the hero of the book, Okonkwo, who was seen as a “Nwoke” real man and on his late father, Unoka – an “Agbala” a no man. Okonkwo is a respected leader within the Igbo community of Umuofia in eastern Nigeria. In contrast to his never do well father, Okonkwo was highly respected in Umuofia, which honors individual achievement rather than family heritage. As a young man, Okonkwo became a wealthy yam farmer and supported his three wives, a significant indicator of wealth and “manliness.” Furthermore, he was known for his incredible strength at wars and had two titles, while his father who was considered as an Agbala died without any title and highly in debt. Being in debt meant Unoka did not provide for his family and therefore did not fulfill his societal/cultural role as the man of the house.

In discussing role reversal/adaptation, therefore, I will share the feelings of these couples, who were brought up with the Nigerian (Igbo) cultural/traditional understanding of male and female distinct roles in the family and now live and work in the United States. I will discuss this issue of role reversal/adaption and how it has affected their present condition of life in the United States and also the impact on their marital
stability. I will focus on the areas of male underemployment, female employment and the sharing of household chores.

During the interview, the following dialogue between the Researcher and Offor one of the couples aptly captured how some of the couples feel on the issue of underemployment:

Researcher : What are some the difficulties you have experienced in this Country. I mean it could be financial difficulty and how they have affected your relationship?

Offor: The family, or me how who?

Researcher: You and your family

Offor: Yeah, well … you know in Nigeria it is a man’s world, the man provides and protects—provide and protect the family. In this country, the reverse is the case.

Researcher: Does it affect your self image? Not having things as they are in Nigeria – because the reverse is the case?

Offor: Yeah.

Researcher: Does it affect somebody’s self-esteem? How the person is seen? .

Offor: I know what you are saying…. You know, but I think that—the truth is that if you let out what is in the bedroom outside, it affects you badly (3, C, p.8).

Offor was not the only Nigerian man that feels uncomfortable with the role reversal and its effect on male self-esteem. Another man, Chukwudi, when asked a related question, opined:

“You know when a man does not have money his word does not carry weight. He may not be taken seriously in his house” (1, A, p. 7).
When asked further to explained what he meant, he categorically stated:

“Sometimes I feel like a maid in the house, where I should be the man of the house” (1, A, p. 7).

Women felt differently from how the men felt. The women felt empowered and independent with the role reversal/adaptation. This is how Ijeoma expressed it.

….so I changed my career into nursing and started as an CNA and went to two year RN program and then now I have my BS and since then I have been working, you know I started as a CNA, and move into nursing student, and RN. You know, my workplace I am now a supervisor… most of the time I am not home. I mostly work 12 hours shift—I leave my house sometimes 5:45 a.m. and come back at 8:30 p.m. or sometimes 7:00 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. and Monday-Friday so you can see I spend most of my time at work and not being there for my family, you know but I have to do it in order to make a living. It is kind of tough, but at the same time I thank God I was able to pay rent and all that and help out in the family (3, C, p. 7).

From the ongoing discussion we can notice that while the men feel like “Agbala” – No man” at their homes. The felt that what counts and defines them as men in the Nigeria Igbo understanding is missing. Therefore, they do not feel like the men of the house and sometimes they feel they receive insults from their spouses on account of that. This according to them contributes to their negative reactions to their spouses. While women on their part feel they stress themselves so much but at the same time are thankful that they are able to provide for their families.

**Financial Stress**

One way defining financial strength or wealth in the traditional Nigerian Igbo cultural milieu according to Chinua Achebe is through possession of material goods like yam barns, many wives, and also through taking of traditional title like “Ozo” title and the highest title of Idemili. Any man who does not take a title is regarded as a failure.
Achebe said: “Okoye … was not a failure like Unoka. He had a large barn full of yams and he had three wives. And now he was going to take the Idemili title, the third highest in the land” (1.12). Continuing, Achebe said:

Okonkwo’s prosperity was visible in his household. He had a large compound enclosed by a thick wall of red earth. His own hut, or obi, stood immediately behind the only gate in the red walls. Each of his wives had her own hut, which together formed a half moon behind the obi. The barn was built against one end of the red walls, and long stacks of yam stood out prosperously in it. At the opposite end of the compound was a shed for the goats, and each wife built a small attachment to her hut for the hens. Near the barn was a small house, the “medicine house” or shrine where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his personal god and of his ancestral spirits. He worshipped them with sacrifices of kola nut, food and palm-wine, and offered prayers to them on behalf of himself, his three wives and eight children. (2.14)

While large yam barn, numerous number of wives, children and ozo title taking were that were indicators of wealth and affluence in the old Igbo Nigeria traditional society are not the same today; the underlining meaning or understanding of wealth being able to provide and cater for ones wife and dependents still persist. It is this underlying meaning or understanding that puts a lot of stress on men of modern times. This stress is more when both couples do not make enough money for their needs like in the case of Nwaka who said, “We do not have time for ourselves, and when eventually we have it is stressful—there is a lot of stress and that affects our communication. No sufficient income. Our income is very low and we have to pay the bills and things snow balled” (D, 4, p. 6). Or when one of the couples especially the man is unemployed or under employed as in the case of Offor who said:

family life, I will say has been tough. You know has been very, very tough. To marry and do not have steady job. Everybody knows what it means… The thing here is this--from my solid own experience in this Country. OK. What I am saying here is about 85 percent of Nigerians because Ijeoma said
it and anybody both men and women who truly speak of the Nigerian problem. Nigerian problem is mostly financial. Mostly, 95 percent of Nigerian family--what is destroying it is financial problem. (3, C, p. 9)

In the traditional Igbo society, it is not only the couple’s needs that put a lot of stress in their lives, but also the needs of their extended family members, and in the case of those living in the United States, it is the need of their extended family members living in Nigeria. These family members come from both sides of the family – the man’s side and the woman’s side. Uchenna explained:

My concept of marriage is—marriage not between two people but between families. So when I am spending money for people from my side or her own side of the families, it does not make a difference to me, even though I learnt to ignore some of the demands because it is becoming unbearable. (5, E, p. 8)

Even though Uchenna feels he is doing the right thing by the way he has handled things, Adaeze, his wife, disagreed with him that he has not learned to ignore some of the demands. She stated that Uchenna, her husband, does not know how to save money. He acts like Santa Claus to extended family members. However, she said that she has devised a way to control her husband’s excessive financial extravaganzan to extended family members by insisting that all their bills must be paid before they consider giving out money to any extended family member. She categorically said:

The problem I have with him is bigger than what he is saying. The problem is that he has some difficulty saving money. We have to pay our bills first before considering who to send money to, so sometimes I insist so that we do not do postpone bill payment. (5, E, p. 8)

Adaeze explained that paying off their bills helped to reduce unwarranted stress on their family and their relationship. For another couple, Chukwudi and Adanma, the stress comes from the side of Adanma who is doing two jobs to meet their financial demands
because her family and the extended family depend on her paycheck, since her husband, Chukwudi, is underemployed. Adanma said:

Well for instance myself I work two jobs OK as a wife. I wake up at 4:30 in the morning and I drive about 40 miles, drive like 45, about an hour to work, OK, and by 3:15pm I leave the job and drive another hour further for the job. By the time I get done I drive 2 hours coming home. By the time I get home by 10 pm in the night I am tired, very tired and that’s like that every day… I do get angry but at the same time I see it as what God has, you know, destined and without that we would not be able to pay our bills. (1, A, p. 7)

Chukwudi who is underemployed, was of the opinion that even though the family depends on his wife paycheck, but the stress this puts in their union is too high a price to be paid. He said that it affects his self esteem in his family. He explained it this way: “It is quite humiliating and such outburst from her is what is affecting our marriage. When she starts she does not know when to stop. You need to come and see her at such moments” (1, A, p. 7).

The issue that goes on here is that Adanma is frustrated and angry with the stress her job puts on her and she reacts in such a way that her husband Chukwudi feels humiliated and feels like an Agbala. He does not feel man enough because he cannot provide food and shelter for his family which is the responsibility of the man in his culture.

Support System

Merriam Webster Dictionary defines support system as a network of people who provide an individual with practical or emotional support. It is a family or societal safe net an individual or group of individuals can fall back on in times of crisis or need for both their emotional and financial support. Individual/s expectation from family and
society varies according to cultures. Therefore, I will give a little explanation of Nigerian Igbo cultural understanding of the concept of family and society.

**Family.** The concept of family is expressed as “ezi-na-uló.” Ezi-na-uló is more than a homestead. It is a cultural phenomenon of great complexity and a basic spacial unit in Igbo social organization. Analytically ezi precedes ulo in structural time, but ezi loses its functional integrity once ulo disintegrates. It is the peace of ezi that brings prosperity to ezi-na-uló. Although in structural time, ezi precedes ulo, both protect ezi-na-ulo. In cultural terms ezi-na-uló constitute a unity. You cannot meaningfully think of the one without thinking of the other. In structural analysis ezi-na-uló are polar concepts but they are also complementary. Their complementarity lies in the fact that it is the social life in the ulo that activates the cultural life of the ezi, the achievements of the ulo that are celebrated in ezi and vice-versa. (Uchendu, 1995)

In ezi-na-uló there is basically recognition of common responsibilities, reciprocal assistance pattern and joint economic activities either on production or consumption or both. There is also maintenance of expressive relations among extended family members through visits and support at crisis periods. In Ezi na Ulo, there are the unwritten laws and principles a member must abide to, these include:

**Ezi aha, which means integrity.** Every ezi-na-uló has a name to protect. Members must strive hard not to defame the family name. Hence, the Igbo say “Ezi aha ka ego”, meaning that good name is better than wealth.

**Ohazurume which means consensus.** Life in ezi-na-uló operates more at the level of mutual understanding and consensus than at the level of legislation. This does not mean that there are no guiding laws. There are guiding laws. Far beyond the rule of
law, there is the rule of love and mutual understanding and respect. When conflicts and misunderstanding occur, brotherly love guarantees reconciliation.

In the Nigerian Igbo traditional society, there are always family members to extend hand of help in times of crisis or when one needs help. Chinua Achebe exemplified this in the life of Okonkwo when Okonkwo was forced into exile to his maternal home. Uchendu, Okonkwo’s maternal uncle welcomed him with the rest of his family. They helped him build a new compound of three huts for his wives and an obi in his maternal home; they also lent him yam seeds to start a farm. Uchendu later noticed that Okonkwo was depressed because of being sent on exile and he invited him for a heart-to-heart talk in the presence of his extended family members. He counseled Okonkwo and advised him to receive the comfort of his motherland gratefully. He reminded him that many have been worse off, for instance that he himself has lost all but one of his 6 wives and buried 22 children. Even so, he told Okonkwo, “I did not hang myself, and I am still alive.”

The above narrative shows that Okonkwo and his large family were not homeless when they lost their home. They were provided with enough yam, which can be compared to a lot of money in our modern time. When his uncle noticed that he (Okonkwo) was depressed he summon the whole family and everybody helped to talk him out of his depression.

*Society – Umunna.* Closely related to Ezi na Ulo is Umunna. Umunna is widely used to denote kindred. Every individual identity starts from ezi na ulo and extend to umunna. Igbo person without umunna is like a tree without a root or a body without the
head. Uchendu sees it this way: “An Igbo without Umunna is an Igbo without citizenship both in the world of human beings and in the world of ancestors.”

People from the same umunna occupy a section of the village and owns common lands, which they allocate to its members for housing and farming. Umunna is led by a formal lineage head, the Okpara, who is usually its senior member. In some groups, this individual is the oldest male of the oldest branch of the lineage; in others, he is the oldest male overall. His office derives from the ritual importance of his ownership of a sacred object called ofo. The ofo is a special tree branch, which embodies the spirits of the ancestors. He performs scarifies to them and also carries out important observances for the earth goddess. The Okpara is the umunna’s political leader and its representative to the village’s governing council.

The couples I interviewed came from the people that have the above world view when it comes to support system from both family and the society. This is how Ijeoma explained it:

….the experiences I had since I have been here like I said or like my husband said is very tough. You are here alone because I remember when I had my first son I did not know anything about child care, I babysat my sister’s kids but I really did not know what was involved. Until I have I had my own child--my first baby. So, that was it. Then, he was not home. I was by myself. I had C-section… I cried and I know if it were in Nigeria, I would have somebody around me but here I am here alone .(3, C, p. 6)

Ijeoma was not the only person who felt this way, when asked the same question. Adanma explained that the lack they suffered would not have happened if they stayed back in Nigeria. She strongly believed that the support network they would have gotten from Nigerian family/society would have cushioned the effect of their financial difficulty as full time students. Obi brought the discussion to another level when he
enthused that one of the major factors that work against some of the Nigerian immigrants is their immigration status, and thus he said:

There’s no support system because as a foreigner you are not qualified, you know to get some of the benefits citizens may have unless you have your citizenship. We just try to adjust my job sometimes I have to take my vacation times to be home so that my wife would go to school and or at least do some other things that are necessary. So, I would have to adjust give and take—that way. When I do not have any other vacation, and I cannot borrow some time from work to accommodate such things then she may have to try to get some things changed. (2, B, p. 7)

From then discussion we can succinctly state that the network of support system the Nigerian culture provided for the Nigerian citizen is lacking in the United States for the obvious reasons of cultural disparity and understanding.

**Discrimination**

Cambridge Dictionaries online defined discrimination as prejudicial and/or distinguishing treatment of an individual based on their actual or perceived membership in a certain group or category, “in a way that is worse than the way people are usually treated, while in the book *Introduction to Sociology*, W. W. Norton & Company defined it as

the group’s initial reaction or interaction, influencing the individual’s actual behavior towards the group or the group leader, restricting members of one group from opportunities or privileges that are available to another group, leading to the exclusion of the individual or entities based on logical or irrational decision making.

Nigerians living in the United States were used to a life in Nigeria where their Nigerian language and culture were the dominant language and culture of the place. They pride themselves as coming from giant of Africa and the biggest Black Country in the whole world; but here in the United States all these national pride and accolades do
not buy them the pride of place they enjoyed in their home country. Therefore, during my interview with the couples some of them complained discrimination based on accent, expression and communication skill in the dominant language, which is English. I noticed that the dynamic shift from dominant language and culture to minority language and culture made some couples complained of a situation where their accent, expression and communication skills have affected their working relationship with their counterparts and this according to them have brought a lot of stress in their lives and on their families. This is how Obi expressed it:

…. in my school, my grades in school were affected you know because I did not—because of being who I am… at work similarly, such challenges were there, you know. I know I handled things that colleagues of mine of American origin could not handle but thinking of pay scale but mine is low compared to theirs by knowing that this is not my primary country, I just have to accept what I have and it is difficult knowing that the situation is like that but I have to accept it. (4, D, p. 7)

Nneka, in expressing similar concern, said:

I have a—just little bit difficult because of my accent in my place of work. Sometime you say something; the person may understand it in a different way just because of the accent. It is not because they are working better than you and most of them will leave the job for you to do and this has made me to learn-how to do more. (2, B, p. 10)

Offor on his part has an interesting twist on the issue of discrimination. He reinforced the point that discriminatory traditions, policies, ideas, practices, and laws exist in many countries and institutions in every part of the world, even in the ones where discrimination is generally looked down upon and Nigeria the home country of the interviewee is no exception. Offor opined that in Nigeria discrimination exists in form of tribalism and nepotism and therefore should be a nonissue for any body and it has not affected or stopped him from whatever he wants to do.
Yes, I experienced it and even in Nigeria we experience tribal
discrimination. So, it is never issue to me—even I will say that you know--
the racial discrimination in America is far better than ethnic discrimination
in Nigeria. (3, C, p. 3

Religion/Faith

Faith and belief in Chukwu, respect for human life and dignity, respect for
morality, commitment to truth, achievement orientation centered on hard work, courage
and determination, deep sense of republicanism with its democratic values; recognition
of the uniqueness of the individual and importance of Umunna form the basis of Igbo
cosmology and belief. Igbo believe in a supreme and benevolent god known as Chukwu,
who created all things (in the natural level of the universe, called uwa) and he demands
obedience from all his creatures. In addition, each person has a personalized providence,
which comes from Chukwu, and returns to him at the time of death. This personalized
providence is called Chi. Chi may be good or bad, when it is good, it is called Chioma
while when it is bad, it is called Chiojoo. Apart from the natural level of the universe,
there also exists another level forces, the realm of alusi. The alusi are minor deities, and
they are forces for blessing or destruction, depending on circumstances. They punish
personal, family and societal, social and moral offences.

Igbo live in a world filled with fear and respect for this Supreme Being and the
minor deities. People are in constant fear and dread of the wrath of the gods and because
of that they weigh their actions on the dos and do nots of the Supreme Being Chukwu
who demands absolute obedience and the minor deities alusi who can attack and kill
people when they contravene the rules. The fears and respect for Chukwu and the alusi
was evident in the stories told by the couples. They were aware of the power of these
deities and therefore are very slow in doing things that will offend the gods in their relationships; Chukwudi puts this way: “I have always believed in mediation, you know, we have talked to some friends to mediate, talked to our family in Nigeria but above all I pray to God for endurance and perseverance” (1, A, p. 12).

The couples’ actions are always guided and controlled by this belief directly or indirectly, Ijeoma expatiated on this when she said:

… I pray over it— I put it in God’s hands— because I believe in God, And I know that he is the one that made all of us so he takes control so that is my own faith …. so that is why sometimes I am not talking because there are certain things you will say—and then it make things worse. (3, C, p. 10)

Nwaka complained bitterly about her marital relationship, she had talked to her family in Nigeria for mediation and had even gone for counseling here in the United States because of that. She is weary of the impact of divorce on her traditional role as mother to her children and wife to her husband. Her traditional belief dovetails with the general Igbo belief when she said: “…as a strong believer in God, I mostly seek my faith to pray as a religious person. It’s against my culture and it is against the stress that is going to put in my children (4, D, p. 8).

Summary

Chapter IV contained an in-depth examination and analysis of the interviews with the participants. The themes that emerged from the interviews were discussed. Also in this chapter, the researcher introduced the term “syndrome,” which was used to describe the pattern that formed or influenced the couples’ life history. This is because each couple has some cultural uniqueness in their life history either through birth order or male and female cultural role expectations or through personal aspirations that were influenced by cultural or social demands based on Nigerian (Igbo) culture. These
cultural expectations or social aspirations usually helped to form the couple’s world view and their circumstantial peculiarity and uniqueness.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION, SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

This chapter is composed of three principal sections: Discussion, Summary, and Recommendations. The discussion section will examine the causes of stress identified by participants in the study. Stressors arising from the unique cultural conditions of Nigeria This will be followed by discussion of stressors originating from the influence of the US Culture in line with the differentiation of self of Bowen. The summary section will present an overview of this study which includes the design and findings and finally the conclusion and recommendations for future research will be presented.

Discussion

The primary goal of the study is to examine the emotional reactivity of Nigerian couples in the U.S. through the concept of differentiation of self. This study is necessary because it will help to set the ground work for better mental health options in the future for the Nigerian population and also for their mental health workers. (Orabuchi). A qualitative methodology was used because of its appeal to the population understudy.

Analysis of the study presented two different categories of stressors. The first was stressors directly linked to the unique cultural conditions of Nigeria and the second category was stressors linked to the influence of American culture and way of life. This result supports an earlier studies by (Franks & Faux, 1990; Rotter & Hawley, 1998; Kuo & Tsai, 1986; Shin, 1994) which implied that immigrants in the US have higher stressful
life events than members of the dominant culture, while going through the process of acculturation and transition processes. This calls for urgent need to re-access the method and approach of dealing with Nigerian immigrants in the area of mental health options.

A critical look was made on how the Bowenian differentiation of self-blended into the two Nigerian and the U.S. cultural milieu and it was discovered that a good mastery of Bowenian concept of differentiation of self can be a panacea in future for family stability and emotional balance in the Nigerian families in the U.S.

**Sources of Stressors**

The way the couples shared their emotional and passionate stories broadened the researcher’s understanding of the emotional trauma or the stressful condition of life many of the couples live in, in the U.S., it also provided a glimpse at their coping mechanisms in such stress laden conditions. Some of couples shared generously their lives stories laden with emotionally saturated details of the devastating impact of stressors on their lives and on their relationships. They recounted with vibrant texture and vitality the challenges they undergo on a day-to-day basis, the efforts they have made to resolve the issues that cause these stressors either by themselves or with the help of the mediators they contacted. Some of the couples stated that some steps they took in getting things resolved did not produce the desired effect. Some stated that they did not have a good experience or a good outcome with the external helps they sought, partly because the couples they involved to help them out had already been Americanized and, therefore, approached the issues at stake from purely American point of view. In the whole mix, the researcher was able to delineate the stressors that originated from the
influence of the U.S. culture and the stressors that arose from the unique cultural conditions of Nigeria.

**Stressors arising from the unique cultural conditions of Nigeria.** The uniqueness of the Nigerian culture in the lives of the participant couples played a major role on their stressful and emotional reactivity. These couples came originally from Nigeria – (Igbo) where gender role is distinctly separated, where men are seen and regarded as providers while women are seen and regarded as home makers and nurturer. (Chinua Achebe). They came from such a society where communalism takes precedence over individualism, they came from a society that believes on social systems that are rooted in tradition, dignity of labor, strong and proud identity and respect for elders and honor for the family name. These things and many more affected the couples in their relationship, when confronted with the US culture. A typical Nigerian couple would not ask or go for a professional counseling in the face of any mental health issue, rather he will seek the advise and counsel of the elders, which does not work always in this place.

One of the couples who had this sore experience was Offor and Ijeoma. Ijeoma and Offor reported that they had tried to involve some elderly Nigeria couples to help them resolve the issue between them and it backfired:

I am a very good evidence--example of talking here-- back home when something happen you call the elders—the people you respect—you look up to the elders may be where we say elders and people close to you think that they are your friends and have they family. I have done that here and it back-fired. It back-fired, we got separated, the man’s name.

Ijeoma cuts in: “Do not mention people’s names.”

Offor continued:
I called two Nigerian couples, you know the most respected men and I end getting their advice. In fact, that would have been the end of this marriage. One of the men I called is supposed to be a Professional or Psychologist or whatever. He advised my wife that he was to call family services because he has to report the case to family services and then my wife-- I said go ahead and do that because I was very angry at my wife. So, my wife said no if this is what you came here to do, open the door, you have to leave, you know, you have to leave. (3, C, p. 15)

Another couple that did not have great taste for Americanized Nigerian advisor/counselor in this regard was Nwaka and Obinna. Nwaka shared her experience in involving Nigerian community members to help resolve the issue in their marriage, she said that Obinna her husband, felt that the couple and elders she invited reasoned more like Americans, and thus he listened while they were there but refused to abide by what they said. Nwaka narrated:

“Yeah, we have one occasion contacted some community—Nigerian community. They came over and they talked sense into him and he agreed to change things and then—but within a short time he slipped off again, but I think most of the time I speak with my people back home their advise helps to—helps me to carry on. (4, D, p. 11)

The researcher asked Nwaka whether they have tried going for counseling for issues that arise in their relationship, and she stated:

… when the family issue continued, it affected my grades and my academic Advisor insisted that I go for counseling but that did not help because my husband, as a Nigerian, did not believe whatever counseling he was getting so eventually he did not want to go.

Extended family dependency in some cases has caused some stress and disaffection among couples. There have been instances where the couple stretched their finances beyond some reasonable limit. Uchenna and Adaeze disagreed on how to respond to the financial demands from their relatives in Nigeria. Uchenna said that he
does not make distinction or in responding to the financial demands from his own side of
Nigerian family and his wife’s side of Nigerian family:

….My concept of marriage is—marriage not between two people but between families. So when I am spending money for people from my side or her own side of the families, it does not make a difference for me, even though I learnt to ignore some of the demands because it is becoming unbearable … but sometimes she feels I favor my side of the family and ignore hers and this has put a lot of strain in our relationship. (5, E, p. 8)

Adaeze stated that the issue was more than what he stated, and explained:

“The problem I have with him is bigger than what he is saying. The problem is that he has some difficulty saving money. We have to pay our bills first before considering who to send money to, so sometimes I insist so that we do not do postpone bill payment … I am such a person, that he knows, you know, when I get the bills, I write the date they are due and that is how I spread my money then he puts some aside for any way he sees it. (5, E, p. 9)

In summary some of the stressors emanated from extended family financial demands, and lack of support network.

**Stressors originating from the influence of the US Culture.** The social environment in the U.S. presents many challenges to couples and families, and these stressors do take a toll on family well-being (DeFrain & Olson, 2004). One of these stressors is lack of time for oneself and for family. People find themselves challenged by a busy and competitive social environment outside the home, but once they return home they need time to unwind from a hectic day before reconnecting with others (DeFrain & Olson, 2004). Nwaka complained bitterly about this lack of time in the following dialogue between her and the researcher:

Researcher: Umm. How is life different from what it was in Nigeria with you?
How is life different here?
Nwaka: You know, umm. when I came to the United States I had this culture shock because of the time—everything here is mostly time—time. Umm, in Nigeria, we go to work, we come back, we have enough time for our family and then maybe we are not paid hourly we are paid on salary basis that gives you a lee way. Even when you finish work like 3 o’clock in the afternoon you have enough time to take care of your family but here you go to school full-time during the morning and in the nights when you are supposed to be with your husband you are at work and then you have to watch your child so we do not have enough time for ourselves and family.

Researcher: So, you—what you are saying is that you do not have family time and support network?

Nwaka: We do not have

Researcher: Uh. that support system

Nwaka: Yeah, we do not have that support system also—somebody to help you to take care of your child

Researcher: Ok.

Nwaka: Looking for a day care. You are looking for everything. You coming home your husband is going to work you just to be able to take of your children to make ends meets the balance. Yeah.

Researcher: Please remember any of you can answer any of the questions at any time. Umm. How have these difficulties affected the family—your family?

Nwaka: My immediate family? My husband?

Researcher: Yes, yes.
Nwaka: Yeah, it put a lot of stress because first we do not have that togetherness as a couple

Researcher: What do you mean by togetherness?

Nwaka: We do not have time for ourselves, and when eventually we have it is stressful—there is a lot of stress and that affects our communication. No sufficient income. Our income is very low and we have to pay the bills and things snowballed. (4, D, pp. 5-6)

Another notable source stress is the changing gender roles and power issues in marriages and families. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of mothers working outside the home in the U.S. in the past four decades and some observers suggest that men still have a long way to go before true equality is reached in the home (Dubin, 1995; Porter, 1999). Among the participants, it was discovered that the men who have difficulty acculturating to the American society have more stressful conditions in their relationship, this point was clearly stated by Adanma in the following narrative:

…well see here in the United States we have to accept the reality of life. If family really want to live in harmony the man normally helps. Living in America and living in Nigeria are two different things. Some people still believe that it is the duty of the woman to cook the food, bring the food and put it on the table but such people are having some problems because with the way it is most of the men, I know mine does, I know my husband does, helps out a lot in the house OK. Maybe cooking, maybe by the time I finish cooking we’re so tired he will say “I’ll clean up the kitchen for you”. OK knowing our culture I appreciate him helping, even with the children, cleaning the house OK. A typical Nigerian man at home would not be doing that because back home we have house helps but here we cannot afford house helps so some of the men try to help out whichever way they can and any family where the man helps out like that they, you know, they always live in harmony. (1, A, p.4 – 5)
One of the men (Offor) corroborated the above notion when explaining why some men have difficulty acculturating in some specific areas like the household shores stated:

“In the family, naturally in our own culture the women—the kids stay with the mother most of the time. The men do not babysit. The men do not babysit. The men do the work. The men bring the food, you know support the major aspect of the family. The women raise the kids they nourish the kids. Here the reverse is the case with some Nigerians who are not completely employed like in my own family. My wife is full-time, spend more time outside, you know in the workplace. We the men, you know, spend more time inside take care of the kids. That is Number one. Number two is cooking. So, the men—we did not let our parents most of time teaches us how to cook. They teach the women because the mothers prefer their food. So we (men) who do not know how to cook wait for our wives to cook and that this big a problem. Ok, it is difficult for us to adjust maybe some people I have heard who know--had to cook and still look at it as a responsibility of the woman to cook. (3, C, p. 10)

On the part of the women participants, it was a general notion that some of them who have already acculturated and embraced the “American dream” (economic independence) had to juggle between their busy schedule and household chores in order to maintain the emotional balance in the house. This is how Ijeoma explained it:

…well, like I said before family upbringing is very important in one’s life and why I said that is—that the way I was raised I think I would say, I would thank God because I kind of did all of these things even before I got married. So, being a married woman, I see how my own parents lived their lives and my sister that I lived with, the way she lived her marital life. It is not really a big problem to me but I know it is a big stress but the only good thing is that I know how to plan my life. Since I know that I work 12 hour shift, I try to plan the other things like keeping the house----- the cooking and all that, the way that will not interfere or give me some stress or try to on Saturdays and Sundays I go shopping, cook on Sunday, and keep in the fridge for the week. So even if I am not there, all they have to do is to warm the food and eat. (3, C, p. 11)

**Differentiation of Self**

It is known fact that Nigerian couples living in the US bestride two different cultures which have different outlook to life, e.g. the US culture lays emphasis on
individualism, personal choice and personal liberty and Nigeria culture which emphasizes communalism – “umunna bu ike”. Therefore stress free life in the US for a Nigerian, will involved a world view or way of life that combines the two cultures world view.

Bowenian Concept of Differentiation of Self is a concept that combines togetherness and individualism. Differentiation of self offers a balance for intricate human tendencies of togetherness and Individualism. The more differentiated an individual is the more balanced the individual is in handling stressful situations, while the less differentiated are prone to chronic anxiety (Carpenter, 1990; Kerr & Bowen 1988; Skowron & Friedlander, 1988). In our stress laden challenging work environment it is very imperative therefore that managing oneself and functioning at a high level requires a strong sense of self. Applying Bowen’s concept of self differentiation as a way of understanding oneself and to make informed decisions in the face of emotional reactivity caused by stressful family condition offers a respite for Nigerian couples because many couples who tried to apply different coping mechanisms have had no positive result but instead more and more dysfunctions (Orabuchi, 2005).

Bowen postulated that differentiated adults are thought to be more capable of reflecting on, experiencing, and modulating their emotions, and are less emotionally reactive than their less differentiated counterparts (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). According to the theory, such persons are better able to take “I” positions in their important relationships, to preserve a solid sense of self, and thoughtfully adhere to their own opinions and beliefs. Likewise, more differentiated adults are thought to be more comfortable with strong emotions and better able to adapt to life stressors, cope with
uncertainty and ambiguity, and remain relatively calm in intimate relationships (Bowen, 1978). Conversely, less differentiated persons tend to get overwhelmed by their emotions and have difficulty maintaining a solid sense of self in their relationships, leading to greater psychological distress (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998).

**Summary**

**Purpose of the Study**

Daily challenges faced by immigrants in the US can seem overwhelming for them. Immigrants are exposed to a new culture and therefore must transition through the acculturation process. This stressful process can lead to identity crises, value differences, and language differences. The challenges pose great risks to the mental health and family stability of immigrants. Many studies have collaborated this idea. Different ethnic minorities living in the U.S. have had studies done on their population, but no study has been done specifically on Nigerian population living in the U.S., to find out how these daily stressors are affecting them and their responses to the stressors. Therefore, the purpose of the Study is to examine emotional reactivity of Nigeria couples in US in line with the concept of differentiation of self.

**The Design of the Study**

The research design was a qualitative, in-depth, descriptive and interpretive. Five couples were recruited exclusively through anonymous methods from amongst Nigerians living in the 13 counties (Stark, Lorain, Ashtabula, Trumbull, Portage, Medina, Summit, Geauga, Cuyahoga, Lake, Columbiana, Mahoning, and Wayne) of northeast Ohio. A convenience sampling procedure (Patton, 2002) was utilized for couples recruited and they fitted the sample parameters set for the Study. These parameters included: (a) Self
identified as having experienced marital dysfunction, separation or divorce, (b) Nigerians by birth, married in Nigeria according to Nigerian statutory marital law of 1914 and the matrimonial causes act of 1970, or Nigerian customary and have lived in the U.S. for more than 5 years, and (c) The couples were 25 years and older.

These couples (participants) were initially contacted on the phone and after they expressed the voluntary willingness to participate in the Study interview dates were fixed at their homes. Semi-structured interview guides were utilized for the interviews. The interview guides used questions that were based on the research question and subquestions to outline the primary areas of inquiry that the researcher was interested in exploring (the role emotional reactivity play in the marital stability within their family). An in-depth examination of the research question was explored through four subquestions while allowing the interview to be framed as a conversation (Patton, 2002). The phenomenological focus encouraged more in-depth exploration of how they (participants) made sense of their experience in their relationship.

**Findings**

Research Question: What role does emotional reactivity play in the marital stability within the family system of Nigerian immigrants in the U.S.?

Research subquestions:

1. What are the difficulties and consequent stressors?
2. What is perceived as different from life in Nigeria?
3. What is the nature of change and adaption to life in the U.S.?
4. What is the impact on marriage and family?
The main research question posed at the outset of this research asked what role does emotional reactivity play in the marital stability within the family system of Nigerian immigrants in the U.S.? Exploration of the research question and sub questions with the participants yielded a significant result of stress on the lives of Nigerian couples in the US. The Researcher looked at it through the lens of the concept of differentiation and arrived at the conclusion that good understanding of the Bowen differentiation of self can act as a buffer for emotional stability for Nigerian couples in the face of stressful life events in the US. Or a good understanding and mastery of the meaning of “togetherness and Individualism” (Kerr & Bowen, 1976, 1978) can be tailored into the Nigerian cultural life of togetherness or ezi-na-ulo (Uchendu1995).

“Togetherness” which is one big aspect of Bowen’s concept of differentiation of self can have special appeal to the Nigerian culture because of its closeness in meaning to the Nigerian (Igbo) concept of Ezi-na-ulo. In ezi-na-ulo there is basically recognition of common responsibilities, reciprocal assistance pattern and joint economic activities either on production or consumption or both. There is also maintenance of expressive relations among extended family members through visits and support at crisis periods. In Ezi na Ulo, there are the unwritten laws and principles a member must abide to, these include: Ezi aha which means integrity. Every ezi-na-ulo has a name to protect. Members must strive hard not to defame the family name. Hence the Igbo say “Ezi aha ka ego”, meaning that good name is better than wealth. Another important characteristic of ezi na ulo is ohazurume which means consensus. Life in ezi-na-ulo operates more at the level of mutual understanding and consensus than at the level of legislation. This does not mean that there are no guiding laws. There are guiding laws. Far beyond the
rule of law, there is the rule of love and mutual understanding and respect. When
conflicts and misunderstanding occur, brotherly love guarantees reconciliation.
(Uchendu, 1995, Achebe, 1958). Again, the “Individualism” of the concept the
differentiation of self can be easily applied to the US idea of personal liberty which
typically consist of the freedom of individuals from outside compulsion or coercion. It
means that people should, must, and ought to behave according to their own free will,
and take responsibility for their actions. The contrast between the two is that the Nigeria
togetherness is egalitarian, emphasis is on the social structure Ezi na ulo, while the US
culture places it on the individual.

Through an in-depth examination and analysis of the interviews, the following
two major categories of stressors emerged”

1. The stressors were the problems that couples encounter due the uniqueness of
the US culture like role reversal/adaptation, financial issues, lack of support network,
and the perceived discriminalional attitude in places of work.

2. Strengths were the Nigerian cultural values that have helped the couples to
wither the stormy times in their life. These include Religion and extended family bond.

The first sub-question asked about the difficulties and consequent stressors.
Responses from the couple participants indicated that the difficulties they encounter are
a lot beginning from Nigerian accent, adjusting to the environment due to cultural
differences, financial demands, lack of time for oneself and family, racial profiling at
school and work, lack of support net work. It was discovered that the above stressors
have affected communication between couples. It comes either through withdraw or
emotional outbursts to one another.
Again, in responding to the second sub-question what is perceived as different from life in Nigeria, all the participants noted that if it were in Nigeria the support network that would have been available to them could have helped to cushion the effects of the stress they undergo.

Another important question that generated heated emotional answers was the third sub-question which was the nature of change and adaption to life in the U.S. Participants answers to the question was based more on gender lines. While the women felt that even though they feel a lot of stress from their work but they also felt empowered by the economic opportunities and independence the society offered them while the men felt differently. Buttressing this point Ijeoma said:

…we came from a far place and the only way we can get a job easily, and start, you know making a living is doing nursing. I really do not want to go into nursing. But when two--three people told me their experiences, so I changed my career into nursing and started as an CNA and went to two year RN program and then now I have my BS and since then I have been working, you know I started as a CNA, and move into nursing student, and RN. You know, my workplace I am now a supervisor. (3, C, p.7) Adanma said that menfolk should accept the fact that America is not Nigeria and therefore should face life as it is. She reasoned:

…see here in the United States we have to accept the reality of life. If family really want to live in harmony the man normally helps. Living in America and living in Nigeria are two different things. Some people still believe that it is the duty of the woman to cook the food, bring the food and put it on the table but such people are having some problems… A typical Nigerian man at home would not be doing that because back home we have house helps but here we cannot afford house helps so some of the men try to help out whichever way they can and any family where the man helps out like that they, you know, they always live in harmony (1, A, p. 6).
Contrary to what the women think, the some of the men on their part felt that because they have not succeeded in having a good job they are not respected but looked down upon, Chukwudi sadly expressed this when he posited:

You know when a man does not have money his word does not carry weight. He may not be taken seriously in his house… Sometimes I feel like a maid in the house, where I should be the man of the house. (1, A, p.4)

The point was that they have tried and have all academic qualification to be gainfully employed but still find it hard to find job in their fields and in the process were either unemployed or underemployed, Chukwudi said:

The level of my educational accomplishments and the job I’m doing is not equivalent at all. Just a basic job in order to survive to put food on the table for the family. But family life is rough and tumble here. (1, A, p. 2)

The fourth and last sub-question was “What was the impact on marriage and family?” First, it must be stated that the raison d’etre for the couples acceptance to participate in the research, was the effect it had on their family. This following dialogue between the researcher and a couple captures succinctly the emotional intensity in the family and how it has adversely affected the couple’s relationship.

Researcher: Can you tell me how that affects your family, if it at all it does come up?

Adanna: Well for instance myself I work two jobs OK as a wife. I wake up at 4:30 in the morning and I drive about 40 miles, drive like 45, about an hour to work, OK, and by 3:15pm I leave the job and drive another hour further for the job. By the time I get done I drive 2 hours coming home. By the time I get home by 10 pm in the night I am tired, very tired and that’s like that every day. But that stress when it comes, my consolation is I thank God for giving me the opportunity to have two jobs because
some people do not have the jobs. I do not take it out on him, do not bring home something that happened at work home, I try not to but sometimes might be difficult but I try not to but most of the time again I get angry even at him. I’m your wife and I’m here I’m supposed to be treated like a wife but I am here doing all these jobs, I do not even have time for myself, for remembering I do know that yeah I do get frustrated, I do get angry but at the same time I see it as what God has, you know, destined and without that we would not be able to pay our bills.

Researcher: Chukwudi how do you feel when she lets out her stressful feeling at you?

Chukwudi: It is quite humiliating and such outburst from her is what is affecting our marriage. When she starts she does not know when to stop. You need to come and see her at such moments. (1, A, p. 6)

It was also discovered that such emotional intensity had led to physical fights and verbal abuse. Sometimes the couples found themselves helpless but cannot seek help because they felt no one understands what they undergo. It is therefore either they continue to live in the abusive environment or in rare occasions seek for divorce or separate.

**Conclusion**

Daily stressors from work and everyday life in the U.S. have affected the emotional reactivity of Nigerian couples. These emotional reactions come out through emotional outbursts, or in some cases, withdrawal from one another and it has affected their family life and relationship. This study demonstrated that the emotional reactivity of Nigeria couples in the US affect the stability of their marriages. Emotional reactivity
is a normal and unavoidable phenomenon in close relationships, most often a person who is reactive does not feel that the issue has anything to do with him; he rather feels that his partner is doing something to him that is causing him to feel that way. Therefore, his understandable response at that point is to focus all his energy on trying to get his partner to change rather than focusing his energy on himself and what he is experiencing. Based on the above understanding, the researcher proposes that mastery of Bowenian concept of differentiation of self as a model for Nigerian couples living in the US to handle their emotional reactions.

Differentiation of self, as has been stated, allows individuals to have a sense of self that is both separate from and connected to the family system. It provides the individual with the ability to be a self in relation; the individual is differentiated from others, including the family of origin, but also is able to be in relationships without losing a sense of separateness. It is the individual’s ability to be in unavoidable close emotional contact with significant others without having one’s thinking, emotions, and behavior governed by seemingly involuntary reactions to the emotional environment (Friedman, 1991). The Researcher believes that in the face of the unavoidable stressors like role reversal/adaptation, financial issues, lack of support network, and the perceived discriminatory attitude in places of work; that trigger some emotional reactions in the life of Nigeria couples that knowledge of Differentiation will be of immense help.

The above researcher’s position is predicated on earlier studies conducted. Several studies have found that the influence of differentiation on marital distress is significant for males and females alike (Richards, 1989; Haber, 1984; Skowron, 2000). Likewise, the psychological well-being of males and females is affected by levels of
differentiation (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). Bohlander conducted one study on all-female sample (1995), and a second study in 1999 which surveyed an all-male sample using similar research designs, revealed independently that differentiation had a significant impact on psychological well-being on females and males, respectively.

Based on an earlier study by Skowron and Schmitt (2003) which looked at cultural differences within the United States, and found inconsistent results. In that study, 225 U.S. adults, reported that ethnicity and income did not have significant effects on levels of differentiation. However, they found that education was significant, with more educated people having higher levels of differentiation. The study concluded that even though Bowen assumed universal position for his theory, the body of literature on the applicability of his theory to all cultures falls short of this assumption, because all available literature on the concept of differentiation shows that studies on Bowen’s concept of differentiation of self are mainly on Western values of independence. However the researcher took into consideration this position, before making recommendation. Earlier in the process the couples filled a demographic questionnaire, which stipulated pseudonym name, ethnicity, current marital status, employment status, income bracket and level of education attained. Identifying the couple’s level of education was important, because majority of Nigerian in the U.S. came to the U.S. for academic enhancement, most if not all of them have their undergraduate certificate. Skowron (2004) indicated that persons of color with the greatest psychological adjustment were least emotionally cut off and more comfortable with connections to family and important others. Therefore, Nigerian couples with their academic achievement level will be able to appreciate what differentiation of self offers.
Recommendations

This study is a ground breaker on different fronts. First, it is the first of its kind to focus on Nigerian population in the U.S. and the impact of their emotional reactivity on the stability of their marriages in the U.S. Second, it is also one of the few to use the concept of differentiation of self on a population other than European American population. The only cross cultural study that was done before now was that done by Skowron (2004). Skowron tried to go beyond the Western values of independence in the study that examined the cross-cultural validity of family systems constructs, differentiation of self, and measured personal adjustment, problem solving and ethnic group affiliation among persons of color. Therefore, it is the wish of the researcher to recommend the following:

1. Orientation. There be should a program that can be organized for all immigrants where they will be taught the civics and values of the US. We are aware that colleges have orientation for incoming students each year, new employees have orientation time. But people who come into this country have no program where they are orientated of the life and living in the US. It can be very daunting for an immigrant to be thrown into a new world, where he has to practically do things for himself. More daunting is the fact that some of the things in the US are done differently than it is done in other countries of the world, beginning from flipping the electric switch in the house down to driving on the road, and even the food etc.

2. Cultural studies. Cultural studies should be a big part for Mental health profession. This does not mean that every mental health student or professional should be a master of all cultures of the world, but it is a suggestion that it is very important for
effective therapeutic administration that a mental health student/professional have a little knowledge of the culture the client he has comes from.

3. Nigerian groups should organize themselves in regions throughout the US, and through those regional organizations or groups help to welcome and educate Nigerians who are new to the US on the life in the US. The new arrivals must made to understand that even though every culture is good, but there things in the dominant culture Nigerian immigrants should not waste time to assimilate because of the exigencies of time and place they live in. They should hold seminars on role reversal and adaptations, financial managements. On how to build net work of support. During the orientation they should also help to direct new migrants on how to take advantage of the opportunity the US society offers them. Another important thing is the fact that all migrants should take English class and phonetics. Although this may not stop racial discrimination but it will help in smooth integration into the US culture and life. This is because the US society cannot change for every language and culture but every language/accent or culture that comes to US must be learn to do it the US way.

4. Mental health workers working with Nigerian clients must bear these two important things in mind about their clients: (a) The client’s strong faith in God (b) The family support or influence on the client.

(a) The client’s strong faith or believe in God: This is an integral part of life for most Nigerians. Before the advent of Christianity, the traditional Nigerian would not embark on any task or project without seeking the approval of the deities. This practice of strong believe in God and the seeking of Divine approval on daily life activities oe events of the pre-Christian Nigerians influenced the modern Nigerian Christians.
(b) Another important point a Mental health worker should remember while helping a Nigerian client, is the influence of the extended family. Extended family members have big influence on the life of a typical Nigerian. Time, distance or space does not weaken this influence. Sometimes such extended family influence could work to the advantage of the client or could be the major source of stress to the client. Therefore questions bothering on faith and family influence or support will be a good assessment tool while dealing with a Nigerian client.

**Limitation**

The participants in this study were limited to Nigerians born and raised in Nigeria and married in Nigeria according to Nigerian Statutory Marital Law of 1914 and the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1970, or Nigerian customary law.

The study was qualitative and exploratory in nature. Results were gathered from participant couples. The sample was small, although the information gained from them was rich with the aim to gain knowledge regarding the phenomenon of emotional reactivity of Nigerian couples in the U.S. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic of inquiry and the Nigerian cultural bias to counseling and openness to someone outside of the individual’s family, identifying couples to include in the study was difficult.

On differentiation of self, Bowen assumed differentiation of self to have a universal applicability, but the body of literature on the applicability of his theory to all cultures falls short of this assumption, because all available literature on the concept of differentiation shows that studies on Bowen’s concept of differentiation of self are mainly on Western values of independence.
The sampling procedure in this study is somewhat troubling. Out of the 10 couples who indicated willingness to participate in the study, three couples were eliminated because they did not meet the criteria and two couples decided to discontinue in the early stage and it was only five couples that continued and finally finished the study.

Data collection procedures in this study also created some questions about the validity of the findings. Having the couple in the same room and have them to tell their stories had the potential of making either of the couple not to be open as he/she would have been if he/she was all alone with the researcher.

Another problem with this study in general and more specifically in the discussion section is the non-representation of other ethnic groups in Nigeria. The locale for the study had a high concentration of the Nigeria Igbo ethnic group. This group usually would be more open to break with their religious and cultural barriers to participate in a study like this. However, the lack of ethnic diversity in the study population places limitations on the generalizability of findings to more diverse populations.

One big burden this study did not avoid is its implication for future research. The study cannot suggest definitively that future research continues to expand on the qualitative work initiated herein. Even though the study offers rich and textured participant narratives, but it is limited by the small number of participants. While small samples are standard when in-depth information gathering is the goal, researchers need to only to use this study as a launching pad to conduct future study that can be generalized to other cultures.
Suggestions for Future Research

1. Considering the high rate at which many more Nigerians migrate to the US, more studies should focus on Nigerian population’s mental health problems.

2. Due to the fact that the identified stressors were significant in the emotional reactivity of Nigerian families, other variables like the income bracket and level of education should be considered in future studies. This will take the study to higher level and will give a better understanding of the emotional reactivity in families.

3. The cultural influence as a strength for coping in the midst of emotional reactivity is another area that is worth exploring further.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Pseudonym : ..............................................................

1. What is your age? ........................................................

2. What is your ethnicity?
   _____ Hausa
   _____ Yoruba
   _____ Igbo
   _____ other

3. What is your current marital status?
   _____ married:    Single _____ Divorced _____

4. Number of marriages _____
   _____ divorced

5. What is the highest grade in school or college that you have completed?
   _____ high school
   _____ professional course
   _____ bachelor’s degree
   _____ Masters/PhD
6. What is your current labor force status?
   ____ full time paid employment
   ____ part time paid employment
   ____ full time self employed
   ____ man/woman home maker

7. Counting all sources of income, what is your family income level before taxes?
   ____ under $25,000
   ____ $25,001 to $49,999
   ____ $50,000 or above
APPENDIX B

PHONE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for your interest in my study and for contacting me. Do you have a moment so I can briefly explain the purpose of this research and what it will entail?

I am a doctoral student at the University of Akron and I am completing this study as part of that program. I am being supervised throughout by Dr. Patricia Parr, an independently licensed marriage and family therapist and professional clinical counselor, in the Department of counseling. My hope in completing this study is to explore and better understand the effects of emotional reactivity on the stability of Nigerian marriages in the U.S. Information from this study will be used to help future counselors to provide effective treatment for Nigerian couples whose marital issues are affecting the stability of their marital union.

As part of this study I would like to meet with you (and your partner) and talk to you about your experiences. I am willing to drive to your home to meet with you at a secure location of your choice. I anticipate that this interview will take approximately one hour. Does that sound like something that you would be interested to be a part of?

Do you have any questions about the informed consent information you filled out and sent to me? Do you have any other questions I could answer for you? Included in the package sent is the criteria one would need to meet. In order for me to include you in the research, may I ask you a few brief questions?
1. Are you a Nigerian?
   (Must answer yes to be included in the study)

2. Are you 25 or older?
   (Must answer yes to be included in the study)

3. Have you lived at least 5 years in the U.S.?
   (Must answer yes to be included in the study)

4. Are you struggling with your marriage now?
   (Must answer yes to be included in the study)

5. Were you married according to Nigeria customary law and custom?
   (Must answer yes to be included in the study)

   Individuals must answer “yes” to all five questions above to be included in the study. A “no” answer on one or more of the questions automatically disqualifies one from participating. For individuals who answer “no” to one or more on the questions, I will conclude by saying: thank you so much for your willingness to be a part of this study, unfortunately, I am limited to couples who meet the criteria above. I really do appreciate your willingness to be a part of this study.

   If respondents meet the research criteria outlined in questions one through five, I will continue with the following protocol. Finally I would like to know if you are still willing to participate as part of this research study. If the potential participants show their willingness I will then arrange a time and location for the interview.
Hello, my name is Benson Okpara a doctoral student in the Marriage and Family Therapy program at The University of Akron.

I would like to talk to Nigerians couples who are struggling to keep their marriages in a stable state. The purpose of this study is to explore and better understand the effects of emotional reactivity on the stability of Nigerian marriages in the U.S. Information from this study will be used to help future counselors to provide effective treatment for Nigerian couples marital distress.

I am asking interested couples to participate in one private interview. For purposes of this study each couple or individual must be 25 years or older, married
according to Nigeria customary/Islamic or statutory law. Also participants must have at least a high school diploma and have lived in the U.S. for at least 5 years.

Please read the enclosed consent form and discuss it with your spouse. It contains additional information about the study and its potential risks. If you are interested in participating, both you and your partner should sign the copy of the enclosed informed consent form and return it in the enclosed envelope.

If you have additional questions about the study please call and leave a confidential voice mail at 330-881-0861. When I receive the copies of the consent form I will contact you by phone to answer any questions and discuss possible arrangements for an interview.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Akron, Office of Research Services 1-888-232-8790 (toll-free).

Thank you for your time and consideration
Benson Okpara
APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT TO ACT AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

TITLE: A Qualitative Study Of Nigerian Couples In The United States: Examining Emotional Reactivity And The Concept Of Differentiation Of Self

INVESTIGATOR: Benson Okpara.
Doctoral Student
University of Akron,
Department of Counseling
Akron, OH 44325
330-881-0861

DISertation Dr. Patricia Parr, Chairperson
ADVISOR: University of Akron,
Department of Counseling
Akron, OH 44325
330-972-8151

DESCRIPTION:

This research project is a qualitative study designed to help Nigeria families in the U.S. to have a better understanding of the effects of their emotional reactivity on the
stability of their marriages in the U.S. The participants involved in this study will be asked to share information about their experiences in handling their emotional reactions as it affects their family and marital relationship. This information will be shared by taking part in an interview with the researcher, Benson Okpara.

The researcher will contact prospective participants via telephone and complete a telephone interview with them to ensure they match with the criteria for study. Participants who qualify for the study will subsequently take part in one on one couple interview with the researcher in their home at a time and date convenient for them. This interview will take approximately one hour. The interview will be audiotape recorded to help the researcher remember what was discussed. These audiotapes will be destroyed within three years after the completion of this research study.

After the researcher has listened to the audiotapes, a follow-up phone call may take place to clarify information or the participant’s thoughts on a particular topic.

Findings from this study may be published for scientific purposes. Publications will include descriptions of themes which emerged during interviews. Individual identities of research participants will not be revealed in any published materials.

SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Participants will be asked the following questions during the interview. These questions were designed to gather qualitative data from Nigerian immigrants living in the six counties of Northeast Ohio to discuss their experiences with emotional reactivity in their marital relationship as it relates to marital instability within the family system of Nigerian families in the U.S.

The interview session is divided into part 1 and part 11.
Part I

Question #1—Describe how life has been for you since you came to the U.S.

a. Tell me about your journey to the U.S.

b. Describe your life in the U.S.

c. Can you describe for me some of the experiences you have had since you came to the U.S.?

Question #2—Share with me any difficulties you have had living in the U.S.

a. How do you make a living?

b. What has family life been like?

c. How has life been different for you here?

Part II

Question #3—How have these difficulties affected you and your family?

a. How have these difficulties affected the family?

b. How have these difficulties affected your marriage?

Question #4—Describe your relationship with your husband/wife/partner.

a. What are/were the problems in the marriage?

b. What continuing problems are there?

c. How do you/have you handle(d) these differences/problems?

d. How are you feeling now? How do you/have you reacted when faced with stressors related to your marriage?

Question #5—What have you done to work with problems in the relationship (as a couple)?

a. How do you/have you and your husband/wife/partner work(ed) together on the
marriage/divorce? (Feelings/Emotional reaction’ to one another)

b. What kind of help have you found for your marriage?

c. What has been helpful?

Question #6—Where are you now in thinking about this relationship?

a. Describe your current relationship with your husband/wife/partner.

b. Describe your feelings about the marriage and your husband/wife/partner.

POTENTIAL RISKS:

There are risks in taking part in this study. Given the very sensitive nature of what I am asking you to do, I am aware that you may have a genuine concern that you will be identified with your stories and also sharing your experiences or retelling your stories can trigger unpleasant experiences and memories in you. But I will guard against the above risks by assigning pseudonyms (fake names) to each participant in order to protect participant’s privacy and identity. Also if you a participant experiences greater than mild distress, I ask you to talk to me “the researcher” about this. Even though I would not be financially responsible for the provision of either directly or indirectly of counseling services, but I will make sure I provide you with referral lists of mental health centers where you can get counseling services. In the unlikely event that you experience active or distressing thoughts of self harm or harm to another person, I will stop the interview and assist you in obtaining immediate help.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

There is no immediate benefit to you as a participant but your participating in the study will contribute to the practice of family therapy for Nigerian population in several ways. First, it will help to provide a means for identifying individual differences in
various aspects of functioning that were purportedly stable and central to a client’s intrapsychic and interpersonal well-being. The study will also enrich the field of Marriage and family counseling by providing people from other cultures a window to the cultural and psychological makeup of Nigerian clients and thus enable the therapist to adequately address the needs of any Nigerian client.

**COSTS AND PAYMENTS:**

There is no cost to participate in this study. Each participant will receive a $15.00 gift certificate to any BP gas station.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Information that you share during this study, including personal information, will be confidential. The interviews will be tape recorded and then typed out so the information can be studied. Pseudonyms (fake names) will be assigned in order to protect your privacy. Anyone else’s name that is mentioned during your interviews will also be changed to protect their privacy. The signed informed consent forms will be kept separate from all the interview information; the tapes, and the typed out transcripts. Signed consent forms will be maintained in a locked filing cabinet in a secure office at the University of Akron. Only the researcher and his advisor will have access to this information. Tape recordings, transcripts, and cross-file will be destroyed within three years after the completion of this research study. Your identity will never be revealed in any description or publication of this research. The findings from this study may be published for scientific purposes.
RIGHT TO REFUSE OR END PARTICIPATION:

You have the right to refuse to take part in this study or stop at any time. I may stop this study if it is in the best interest of a participant. You may also request to take a break during the interview or refuse to answer particular interview questions.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

You can reach Benson Okpara at 330-881-0861 if you have questions about this study at any time. You may also contact Dr. Patricia Parr at 330-972-8151 with any questions or concerns. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, you can contact IRB office at 330-972-7666. By signing this form, you are agreeing to take part in the study.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

Benson Okpara has explained all of the above information and has answered our questions about this study. We understand that participation in this study will include an initial phone interview, face to face interview. We understand that he will be contacting us at the number we have provided below to arrange the initial telephone interview. By signing this form, we agree to take part in this study.

________________________________________________________________________

Signature (Husband)  Date

________________________________________________________________________

Signature (Wife)  Date
TAPE RECORDING:

We also agree to allow the researcher to audiotape my interview. We understand the tapes will be destroyed within three years after the completion of this research.

_____________________________________ ____________________
Signature (Husband) Date

________________________________     ________________________________
Signature (Wife) Date

________________________________________________________________________
Please Print Name  (Husband) Please Print Name (Wife)

INVESTIGATOR'S CERTIFICATION:

Benson Okpara certifies that he has explained to the above individuals the nature, the purpose, the potential benefits and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, and he has answered all questions that have been raised, and has witnessed the above signature.

________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Investigator Date

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Please provide a phone number where you can be contacted. __________________