

LONG-TERM MARRIAGES AMONG NIGERIAN IMMIGRANTS: A QUALITATIVE
INQUIRY

A Dissertation

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This dissertation meets the standards for scope and quality of
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

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ABSTRACT

There has been a rash of divorce among Nigerian Igbo immigrants. This was unheard of several years ago in a community whose culture frowned upon divorce. While some have examined factors affecting divorce, this study investigates those couples who remained married in the whirlwind of the divorce around them.

This phenomenological study reports the lived experience of nine Nigerian Igbo immigrant couples who live in the Houston area metropolis and who have been married for 20 years or more. Data from two clergymen who also live in the Houston metropolitan area and who have ministerial duties for the Nigerian Igbo community were utilized. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Giorgi's psychological phenomenological method (1985) was used to analyze data.

The analysis of the data from participating couples yielded the following 15 essential structures: successful navigation of problems related to extended family, understanding that every marriage is unique with no comparison, mutual trust and understanding, appreciation of the marriage experience, communication, living within ones means, ability to be flexible and dynamic, team work, eliminating interference from others, infidelity, involvement in spiritual and religious activities, seeing marriage as a learning process, finances, raising of children , and acculturation issues. Participating clergy identified these six structures: ability to forgive and to tolerate, preference to go to the priest or religious leader, awareness of unacceptability of divorce, effective management of issues surrounding sex, being constantly aware of the love element in marriage, and managing the over inflated image of a cozy life in the US.

This study's finding did not differ greatly from other studies on long-term marriages. The results support the conclusion that there may be cross cultural similarity in structural factors fostering marriage longevity. The results did, however, indicate some uniqueness germane to the acculturation of this immigrant population in the areas of extended family, upbringing of children, gender roles, and male patriarchal hegemony. This underscores the need for counselors to consider cultural context when looking at marriage longevity. The Nigerian couples in this study also acknowledged that the above listed structures may have either a positive or negative impact on marriage stability.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents:

Nze Nicholas Amadi Nwachukwu Udaku

and

Lolo Cordelia Ahuruole Nwachukwu Udaku

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The picture painted of Marriage, “the oldest institution sanctioned by God in the Garden of Eden”, as described by David-West (2005), a contributor to the African Dialogue Series, an on-line University of Texas Austin Pan-Africanist intellectual community series, was not positive. In a symposium on marriage and its future, Walker (2004) and other researchers (Houston & Metz, 2004; Cherlin, 2004; Oropesa & Landale, 2004; Smock, 2004; Amato & Rogers, 1999) agree that marriage is no longer the sacred cow it used to be. He describes it as “a contested domain” (p. 843), citing current issues of public debate that focus on same-sex marriages, high rates of cohabitation, and equally high rates of divorce.

Houston and Metz (2004) reiterate the social critics concern that Americans as a society are turning away from the institution of marriage. Cherlin (2004) writes about the deinstitutionalization of American marriage, a point well noted in Oropesa and Landale (2005) as they write about the future of marriage among Hispanics. Whitehead (1999) writing about marriage break ups describes it as America developing a divorce culture that is aimed at low commitment and breaking of bonds in vital human relations with no concern for the well being of children. Lewis (2004), after examining the research, questions the future of marriage and comes to the conclusion that just as family is in the eye of the beholder or participant, the same can be said about marriage.

Oropesa and Landale (2004) point out that in addition to changing views many other aspects of American society are also evolving. They give as an example, the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the U.S. population. “One of the most notable transformations is the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the US population”. (p. 901). They further assert that the

Asian and Hispanic population are on the increase while the whites and African Americans are not increasing at the same rate. A point of note here is that in most of the literature no mention is made of African immigrants. For instance, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) admittance figure put the number of Nigerians admitted to the country in 2004 as 9,374, as opposed to 7,920 in 2003, a 16% increase. The figure may not be accurate as Nworgu (2000) points out that the USCIS figure excludes a sizeable number that are illegal aliens or who have no immigrant visa.

Oropesa and Landale (2004) question how this shifting demographic landscape will affect the future of the family and marriage. There is some indication that there would be repercussions as they point out, with regard to the Hispanics, that “exposure to the United States is likely to erode marriage among Hispanic immigrants and their descendants”. (p. 901). The same trend seems to run among other ethnic groups (Asian Indian Immigrants, Murthy, 1996; Russian Immigrants, Ginsburg 2002; Laotians Immigrants, Meredith & Rowe, 1986).

Marriage in Nigerian Immigrant Context

But what is happening with the Nigerian Immigrant Community? David-West expresses it this way, “It is puzzling and exceedingly unsettling to see the increasing divorce rate among Nigerian couples in the United States” (p. 1). He goes on to state that “it’s indeed frightening that most Nigerians (in the U.S.) know a Nigerian couple or two (also in the U.S.) who are going through separation and divorce” (p. 1). He laments that this was not the case a few years ago. He initiated a vigorous debate among Nigerian intellectuals with no less than ten articles posted on the African Series Dialogue Website regarding this issue.

There is also a more sobering dimension about the divorce issue among the Nigerian community. This is not the issue of divorce per se but divorce by violence and divorce by

murder. From 2005 to 2008, Kalunta Crumpton (2013) use online internet data sources to examine the murder of nine Nigerian women by their spouses. She contended that without the media, especially the internet that these incidents and issues of intimate partner violence among Nigerian Community would have received little or no public attention. Kalunta Crumpton (2013) concludes that two articulation issues contributed to the murder, patriarchal gender relations and economic- based gender role reversal. These were stated as follows: “the women’s violation of the patriarchal agreement in gender relationship by virtue of her un-submissiveness to male authority or patriarchal requirements is expressed as the reason for the deadly violence” (p. 219); and “according to the internet report, all the victims were either the sole or major breadwinner” (p.221).

How does one then explain what is happening in the Nigerian Immigrant Community regarding the issue of marriage and divorce? Nigerian intellectuals have tried to opine as to the reason for this increase. But there is another aspect that has been overlooked in the discussion. What about Nigerian immigrant marriages that continue to be stable despite the present wave of divorce? It is important to examine this issue in the light of Igbo (sometimes referred to as Ibo) understanding of marriage. Basden (2006) one of the early missionaries to Igboland observed that “MARRIAGE IS A MOST IMPORTANT event in the Ibo’s life” (p.59). Igbos look forward to being married. It has an intrinsic connection to the community. Anekwe (2004) stated that ‘through marriage, a family is raised which forms the core of the Igbo community. The inter-connection between family and community is always present’ (p.48). The family line and community is perpetuated through marriage (Obi, 1970). Marriages have to be stable for them to fulfil this role. Divorce, therefore, is not the norm. Njoku (2001) stated it some how comical “Divorce is not in our marriage dictionary. It is almost a taboo. For the Igbos, therefore, before

marriage, you choose whomever you love. After marriage you have to love the person you chose for there is no going back” (p. 73). Igbo marriage will be further examined in chapter two. How did the Igbo couples that have held on to this understanding of marriage and not succumbed to the influences around them that have torpedoed other marriages managed to survive? The present study addresses how the Igbo couples survive negative influences around them and proposes to explore how long-term Nigerian immigrant couples describe the experience and the meaning of being married for 20 or more years.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore lived experiences of long-term immigrant Nigerian marriages and how nine Nigerian couples gave meaning to their 20 or more years of marriage. The study also sought to explore couples' perceptions of the marriage sustaining factors that helped to maintain their own marriage in the societal context of the failing of other marriages around them. Consistent with a qualitative focus this report emphasizes the actual words and reports of participants telling their stories in their own words and from their own experiences (Simanski, 1996).

Research Questions

The research questions consisted of grand tour questions followed by sub questions (Smith, 2005). The main question asked: How do long term Igbo Nigerian immigrant couples describe the experience of being married for 20 or more years. It was anticipated that interviews with these couples would increase our understanding of what factors and issues have facilitated the stability of their marriage and what had not helped them? In keeping with qualitative research subsequent research questions evolved as the research progressed. (Appendix B)

Significance of the study

Oropesa and Landale (2004) make a striking observation of the changing population landscape of the US as it pertains to the increase in racial and ethnic diversity. With the diversity lottery visa program, many Africans have been able to immigrate to the US. As these immigrants arrive in the US they encounter acculturation issues that impinge on their culture and institutions, one of which is marriage. This study highlights the case of marriages that survive and brings to focus the state of long-term marriage among one group of immigrants, the Nigerian Igbos. Another potential area of importance of this study is the lack of adequate research on the population that is being investigated (Nworgu, 2000). There is substantial amount of literature on African Americans but very little on Africans and in particular African Immigrants (Nwabugwu, 2006; Nworgu, 2000; Ibeziem, 2008). The Africans do not share the same cultural experience as African Americans.

Having knowledge of what contributes to the stability of long-term Nigerian immigrant marriages will add to the literature on resilience of traditionally based institutional practices. Resilience here is simply defined as "the ability to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges" (Walsh, 2012). Beitin and Allan (2005) agreeing with Walsh (1998) on the need for well-functioning families and an understanding of what enables them to succeed, stated that: "There is an increasing need for a more positive focus on how families succeed, rather than simply on why they struggle" (p. 252).

There may also be a clinical significance of this study. Therapists working with this population will learn from the experience of these Nigerian immigrant couples what has supported their marriage and what has not help them over time. The study may have implications in terms of planning and executing interventions to strengthen marriages for this population.

Qualitative research methodology is particularly well suited to increase an understanding of unique populations. “Understanding what people value and the meaning they attach to experiences from their own personal and cultural perspective are major inquiry arenas for qualitative inquiry,” (Patton, 2002, p. 147)

Sample

Qualitative studies lend themselves to relatively flexible sampling procedures (Simarski, 1996). Participants were selected by a purposive sampling method. Participants who would provide “information rich cases strategically and purposefully” (Patton, 2002, p.243) were chosen.

Data was collected from two sample groups. The first group of participants in this study consisted of nine couples self-identified as culturally Igbo living in the Houston area, where there is a large Nigerian immigrant community. These were all Nigerian Igbos who had been married for at least twenty years. Colleagues and acquaintances of the researcher living in the Houston area identified potential participants. These gatekeepers provided the researcher with the names of Nigerian Igbo couples who had been married for twenty or more years. The researcher contacted the couples by phone to screen for those who might be undergoing marital therapy or dealing with issues that could be exacerbated by the project. This initial contact also included a brief description of the project, a solicitation of the couple’s willingness to participate in the study and the setting up of the date, place, and time when the couple was in agreement to take part in the study. A snowball or chain sampling procedure (Patton 2000) was used until saturation of data was reached. Accordingly the researcher asked couples to identify other Nigerian couples who had been married for more than 20 years and who might be interested in the opportunity to participate in the study. The next source of data for the study came from

interviews of two clergy members invited from the Houston area who had ministerial involvement with the Nigerian immigrant community. The initial contact with the clergy was on the phone, and consisted of a brief description of the project, solicitation of the willingness of clergy to participate in the study and the setting up of the place, date and time of the main interview.

The final participant was a Nigerian family therapist in Houston. The therapist provided expertise and was presented with the data collected from the previous groups for examination and analysis. The therapist served as a peer debriefer or reviewer.

Instrumentation

Silverman (2000) asserts that there are “no prior instruments in qualitative research” (p.88). The researcher is the instrument (Patton, 2002). Leely and Ormrod (2005) see the researcher as instrument in “the same way that a socio-gram, rating scale, or intelligence test is an instrument” (p.133). The researcher’s presence in the lives of the participants of the study is very crucial to the methodology used. (Marshall & Rossman, 1995)

In keeping with the phenomenological method, unstructured in-depth interviews, with open-ended questions, were used. The researcher listened with a suspension of any preconceived notions. This is referred to as bracketing or epoche. (Leely & Ormrod, 2005). Polit and Beck (2006) define bracketing as: “the process of identifying and holding in abeyance preconceived beliefs and opinions about the phenomenon under study.” (p. 220). Reflexive journaling is one way phenomenological researchers and other qualitative researchers employ to achieve the stance of bracketing. (Beitin, & Allen, 2005; and Polit & Beck).

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher traveled to Houston to interview the participants in their homes, office, or any convenient location of the participants' choice. The semi-structured interviews lasted about 60 to 90 minutes and consisted of open ended questions and follow up questions for elaboration and clarification (see Appendix B). The questions were designed to invite the couples to tell their stories of what it meant to be married for twenty years or longer. The researcher attempted to get a clear understanding of what the concept of long-term marriage in the Nigerian Igbo context was and what it meant to them. The researcher also attempted to understand couple perceptions of how they had maintained their marriage as an immigrant couple in the United States.

Interviews were scheduled for 60-90 minutes and were terminated when no new information was discovered or at the point of theoretical saturation, as recommended by Glaser and Straus (1967). After each interview, the researcher set aside 20 to 30 minutes for journaling and self-reflecting. These are common phenomenological and qualitative research methods used "to identify researcher presuppositions and biases and capture the insider perspective on the evolution of the research". (Beitin & Allen, 2005, p.254; see also Patton, 2005). This also assisted in the establishment of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

All interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Analyzing phenomenological data entails a concerted effort on the part of the researcher to search for meaning and structure that emerge with an open mind (Rossman and Rallis, 2003). There are a number of different approaches to phenomenological data analysis as there are schools of phenomenology. Polit and Beck (2006) identify the methods of Colaizzi (1978), Giorgi (1985), and Van Kaam (1966), which are based on Husserl philosophy, as the most frequently used especially when analyzing

data in descriptive terms. Other approaches they identify include that of Van Manen (1990) which combines the elements of descriptive and interpretative phenomenology and that of Diekelmann, Allen, and Tanner (1989), which is an interpretative approach, called Heideggerian hermeneutics.

Data analysis in this study utilized Giorgi (1985)'s method of descriptive phenomenology. Although Giorgi's method does not specifically incorporate member checking in its methodology, member checking was done by sending the transcripts back to the participants for accuracy. A professional transcriptionist transcribed the audio taped interviews. In view of the participant's accent, which the American transcriptionist could misinterpret, the researcher who is Igbo went through the transcript line by line listening to the audio.

As a component of the member checking process, a second interview was scheduled for the participants to review the transcript and allow for follow up and clarification questions. Participants would have the opportunity to ensure that it was an accurate representation of what they had stated. The participants were also encouraged to add anything else they had thought of following the interview. These procedures were implemented to enhance the trustworthiness of the data collected. This is member checking, as mentioned above; it is another way of establishing credibility. The transcripts were read several times to get an overall feeling of the narratives. Then, pertinent phrases or meaning units (Giorgi, 1985) sentences, phrases that relate to the experience of being "married" for 20 years or more, were identified. Essential structures (Giorgi, 1985) from significant statements were formulated, using reflection and imaginative variation. Examples utilizing participants' words and phrases were presented. An in-depth description of long-term marriages among Nigerian immigrants was formulated from the results.

Basic Assumptions

The phenomenological analysis to be used in this study requires the researcher to state his or her assumptions regarding the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 1998). There is always an understanding that qualitative researchers are aware that their realities and construction influence the way they understand and interpret participants' experience. The researcher is well aware of the possibility of this happening given his over 12 years' experience as a marriage and family therapist. Heppner, Kivlighan and Wampold (1999) attest to this when they stated: "Counselors are particularly suited to the task of qualitative research because through their own training and practice, skilled practitioners are able to reflect on and understand how their own psychological processes affect the counseling process". (p.249)

The researcher has a vested interest in the success of marriages, being a catholic priest who has prepared couples for marriage and helped them stay together. The researcher has the hunch also that the Nigerian immigrant couples who have gone through the Igbo customary marriage rite would stay together longer than those who did not.

It is also the basic understanding of the researcher that participants answered honestly, cooperated and worked toward the completion of the project.

Limitations

This study is not without some limitation. First, the limited number of couples participating in the study is also limited to the geographical areas of Houston. However, sample size is not an issue in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Second, interviewing couples together leaves out some information that the individual in the marriage experience differently. But some may argue that the entity under examination is the dyad and not the individual. Third, there is the issue of generalizability or transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This could be a problem

if one looks at the research through the prism of quantitative research. In qualitative research generalizability is seen from a different standpoint, as Eisner (1991) points out that not only ideas can be generalized but also skills and images. Fraenkel and Wallen (1993) indicate that it is not the researcher who makes the generalization in qualitative research but “by interested practitioner – by individuals who are in situation similar to the one(s) investigated by the researcher” (p.204). Eisner (1991) captures the role of the qualitative researcher in regard to generalizability. After doing his or her research, the researcher is to say, “This is what I did and this is what I think it means. Does it have any bearing on your situation?” (p. 204)

Definition of Terms

Long-term marriage here is defined as marriage of couples that had been in one marriage for a period of 20 years and above. There is no consensus as to how many years constituted a long-term marriage. Reiterating this fact, Simanski asserts that: “There has been some discrepancy over how many years of marriage constitute a long-term marriage. Some studies cite marriages as little as 20 years up to as much as 55.5 years,” (p. 1) Twenty year cutoff point is chosen in this study after doing a cursory survey of the availability of Nigerian Immigrant couples in Houston area, who would fall within the above range and would provide rich and in-depth data. Fenell (1993) in his research on long-term marriage utilized the cut off point as 20 years and above. Invariably, 20 years cutoff point seems to fall within the acceptable range for long-term marriage research.

The country, Nigeria, is situated on the West Coast of Africa, with a size of about 356,700 square miles. It is said to be the most populous and richest country in Africa, with an estimated population of about 118.6 million people (Nwaorgu, 2000; and Otite, 1991). Demographically, Nigeria is said to be made up of about 200 to 250 different ethnic groups, each

with its own language, history, and customs. Politically, there are three dominant groups: the Hausas, the Yorubas, and the Igbos. The Hausas, occupy the predominately Muslim Northern region, the Yorubas, the western region and the Igbos, who are mostly Christian, occupy the eastern region or the territory called Biafra during the Nigerian civil war of late 1967 to 1970. These groups may share some common cultural values but they are cultural diverse (Nwaorgu, 2000).

A qualitative study is defined as “answering questions about the complex nature of phenomenon often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participants’ point of view.” (Leely and Ormrod, 2005, p.94). The phenomenological approach used in this study is seen from Patton’s (2002) view point as “one that focuses on the description of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience” (p.107).

Organization of Remaining Chapters

This study is organized into five chapters that focus on the perceived factors affecting long-term Nigerian immigrant marriage in US. Chapter 1 contains the introduction, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, the direction of the study, previous research, the significance of the study, the population and sample, the instrumentation, the method of data collection and analysis, basic assumptions, the limitations of the study, and the definition of terms.

Chapter 2 presents a review of literature and a history of research in this field with an emphasis on resilience and perceived factors affecting long-term Nigerian immigrant marriages in US. Chapter 3 describes the design of the study, including the population, the sample, the method of inquiry, data collection procedures, limitations including the researcher’s bias, and data analysis techniques. Chapter 4 consists of an interpretation and analysis of the data that has

been gathered. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes the study, present the key findings, draw conclusions, and make recommendations for future research.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Bachand and Caron (2001) made the observation that the predominance of divorce in Western society has paved the way to a abundance of research on divorce and related relationship issues. Most of marital research is focused on younger couples (Gottman, 1979; Kaslow & Robison, 1996; Levenson, Carsenson, & Gottman, 1993; Levenson & Gottman, 1983), and on the breakup of marriage (Kaslow & Robison, 1996; Levenson, Carstenson, & Gottman, 1993; Levensen & Gottman, 1983). The aim of these studies, as Bachand and Caron (2001) noted, has been to strive “to comprehend divorce trends by examining factors contributing to the breakup of marriages the subsequent consequences resulting from divorce” (pp. 105-106). But there is a recent inclination in couples’s research to explore factors contributing to positive long-standing marriages, rather than emphasizing marital dissolution and break up (Bachand & Caron (2001). Bachand and Caron (2001) rationalize that “by focusing on what factors contribute to making marriages last rather that what keeps them from lasting, a different picture has begun to emerge that may provide clues for creating marriages that will have increased survival rates” (p. 106).

There is debate regarding what constitutes a long-term marriage. The landmark study of Cuber and Haroff (1965) considered marriages that lasted 10 years or more as long-term. Most researchers considered 20 years of marriage as long term (Fenell, 1993; Field & Weishaus, 1984; Kaslow, Hanson, & Lundblad, 1994). There have been other researchers who used the range 25 to 49 years as the range for long-term marriage (Bachand & Caron, 2001; Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992; Kaslow & Robison, 1996; Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993;

Sharlin, 1996). Some researchers have also considered 50 or more years of marriage as long term (Field & Weishaus, 1984; Weishaus & Field, 1988).

In searching the literature, there was a paucity of information regarding long-term marriages among Igbo Nigerian couples. The few studies that were found dealt with acculturation issues as they pertain to Igbo Nigerian marriages (Ibezim, 2008) and stability of Igbo marriage (Nwaorgu, 2000). Brooks (2008) was confronted with the same issue while writing about long-term marriages among black American couples when he stated, “the literature lacks investigations on both happy African American couples as well as those in long-term marriages” (p. 3). The present researcher also travelled to Northwest University, Evanston, Illinois, which hosts a large number of books on African writers and African issues. Nothing was found on long-term marriage among immigrant Igbo Nigerians. Most of the literature on long-term marriages, as Brooks (2008) pointed out, “has been conducted on non-Blacks” (p. 7). This chapter reviews literature on the marriage process in Igbo Nigerian culture. In addition the chapter will review research on the impact of acculturation, resilience, and protective factors shown to facilitate the maintenance of long-term marriages particularly among African immigrants to the United States.

Traditional Igbo Marriage

The IGBO people live in the eastern region or the territory, once called Biafra, during the Nigerian civil war of late 1967 to 1970 and are mostly Christian.

Uchendu (1965) described Igbo marriage as “an alliance between two families rather than a contract between two individuals” (p. 50). Anekwe (2004) considers marriage as “more a covenant than a contract” (p. 49). Accordingly Igbo marriage is geared towards fecundity, which keeps the family line and community going.

Kinds of Marriages in Igboland

Marriage institution is found in a variety of forms, which fall into two broad categories of monogamy and polygamy. Some writers believe that a polygamous or plural marriage the most common form of marriage in Igboland (Achebe, 1956; Basden, 2006; Uchendu, 1965). The traditional institution of plural marriage is not only permitted, but highly encouraged as advantageous in the Igboland socio-cultural context. For instance, in the days before the arrival of western colonialism, the wealth of a man was considered in terms of the number of children, yam barns, and fleet of goats, sheep and cows. But Basden (2006) made a point of note here that “whilst polygamy is recognized as an integral part of the social economy of the Ibos, in actual fact one wife only is specifically acknowledged” (p. 83). He also noted that native law recognizes only the first wife. This was a problem for the early Catholic missionaries, as it came to the question of choice of partner for the newly baptized polygamous non-Christian receiving sacramental marriage which wife would he choose, the first or any of the wives, since he had not been married to any of them in the church? Invariably the common practice was to choose the first wife.

Tradition of polygamy in Igbo marriage

The major occupation of the Igbos then was agriculture. This type of occupation inevitably favored polygamous marriage for economic reasons. In traditional Igbo society, a man’s agricultural production varied directly with the number of wives he has. A man that has two wives produces twice as much as another with one wife, and the man who has three wives produces thrice as much and so on. And today, it is still a well-known fact that in Igbo society that the need for a male offspring is so strong that a man, whose wife gives birth to only females

throughout the marriage has the tendency to look for a male offspring in a second or third wife. In Igbo traditional society, a man without a son is believed to have not been represented. As the Igbos would put it, “*Ama ya echiela*” – “his lineage will be extinct”.

Polygamy was also engaged in as “a symbol of high social status”, (Uchendu, 1965, p. 49). Marrying was an expensive business. To have several wives would mean that one is rich and has enough to marry them or that one is a chieftain or a titled man.

There is also the widow inheritance or levirate marriage. This was the case whereby if a man died suddenly and had no male child or children, the deceased brother was allowed to take the woman as his wife in order to beget children for his brother and to take care of the woman and her children. Uchendu (1965) identified another form of Igbo marriage known as “Woman marriage”, which is “a recognized Igbo institution by which women can validate their status in society” (p. 50). The woman paid the bride wealth and would have the antecedent right of the bride. Often times, this was seeded to the husband.

Despite all of these types of marriages, monogamy still remained the number one form of marriage (Basden, 2006; Obi, 1970). Currently, most marriages are monogamous mainly because of the influence of Western Colonialism and the Christian religion, which emphasizes the one man to one-woman aspect of marriage.

Characteristic features of Traditional Igbo Marriage

There are mitigating circumstances that facilitate marriage or hinder marriage among the Igbos. Onuoha (2007) identified some factors in the following examples:

Onuoha (2007) gives this example: “a man could be given a woman for a wife if he is famous in hunting, wresting, or dancing. This may cost him a few pots or palm wine, and sometimes the woman could just run to him, and the parents of the woman would have no choice but to consent

(p.6). Onuoha goes further to list the following as some bases for traditional marriage in Igbo land:

“One could pledge his daughter to a king or a wealthy man for a certain amount of money, and if the borrower failed to pay the money, he could ask the lender to have the girl as a wife. In the traditional system of marriage, a king could just take over another man’s wife as his own, and the initial husband of the woman would acquiesce because he has no authority to question the king’s action. In the traditional system of marriage, divorce is allowed at any time when the partners could no longer live together. In the traditional marriage in Igbo land, a man could marry as many wives as he could feed, maintain and control. With traditional marriage, a man/woman could re-marry when his/her former partner was deceased.

Pregnancy prior to a formal marriage ceremony was a taboo and highly forbidden in the traditional marriage.

A majority of women depended wholly on their husbands for their daily needs, so law and order were kept. There was absolute respect for the man who was the head of the family.

Marriage was forbidden if any of the members were outcast, for example, “*Osu or Ume.*”

All the children begotten as a result of co-habitation with a woman were regarded as illegitimate and would never bear the man’s name or inherit his property. In the traditional marriage, a man could be given a woman for marriage if he was able to do some farm work for the father in-law for a given number of years. Equally, during the traditional marriage, questions were asked of the various families involved and the type of sickness the families suffered from. Marriage was not allowed if either of the two families suffered from venereal disease, epilepsy, tuberculosis or similar diseases.”(p. 6-7).

Mate Selection in traditional Igbo Marriages

Igbo men are privileged to select female mates in the context of societal rules based on genealogy and kinship ties (Uchendu, 1965). Marriage among the Igbo is both endogamous and exogamous, and this differs at various levels of the Igbo society. At the level of family orientation, the (consanguine family) marriage is strictly exogamous. Cousins, whether parallel or cross, regardless of the generational separation, never marry each other. This is because the relationship between them is that of blood. And of course, a man cannot marry his sister, or his father's sister or his mother's sister. In the same way, a girl cannot marry her brother or her father's brother or her mother's brother. Marriage in Igbo land is largely exogenous in contemporary times. The family here, as culturally and socially defined, comprises of a man, his wife or wives and slaves, if any. The slaves were regarded as his property. Close and affectionate friends of the man are incorporated into the family and to whom all rights and obligations are extended and from whom a certain pattern of behavior is also expected. It is this type of family that is regarded as extended family in Igbo land. Marriage could also be endogamous (within the extended family) particularly, if the spouses so desired. This also is allowed between a slave and a son of the man and also between slaves themselves. In this case, because these people are not related by blood, the generational gap matters little. This was the common practice in the past. The ideal of the Igbo people is the polygamous family type.

Timing of Marriage

In the past, the marriage age for males and females ranged from 15 to 18 years of age. Males, as an Okonkwo, the protagonists of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, a novel about the Igbo, would state without being bashful that a young man is ready for responsibility and marriage when he is able to impregnate a woman (1959). If a young man is wild and unable to settle

down, his parents will help him become responsible by getting him married. Currently the age of marriage is delayed sometimes because of economic reasons or educational pursuits. Some males marry early because of family circumstances that dictate the need for a male heir and the parents have the money to support the young family.

Stages of Marriage Negotiation in Traditional Igbo Marriages

Igbo marriages begin with a negotiation process involving multiple stages that takes more than months to accomplish (Uchendu, 1965). Successful completion of components of negotiation at each stage, support the process toward a traditional marriage. A point of note here is that these marriage stages and processes may vary from town to town or village to village.

Stage 1: Mmanyi Ajuju (knocking on the woman's father door)

Here, the young man makes his intension of marriage known to his parents. His parents reciprocate by picking some of their kinsmen and carrying a gourd of palm wine and a bottle of “Schnapps” (gin) to the girl’s home. On arriving at the house of the girl’s father, the young man and his people will be welcomed with kola nuts and local gin. After that, the visitors will inform the girl’s father that they saw ‘a chick’ (a girl) in his house, and that is why they are there. The father will say that he has many girls and will ask which of them they came for. The visitors will mention the girl in question. The father of the girl will call the daughter and ask her if she knows the visitors and inform her that they have come for them to marry her with the drink they brought. The girl will say to the father to accept the drink, which means that she has accepted their move to marry her. Then the father of the girl will tell the visitors to go and give them a chance to make investigations on both sides, i.e. the girl’s side and the boy’s side.

Stage 2: Ajuju (Inquiry)

This stage is characterized by discrete mutual investigation by agents of both marital parties. At this stage, both parents of the people involved in the act of marriage will be making moves secretly to gather information from their people about the family: what they do, the kind of diseases they suffer from and the character they are known for in their various communities.

Stage 3: Demand for marriage list

As investigations have been carried out satisfactorily, the suitor and his kinsmen will go back to the father of the bride-to-be to demand a 'marriage list' of both the men and the women in their community. The list will be obtained with an agreed sum of money. In lists for both men and women, items like the following will be introduced: Women list: Crates of minerals, local palm wine, blouse, head tie, brassiere, underwear, bottles of hot drink, yams, etc. Men list: Bride price to be paid, drink comprising of palm wine, hot drinks, stock fish, big yams, local wrapper, etc. After collecting all the lists, the suitor will now arrange a convenient date for both families to meet and concretize the marriage negotiation. In the past, a man had to pay all the money settled in the marriage negotiation before his wife could return to him. But these days, the man has to pay as he could afford after all the negotiations have been reached, but he is expected to pay for the entertainment of the kinfolds. He is now free to leave with his wife.

Stage 4: Bride Price

The settlement of the bride price was usually a protracted engagement, when both parties haggled even into the dead of the night. When an agreement was reached, there was a handshake (Uchendu, 1965). The final phase of the process occurred before the father of the bride would accept the bride wealth. The bride's father would give his daughter a cup of palm wine to give to her husband. The bride would then take a sip and walk to the husband with the cheers and

applause of the people around. By doing so, she publicly declared her consent and the festivities began. With her father's acceptance of the dowry and her consent, she was considered married and separated from her family and then went to join her new husband/family (Uchendu, 1965).

Final Stage: Return of palm wine pot

After the negotiation, the wife is allowed to go to the husband's house with an escort team for a celebration amidst food, music, dancing and merry making. Upon approach to the prospective husband's house, the escort stops on the way, and the husband is expected to come out and meet them with a bottle of schnapps and a jar of palm wine before the escort departs as the wife moves into the house and the normal marriage relationship begins

Marital Stability and Divorce in Igbo Land

Marriage is said to bind "the communities together and not just a family, so any unsuccessful marriage is considered a failure on the part of the community" (Anekwe, 2004, p. 49). Divorce is usually frowned upon in the Igbo culture. There is usually a concerted effort to keep marriages going. Njoku (2001) stated that "families always work towards the loving preservation of the union" (p. 74). However, despite all the good will to make marriages work, they still could fall apart. The manner of break up would depend on who the grieved party was. As in the marriage partner selection, men are privileged to be able to divorce their Igbo wives. Basden (2006) noted, "a woman cannot divorce her husband" (p. 65). When a woman is grieved and has exhausted all avenues of redress, the family, the middlemen, and community, she returns home to her family. She would stay there until her husband comes to get her back. If the husband never comes to get her, this signals the demise of the marriage which culminates with the return of the bridal price. But if the husband was the grieved one, he could send his wife away. He would make a public declaration of this by sending her cooking pot and some of her personal

things after her. As Basden (2001) noted, “this procedure constitutes permanent divorce, and the action of the husband will be upheld by native law” (p. 65). In general, marriage was entered into with an eye on permanency because of its role in the life of the community. In this way traditional Igbo marriage arrangements perpetuate the community.

Satisfied and Long-Term Marriages

Contemporary understanding about long-term satisfied marriages has emerged from a focused research literature addressing factors related to how individuals in relationship achieve both personal and coordinated sense of adjustment and coping across time, across domains of living and tasks (Fenell, 1993; Heaton, 2002; Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992; Lauer & Lauer, 1990; Sharlin, 1996).)

In an attempt to find out more about the characteristics of successful long-term marriages, Fenell (1993) studied 147 couples whose first marriages lasted 20 or more years. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976) was given to each couple to find out if the participant was in a satisfactory long-term marriage. Participants who had a mean score within 116 for men and 115 for women were presumed to have made the criteria for a satisfied marriage. The network approach was used to recruit the participants. This entailed asking qualified participants to refer other couples whose first marriage lasted 20 years or more. The male participants had an average age of 54 and had a mean of 16 years of education. The females had an average age of 50 years with a mean of 14 years of education. The religious affiliation of the participants was indicated in this way: 69% Protestant, 21% Catholic, 2% Jewish, 2% other, and 6% no religious affiliation. The income range of most of the participants was between \$40,000 and \$49,000. The Delphi process was employed to a list of the characteristic representing the marriage. The use of people with expert knowledge of the issue in study is the hallmark of the Delphi process. Fenell

(1993) considered them as experts in marriage since their marriage had lasted 20 years or more. Fifty-nine potential strengths from the survey listing were presented to each participant, and they were asked to rank the top 10 which they would consider as contributors to their relationship. The data analysis involved tallying the number of times each participant classified one of the items in the top 10. How often an item was rated determined the score it received. Ten items with the highest score were identified. Fenell (1993) also included a reliability check in the design of the study. This was done to make sure that the 10 characteristics that the participants identified were very important.

The percentage of husbands and wives who selected the 10 items as being most helpful in their relationship was tabulated. These were the most important characteristics contributing to long-term marriages (p. 454).

1. Lifetime commitment to marriage
2. Loyalty to spouse
3. Strong moral values
4. Respect for spouse as best friend
5. Commitment to sexual fidelity
6. Desire to be a good parent
7. Faith in God and spiritual commitment
8. Desire to please and support spouse
9. Good companion to spouse
10. Willingness to forgive and be forgiven

The results above showed some agreement between the sexes. There was difference among the genders in two items: “the desire to be a good parent” and “the willingness to forgive and be

forgiven.” While men gave prominence to willingness to forgive and be forgiven, women underscored the desire to be a good parent.

Kaslow and Hammerschmidt (1992) studied 20 couples in long-term “good” marriages. These couples were between the ages of 25 to 46 years. Their joint income was between \$51,000 per year to \$101,000 per year. Nineteen of the couples reported having a religious background, with 75% Jewish and the remainder Catholic and Protestant. The participants were all Caucasians and had some good education. The researchers sent questionnaires and rating scales to 63 couples. Potential study participants from different parts of the country were reached through the network approach. The questionnaires used were constructed by the researchers with some combinations of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), and two items from the Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959). The researcher did not state the specifics of the questionnaires. The couples were instructed to complete the above questionnaires. They were further divided into three categories – satisfied, mid-range, and not satisfied. For scoring the data, Spanier’s DAS system was used. The participants fell into these categories: 10 satisfied, 4 mid-range, and 6 unsatisfied. This was arrived at by looking at where both parties of the couple received a DAS score between 109 and 119 as “mid-range” and 101 and 108 as “non-satisfied.” In one instance in which one spouse scored 110 and the other 134, they were categorized as non-satisfied.

The “essential ingredients” for long-term satisfied marriage, as Kaslow and Hammerschmidt (1992) stated in this pilot study, were the following:

1. Good problem solving and coping skills
2. Trusting in each other that includes fidelity, integrity and feeling “safe”
3. Permanent commitment to the marriage

4. Open, honest, good communication
5. Enjoying spending time together, have fun together, good sense of humor – yet appreciate some spaces in togetherness for separate activities
6. Shared value system, interest and activities
7. Consideration, mutual appreciation and reciprocity – easy give and take
8. Deep and abiding love for one another enriched by being dear friends and lovers; continue to find one another attractive, appealing, desirable, and interesting (p. 35).

It was interesting to note that in this study, problem-solving and coping skills were reported as the most significant element of happy, long-term marriage. This did not seem to be corroborated with studies of similar samples. But the response that seemed to replicate studies of similar couples was the role of commitment (Bachand & Caron, 2001; Fenell, 1993; Robinson & Blanton, 1993).

Sharlin's (1996) study was a look at the characteristics of long-term marriage and variables contributing to satisfied "good" marriage in Israel. The study took into account the differences between the males' and females' experience of long-term satisfied marriages. The study was also a replication of a previous study. A purposeful sample was collected using the network system. Couples were encouraged to recruit other couples that had been married for 25 years or more. Those selected for the study were all Caucasian and Jewish. The age of the men ranged from 45 to 74 with a mean of 62, the women ranged in age from 43 to 70 with a mean of 58. The participants had been married between 25 and 40 years with a mean marriage length of 34 years. Only 78% of the males and 82% of the females professed to be not religious. This was said to be higher than the representation in the Israeli society. The reported annual income of the couples ranged from \$51,000 to \$100,000. The quality of marital satisfaction was measured

using Spanier's Dyadic Assessment Scale (DAS). The questionnaire was also translated into Hebrew.

Fifty couples completed the battery of tests comprising of the questionnaires and rating scale. The results showed that on the relationship characteristics of the samples, there was not much difference between men and women with regard to closeness between themselves and their own parents. They also revealed that there were no significant differences between men and women in the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. To the question of motives for staying together, love seemed to be the central answer when looked at "today". But when looked at in times of crisis, there were some differences. For men, they were motivated by "responsibility for our children" (p. 234) and for women, "marriage is a partnership" (p. 234). In general, with regards to the ingredients for marital satisfaction, both genders reported the following: mutual trust, love, mutual respect, and surrender philosophy of life.

The study also looked at the prevalent factors and the way things ought to be regarding marital satisfaction. The participants were asked to choose and rate, from a list of 43 items, what they considered as ingredients for marital satisfaction. Of the top 10 items chosen, 7 were ranked equally, by men and women. Notwithstanding, they were not listed in a successive order by the sexes. It was also interesting to note in this study that husbands tended to emphasized change in physical and sexual closeness more than wives, while wives showed strong desire for their husbands to be sensitive, considerate of their needs, and to be good listeners.

The following were the most important ingredients that came out of this study (p.240):

1. Mutual trust
2. Loyalty and fidelity
3. Love

4. Mutual support
5. Mutual appreciation
6. Mutual respect
7. Making major decisions together
8. Reliability

Heaton (2002) surveyed data from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG). This was done in an effort to find out factors contributing to increase in marital stability in the United States because the results from the 1995 NSFG indicated that marriages contracted after 1980 were becoming more stable. The sample was made up of 10,847 women between the ages of 14 and 45. In data analysis, those in their first marriages and those who were divorced or separated from their first marriages were included. The result showed that age at marriage was a consistent variable to establish whether a marriage lasted long or not. Individuals, who took time to choose their partner and, thereby got older in the process, had the likelihood of having a stable marriage. The caveat about educated women, as this study result showed, was that women who had more education than their husband had a higher probability of divorce. Heaton also included sexual experience, race and religion as factors predicting the stability of marriage. With regard to sexual experience, stability was associated with no birth before marriage. Race and longevity of marriage were correlated. Asian marriages were most likely to be stable, while marriages among Blacks had a high rate of divorce. In terms of religion, Catholics were the least to divorce, likewise the Jews. The two groups scored better when compared to those who had no religious preference and those who were of different faiths.

Lauer and Lauer (1990) looked at factors that might be involved in a stable and satisfying marriage. They started this study by noting the variables discovered in their previous study

(Lauer & Lauer, 1986) of 351 couples that had been married fifteen years or more, with a mean age of 25 years. The variables found were: viewing the spouse as best friend, liking the spouse as a person, and being committed to the spouse. In their most recent study, they wanted to see how those factors would pan out with age and length of marriage. They recruited 100 couples from different areas of the country that had been married for 45 to 64 years and had a mean age of 54 years. They were all ambulatory, with six couples childless, and the rest of the couples had between one to six children. Ninety-seven percent of the participants had some religious preference; 69.0% were Protestant, 7.5% were Roman Catholic; 7.0% were Jewish, and the rest belong to other religious groups. They were from upper-middle class, 74% were college educated, and 84% had an annual income over \$20,000.

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) includes 32 items, and seven Likert-type questions were used to measure mental satisfaction. The researcher also used open-ended questions to ask the participants to rank the 39 items in terms of importance with regard to their marriage stability and to graph their marriage through the years and how they have handled issues and conflicts. They found that 78% of the couples agreed on the following as important in long-term and satisfied marriage: family finances, matters of recreation, religious matters, demonstration of affection, friends, sexual relations, proper behavior, philosophy matters, ways of dealing with in-laws, aims and goals in life, amount of time spent together, making major decisions, household tasks, leisure, and career decisions (p. 192). Attitude toward the spouse and marriage was also looked at. Ninety-five percent of the respondents reported that they liked their spouse as a person, 94.5 % said that their spouse was their best friend. With regard to marriage, 98.9 % concurred that marriage was a lifelong union, and 84 % said that it was sacred. In this study, there seemed to be agreement between the sexes about the ingredients of long-term and satisfied

marriage. The most important reason for the success of his or her marriage for the group studies was the involvement in an intimate relationship with someone one loved.

Another important observation made by Lauer and Lauer in the 1996 study was commitment. This concerned the bilateral aspect of commitment, namely commitment to the spouse and commitment to the institution of marriage. Their finding indicated that the participants viewed their marriage as sacred and were also committed to their partners. From this result, Lauer and Lauer made a striking comparison of couples in unhappy long-term marriages and those in happy long-term marriages. They stated that couples in an unhappy long-term marriage were committed to the institution and not particularly committed to their partner, whereas those in happy marriages were committed to both their partner and the institution.

In an attempt to find out what factors made marriages last, Bachand and Caron (2001) conducted a qualitative survey into long-term marriages. Fifteen heterosexual couples who, through self-reporting, identified themselves as happy and who had been married 35 years or more were interviewed. The network approach was used to recruit participants. The reported religious affiliations were the following: Protestant, Methodist, Catholic, Presbyterian, Episcopalians, and no particular religious affiliation. The interview questions were a main guideline to be followed. The couples were interviewed individually at their homes or wherever was convenient. The interviews were taped and transcribed. However, four couples chose not to have their interviews taped. The transcripts were coded. Twenty-four categories were created, and individual responses were placed in the appropriate categories. The placement of responses in the categories netted an inter-rated reliability score of 88 %.

The researchers set out to find answers to these research questions: “How do couples explain their own long-term marriage?” (p. 109), and “Do husbands and wives perceive different

factors as contributing to their long-term marriage?” (p. 109). The five most prominent responses from the first research question were: friendship, love, similar background/interest, commitment and freedom to pursue goals. Friendship and love were viewed as the most important factors in long-term marriage. From these two factors, one can get a feel of what that meant to the respondents. A wife married for 51 years, regarding friendship stated: “We have a lot of respect for one another. We are best friends. We grew up together and have always been chosen” (p. 113). While a husband married for 41 years spoke about love in these terms: “We truly love one another. We do not have to agree on things all of the time. I listen to what X is really saying, and she does the same. Strong family background. Same values” (p. 114). To the third most important contributing factor, similar background and interest, a husband who was married for 41 years articulated it this way:

There are many different reasons that all add up. We have very similar background. We believe in family and God and the same stuff. There wasn't too much to fight about. Our kids are very important to us. We agreed on roles, too, unlike kids these days. Not that it is bad. I work to support the family, and she stayed home with the kids and our home. We were partners but had separate divisions of work (p. 114).

Commitment was the next important factor contributing to the longevity of marriage. A respondent husband married for 48 years had this to say about it:

We never thought or acted like it was a temporary thing. In my day, people did not divorce. We are very good friends. We laugh lots together, and I love her very much. I guess we just grew closer as the years went by, so even big problems seem small (pp. 113-114).

Other factors contributing to the stability and longevity of marriage were listed as: “knowing one another well before, respect for other, similar values, spouse is a good person, conscious of other’s feelings, support, acceptance/tolerance, religious agreement, partnership, trust, children, communication, loyalty, patience, companionship, compromise, forgiveness, put the other first” (p. 113).

Bachand and Caron also asked about the role that children played in the longevity of their marriage. A wife married for 41 years put it succinctly:

It enhanced and changed our lives. We would still be married without them, but it would have been different. Children teach you how to give unselfishly, and I am sure that has helped our marriage (pp. 114-115).

To the question: “How has your religion affected the longevity of your marriage?” (p.115), three general categories of answers were given. Of the group, 36.6 % of respondents answered that it was positive, 26.8 % reported that it directly affected the longevity of their marriage, and 36.0% reported that it had little or no effect.

The final question was about the effect of their parents’ marriage on the longevity of their own marriage. Eighty percent responded that it was a positive effect. A wife married for 41 years stated: “My parents’ marriage was an inspiration, very positive. I thought that I would be lucky if mine was like theirs” (p. 116). But only 20% of respondent did not see their parents’ marriage as a good example. A husband who had been married for 41 years echoed this: “I learned that hard work does bring about rewards. My parents did not openly express affection. It was hard for me to learn to be affectionate with X. She taught me” (p. 116).

The authors did not find any significant difference between husbands and wives when they were asked to rate the part children, religion and their parents' marriage played in the longevity of their marriage.

In looking at Nigerian marriages, researchers found that acculturation is a critical factor in the stability of marriage. An example of the impact of acculturation, as previously stated, nine Nigerian men in the U. S. murdered their wives and attributed the cause to acculturation problems.

Acculturation Process: Meaning and Impact.

No one simple answer can adequately explain acculturation. Domino (1996), citing Olmedo (1979) and others has stated, "Acculturation is one of the most elusive, yet ubiquitous constructs in the behavioral sciences; with a "myriad of aspects and processes" (p. 256). Acculturation has also been identified as a group phenomenon, as an individual phenomenon, or as both (Domino, 1996; Teske & Nelson, 1974).

Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936) in defining acculturation stated: "Acculturation comprehend these phenomena which result when groups of individual having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (p. 149).

Immigrants who come to the United States have the issue of acculturation pressure to grapple with, as the experience changes in their social and cultural milieu (Berry, 1992). Researchers recognize that acculturation pressures are inevitable. Pressures come from within the society (Georgas, 1989, 1991) or from contact with other cultures (Feldman, Mont- Reynaud, & Rosenthal, 1992). Furthermore, these acculturation problems for immigrants also stem from changes in values, attitudes, abilities and motives, personal identity, ethnic identity, intergroup

attitudes and lifestyle preferences (Berry, 1980; Berry, Kin, Minde, & Mok, 1987. Nworgu, 2000)

Immigrants experience fundamental changes in their family system and antecedent gender role alterations (Bulatao, 1984; Connel, 1984; Espin, 1987; Graves, 1984; Kibria, 1993; Lamphere, 1987; Morokvasic, 1984; Nwaorgu, 2000; Safa, 1981, Uba, 1994; Yao, 1985). A consistent finding is that the level of dissimilarity between the immigrant culture and the host culture was commensurate with the acculturative stress; the larger the dissimilarity, the higher the intensity of the acculturative stress (Berry, 1986; Nwaorgu, 2000).

Nigerian Immigrants to U.S.

Nigerians are the largest group of African immigrants to the United States. In 1980 the size of the Nigerian population was 25,000 and 2014 the population has grown to approximately 380,000 Nigerian immigrants including the first and second generation children (Migration Policy Institute, 2014.)

How do the immigrant Igbo Nigerian families and couples fare in this issue of acculturation? As was stated earlier, not much has been written regarding this population in connection with this issue. Nwaorgu (2000) stated it clearly, “no empirical studies have been done on the impact of acculturation on Nigerian Igbo couples in the United States” (p. 90). This researcher will examine the few studies that are available.

To examine the impact of acculturation on marital stability among Nigerian immigrant couples in the United States, Nwaorgu (2000), conducted a quantitative investigation of two national data sets gathered from Nigerian Igbo couples in Nigeria and Nigerian Igbo couples in the United States. The data was used to make a comparison of the males and females with the two groups on aggregates of constraint commitment, personal dedication, gender role

expectation, and dyadic adjustment. Two sets of participants were selected for the study. Sample A was comprised of 67 Igbo Nigerian couples, who lived in the New York/ New Jersey and Washington DC metropolitan areas, who had lived in the United States for at least one year, and who had at least one child in the family. Sample B, was made up of 65 Nigerian Igbo couples in Nigeria, who lived in the metropolitan area of the eastern states of Nigeria, and who had at least one child. The network system was used in recruiting for the participants in both samples.

Batteries of tests comprising of the Attitude Toward Women Scale (AWS) (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1973), the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976), and the Commitment Inventory (Stanley & Markman, 1992), were administered to all the participants.

Nwaorgu (2000) stated the study hypothesis as follows:

H. 1. There will be significant differences in mean scores between Nigerian Ibo couples in the United States and Nigerian Ibo couples in Nigeria when measured on constraint commitment.

H. 2. The mean score for Nigerian Ibo couples in the United States will be significantly different from the mean score of Nigerian Ibo couples in Nigeria when measured on personal dedication to marital commitment.

H. 3. For Nigerian Ibo couples who live in the United Stated, the vector of means on the traditional and egalitarian scores on a measure of gender role expectation for female population will differ significantly from the vector of means on the traditional and egalitarian scores for the male population on this measure.

H. 4. When measured on overall dyadic adjustment, mean scores for Nigerian Ibo couples in the United States will differ significantly from the mean scores for Nigerian Ibo couples in Nigeria (pp. 68-69).

One Omnibus test of MANOVA was used to analyze these hypotheses.

The study results revealed as predicted by the hypotheses. But with regard to hypothesis 3, there was an interaction effect. Females in the United States sample scored significantly different than male counterparts and from the Nigerian Igbo couples in Nigeria. This finding would be significant in the light of research findings as Nwaorgu (2000), referring to Juni & Grimm, stated, “the less crystallized couples are in their gender role expectation, the higher the risk of marital dissolution”. With this kind of strong egalitarian showing, some might see a challenge to the Igbo traditional power structure that is patriarchal in leaning.

Nwabugwu (2007) conducted a qualitative study to explore the sources of conflict faced by immigrant Nigerian Igbo families in South Florida between host culture and traditional culture in living their lives as a family. The participants were recruited using the network system. They were made up of three immigrant Nigerian Ibo couples and three young Nigerian Ibo adults. They were interviewed, and the taped audio was transcribed. The research questions were as follows:

1. How do immigrants Nigerian Ibo families in South Florida explore the living sources of cultural conflict in their process of integration into American culture in their lives as traditional family?
2. How are immigrant Nigerian Ibo families influenced by the gender roles in the American culture?
3. How do the cultural conflicts impact family members’ patterns of interaction?
4. How do the social and cultural changes affect immigrant Ibo families?

The study results focused on family adjustment in the areas of conflict related to parenting, decision-making and finances. The three couple participants reported that with the passage of

time, they had learned to make these adjustments. A striking finding of this study was the impact of the clash between the Nigerian Igbo culture and the host culture regarding the Nigerian Igbo parents. This was evident from the frustration and the confusion that the three Igbo young adult participants voiced.

The dissension among children and their parents could be felt from the answer one of the adult participants gave: “My parents are holding on to their culture and their values and they want to imprint everything that they learned from their parents, and everything that they were brought up on. They wanted to make sure we were raised in the same way” (p. 92). The three wives in the study reported that they were satisfied with the egalitarian stance of the relationship with their husbands. The Nigerian Igbo tradition where the husband has executive powers in decision-making was no longer experienced in their marriages. However, there was some division of labor, where they each knew who was in charge of certain things, for instance, the wife was in charge of the cooking, showing some retention of aspects of Igbo culture.

Ibeziem (2008) explored the nature and impact of cultural conflicts and crisis in marriages among Igbo Nigerian immigrants living in New York metropolitan area. Participants for the study were recruited using purposeful sampling and convenience sampling methods. Data collection involved in-depth open-ended interviews of eight couples and 40 mail questionnaires. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed.

The research questions were as follows:

1. Do conflicts between Igbo cultural beliefs and values and American cultural beliefs and values impact negatively on marriages of Igbo families living in metropolitan New York?

2. What are the sources of cultural conflict among Igbo families living in metropolitan New York?
3. How do Igbo cultural values differ from American cultural values?
4. How has the cultural conflict affected participants' marriages and children?
5. Would an educational intervention program that discusses cultural conflict be acceptable to Igbo married couples? (p. 4).

The result of this study identified 12 items as the source of cultural conflict and non-cultural conflict among the participants. These were listed in order of importance as follows:

1. Money- bills and household expenses.
2. Long hours at work/overtime/ two or three jobs.
3. Reversal of roles as they affect both men and women.
4. The Igbo men's need to play the traditional role as heads of family and decision makers.
5. The Igbo women's desire for male/female equality and independence.
6. The Igbo women's willingness to bring in police during domestic conflict.
7. Extended family pressure.
8. Ostentations lifestyle.
9. Selfishness and individualism.
10. Female spouse's inability and unwillingness to cook the Igbo food.
11. Infidelity and late nights.
12. Mother-in-law interference (pp. 94-95).

It is of note that most of the participants in this study were in favor of integrating the American and the Igbo cultures. But a few did not see it as a viable enterprise; one of them stated that it

was like “oil and water do not mix” (p. 95). This was an overwhelming endorsement given the fact that 87.5% of the interviewed couples and 77.5% of the mail participants supported integration of Igbo culture with American culture. There would be need for some caution with over-integration of the two cultures. Ibeziem (2008), referencing another study (Flores, Tschann, Martin and Pantoja) stated, “higher levels of acculturation reflected more direct expressions of power issues between spouses resulting in greater conflict and potential marriage dissolution” (p. 108). Flores et al. (2004) had studied 151 Mexican-American couples and discovered that highly acculturated couples reported substantially more marital conflicts than those who were not acculturated.

Resilience and protective factors promoting the stability of Traditional Igbo Marriages

One of the purposes of this research was to explore how Igbo Nigerian immigrant couples who have been married for 20 years or more have remained married while other Igbo Nigerian immigrant marriages around them fell apart. What accounted for that? How did they describe it? The answer could be found in resilience. Chan and Wethington (1998) writings about factors promoting marital resilience, among interracial couples, stated, “the resilience perspective automatically frames the research questions to address the long-term process of adaptation involving the development of competence as well as to address short-term negative emotional responses” (p. 75). They also pointed out that it was better paying more attention to the positive resources that individuals bring into marriage than other social or personal aspects that might threaten the longevity of marriage.

Different definitions have been given about resilience. For Walsh (2012), resilience is “the ability to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges” (p. 399). Kumpfer (1999) citing Masten stated, “Resilience in an individual refers to successful adaptation despite risk and

adversity” (p. 18). Some have defined it simply as “the psychological and biological strengths required to successfully master change” (Flach, 1988, p. xi). Wolin and Wolin (1993) referred to resilience as “capacity to bounce back; to withstand hardship and repair yourself” (p. 5). Werner and Smith (1992) advocated examining resilience and protective factors together. They pointed out that both are the positive counterparts to both vulnerability and risk factors.

Research on resilience has focused primarily on the study of individuals, especially children, looking at what factors or processes helped them bounce back. There was the need to look at the “invulnerable child” (Anthony & Cohler, 1987) to learn how to help other at-risk-children. The push was for mental health specialists to pay much attention and comprehend the protective factors that serve as buffers for vulnerable children (Dugan & Coles, 1989; Luthar & Ziglar, 1991; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Rutter, 1985, 1987; Simeonsson, 1995). There were others who, as Walsh (1996) noted, connected resilience to personality traits that individuals have to withstand stressful situation and adapt in a healthy way (Antonovsky, 1979; Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1981; Holmes & Masuda, 1974; Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

One of the landmark studies of resilience needed to be mentioned here. Werner and Smith (1992) studied 700 children born into poverty and hardship on the Hawaiian island of Kauai. They followed them from infancy to adulthood. They grew up in poverty with one-third living in an environment and families where they witnessed violence, divorce, alcoholism or mental illness. The result showed that most of them turned out right. Werner and Smith (1992) described them as growing “into competent young adults, who loved well, worked well, played well, and expected well” (p. 192).

The three closely related factors that research has shown to bring about resilience in vulnerable children were: the individual, family, and the larger social context. Igbo children are protected by the society at large. Igbo families believe it takes a village to raise a child. Other categories that manifest resilience or personal strength have been stated as: social competence, problem solving, autonomy and sense of purpose (Benard, 2004). Research has also shown that resilience encompassed a dynamic interaction of an array of risk and protective factors over time, with cultural, individual, interpersonal and socioeconomic influences (Garmezy, 1991; Rutter 1987; Walsh, 2012). Resilience literature highlighted the positive influence of significant relationships (Walsh, 1996). Walsh (2012) alluded to this as a relational network, whereby resources for resilience could be identified in the immediate or extended family (Minuchin, Colapinto, & Munichin, 2005; Ungar, 2004). The family need not be special. Walsh (2012) noted, “even in troubled families, an island of strength and resilience can be found” (p. 401). Walsh (2006) saw crisis as a threat and an opportunity, using as example, the Chinese symbol for the word crisis, and a composite word of two characters, meaning “danger” and “opportunity.” Furthermore, Walsh (2006), alluding to Wolin and Wolin, “the paradox of resilience is that our worst times can also become our best” (p. 7-8).

With all that has been known about resilience in terms of its importance in child development, mental health theory and research, there has been a growing move to shift the focus on individual resilience to relational resilience (Walsh, 1996). Walsh has argued for a family resilience perspective (Walsh, 1996, 2003, 2012), “a family resilience perspective recognizes parental strengths and potential alongside limitation. Furthermore, grounded in a systemic orientation, it looks beyond the parent child dyad to consider broader influences in the kin network, from sibling bonds to couple relationships and extended family ties (Walsh, 2003,

p. 2). This insight is remarkable in the light of the present study that seeks to locate the longevity of Igbo immigrant marriage in the resilience framework. Furthermore, by linking resilience to extended family, which is a very vital bond in the Igbo tradition, a possible factor influencing longevity of marriage could be found.

The literature findings tended to agree on the factors or characteristics of long-term satisfied marriages Fenell (1993). Although they were found in most of the studies highlighted, the ranking in order importance by the participants showed same differences. An observation made by Lauer and Lauer (1990) in their study in regard to commitment was striking. They looked at the bilateral aspect of commitment. When couples speak about commitment, what are they committed to; is it commitment to the sacredness of marriage or commitment to their partner? Their comparisons of couples in unhappy long-term marriages and happy long-term marriages to find out that those in an unhappy long-term marriage were committed to the institution of marriage, while those in happy marriages were committed to both spouse and institution was noteworthy. Their finding sheds some light on the Igbo concept of marriage, where marriage is sacred but also a duty to the community. Marriage is for fecundity to perpetuate the family line. This kind of commitment can be awash by the impact of acculturation; hence bringing about the result of marriage break-up in the Igbo immigrant community. The Nigerian Igbo study findings did not differ greatly from the other studies. They confirm the fact that there are universal factors fostering the longevity of marriage. However, when acculturation issues are factored into the equation, there are some unique elements. For instance, issues in upbringing of children, gender roles, and male patriarchal hegemony. Children are brought up to be aware of the culture to perpetuate the life of the community and parents make a great effort to inculcate the value of community. The society has traditional roles specific

to male and female roles and are guarded carefully to reflect the differences. Males bear the responsibility of the entire family's welfare and females take of nurturing. Both genders do not compete with each other (Nwadiora, 1996).

The plethora of literature on resilience and protective factors or mechanisms, shows a developing framework. There is a need to look at not only individual survivability and ability to bounce back in the mist of adverse circumstances, but at other resilience entities like family and marriage. Walsh and others have begun to write about family resilience (Lietz, 2007; McCubbin & McCubbin, 1988; Patterson, 2002; Walsh, 1996, 2003, 2006, 2012). What about marriage resilience? The researcher found a gap in resilience studies and is proposing a framework for marriage resilience.

Chapter III

Method

The research explores the perceived dynamics of long-term marriages among Nigerian immigrants. Specifically this study reports the lived experiences of nine Igbo Nigerian couples who live in Houston area metropolis and who have been married for 20 years or more. The results are offered in thick descriptions in their own words (Patton, 2002) as they describe their marital experience and meaning attached to it.

The study employs a phenomenological research design to inquire lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). This chapter details the parameters of the specific philosophical framework and the data collection methodology. The role of the researcher is examined and study participants described in more details. An explanation of the data collection process and analysis using Giorgi (1985) are enunciated. The chapter concludes by describing how trustworthiness of this study was ensured.

Research Questions.

The research questions were: How do long-term Nigerian Igbo immigrant couples describe their experience of being married for 20 years or more; what meaning do they ascribe to this experience; and how do they, from the Nigerian Igbo immigrant context, explain what made their marriage successful.

Design Rationale

This study is about people's experience and meaning attached to the experience. For Merriam (2002) meaning is socially constructed by individual's interaction within social environment.

Qualitative design is best suited for personal issues that are direct and immediate (Janesick, 2000). It is as personal as it gets when the Nigerian couple in this study describe their experience of marriage for 20 years or more.

Giorgi (1971) has pointed out that “man is an experiencing creature and qualitative questions are meaningful only for experiencing creature” (p. 19). The subjective constitution of human life makes it imperative that qualitative design be chosen for this study. The experience of Nigerian Igbo couples that have been married for 20 years is called into question here. One of the characteristics of qualitative research as Maykut and Morehouse (1994) describe it “is to discover what can be learned about some phenomenon of interest, particularly social phenomena where people are the participants (or as traditionally referred to – subjects).” (pp. 43-44)

Eisner (2003) stated that it is important to acknowledge that “all experience is in some way qualitative, qualities are sources our system picks up as we have intercourse with the environment” (p.20). Marecek (2003) “The desire to make sense of actual lived experience is the heart of qualitative stance” (p.56). Berg (2001) thinks that researchers naturally pay attention to “emerging languages and the meanings individuals assign to experience” p.110). The main interest in individuals and their world is one of the reasons why qualitative design is preferable. Qualitative research also helps to highlight the people behind numbers and ascribes faces to the statistics (Patton, 2002). The nine Nigerian couples who have been married for 20 years or more had the opportunity through this study to tell their stories in their own words and give whatever meaning they ascribe to their experience.

Phenomenological Methodology

Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a qualitative method of inquiry (Merriam, 2002). As a philosophy it has its origin from the 20th century German philosopher and mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Phenomenology for Husserl (1992) is “a descriptive science of direct experience” (425). Furthermore, Stiver states that Husserl was not preoccupied with de facto occurrence of empirical facts but “with the nature of what can possibly occur, namely with essential structures of experience” (p. 425). Hence for Husserl phenomenology is a “science of essences” (p.425).

Stokes (2007) thinks that Husserl’s phenomenology has its root in the idea of “intentionality” as Brentano conceived it. In defining intentionality, Stiver (1992) observed that Husserl made the distinction between the object that is intended (Noema) and the act of intending (Noesis). Another important concept in Husserl phenomenology is the phenomenological reduction. Stiver (1992) noted that Husserl called this brackets or the epoche, and that the “phenomenological reduction per se brackets prejudices that arise from tradition or common assumptions from the natural attitude as well as any evaluation of the way the thing is “in itself” (p.426). Husserl also identified another type of reduction, namely “eidetic” in which he sets out to describe the essential structure of experience. In eidetic reduction, what is accidental to experience is bracketed and attention is focused on what is invariant or what remains common to the many such experiences (Stiver, 1992). Husserl believes that essences could be intuitively conceived by the use of his important technique of “free variation” of an experience in imagination in order to “see” it from all conceivable points of view (Stiver, 1992). The major process of doing phenomenological research includes the following: “epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis” (Moustakas, 1994, p.xiii).

Bradley (2008), citing Johnsons and Christensen (2004) stated that “phenomenology as a research method sets out to respond to the question “What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of [a particular] phenomenon by an individual or by many individuals?” (p.117). Phenomenology is also about looking at people’s *lebenswelt*, the German for life world. Included in people’s life world are feelings, thoughts, and self-awareness as the individual experiences it at any given point in time (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Bradley, 2008).

For Van Manen, (1990) “All phenomenological human science research effort is really exploration into the structure of the human life world, the lived world as experienced in everyday situations and relations” (p.101). Van Manen (1990) also identified four fundamental life world themes, which he referred to as “existential” (p.101). These are: lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), time (temporality), and live human relation (relationality or communality) (P.101). These are considered to be fundamental to the structure of life world and are helpful with reflection in the research process (Van Manen, 1990; Merleau Ponty, 1962). “Lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research”, (Van Manen1990 p.36,). Van Manen states furthermore that the task of phenomenology is “to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essences in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful” (p. 36). When it comes to the question of interpretation of experiences, Silvers (1982) stated that the task of phenomenology is to be attentive to “how we experience our ordinary everyday affairs, how we came to understand those experiences, and how we make these understanding intelligible to others” (p.231).

From the foregoing, the task of this study was to elucidate the essence or what it was perceived for the nine Nigerian couples that have been married for 20 years or more, to show what meaning it had for them.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher in qualitative research is inherently the instrument (Patton, 2002). The primary tool of data collection is the researcher's use of self (Burns, 1989, Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Patton, 2002). Marshall and Rossman (1995) stated that "because the conduct of the study often depends exclusively on the relationship the researcher builds with participants, interpersonal skills are paramount" (p. 65). The importance for the researcher to bring to the forefront, the researcher's bias prior to, during and the completion of research cannot be overemphasized. One of the ways this is accomplished "as Janesick (2000) pointed out is" by clearly describing and explaining the precise role of the researcher in the study" (p.389).

This is reiterated when Patton (2002) stated, in "qualitative inquiry, because the human being is the instrument of data collection, requires that the investigator carefully reflect on, deal with, and report potential sources of bias and error" (p. 51). As with any trustworthy research project it is incumbent on the researcher to assume a stance of "neutrality" regarding the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002, p. 51). Of course, this neutrality does not mean detachment, as Patton (2002) contended; rather it is classified as an emphatic stance whereby the researcher in experiencing reality and gaining insight learns from the experience.

The role of the researcher then is to commit, as Patton (2002) pointed out, "to understand the world as it unfolds, be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and be

balanced in reporting both confirmatory and disconfirming evidence with regard to any conclusion offered” (p. 51).

It is impossible to have a completely value free inquiry as the researcher goes through the intricacies and complexity of the research process. The researcher has set forth some the biases on the context in which he came in contact with the project, and also in which in keeping with the phenomenological method; he has bracketed in order to let the project speak for itself.

Researcher disclosure

The researcher is a Catholic priest for over 30 years has prepared couples for marriage, settled their problems, helping them remain married. He upholds the Church’s teaching that validly consummated marriage is indissoluble. He comes from a family where his parents have been married for over 60 years and his 10 other sibling who have been married have not divorced or separated. The researcher is also Nigerian-Igbo, and understands the marriage process and custom of the participants. He is also aware of the gender roles and the relationship between husband and wife, where the husband is looked upon as the breadwinner and the wife as the homemaker (Nwabugwu, 2006).

Furthermore, the researcher has lived in the United States for over 20 years. He has known the effect of acculturation on immigrants. As a priest who deals with marriages and couples, he has learnt, firsthand, the attitude people have about marriage both here and in Nigeria. The researcher’s interpersonal skills were vital in interviewing and dealing with participants (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). The researcher is a trained and licensed marriage and family therapist. He has engaged in therapy with couple and family for over 20 years. His expertise helped him immensely in this project and in the choice of this design. This is attested to when Erford (2008) in writing about phenomenological research, stated that “in many ways the role of

the phenomenologist is comparable to that of the professional counselor who empathically and nonjudgmentally enters into the world of clients to provide therapeutic help” (p. 117). The ability of the researcher to set aside his assumptions, beliefs or feelings about marriage and to let the participants lived world speak for itself, was easily achieved given the researcher’s experience (Wertz, 2005, and Erford, 2008). The researcher also understands that it is a task that must be done because as Darroch and Slivers (1982) rightly observed, “it is the researcher who stands as the link between the world of the presence of the one studied and the world of the presence of the one receiving our work” (p. 4).

Study Participants

Participants for this study were selected from the Houston metropolitan area of Texas. Houston area hosts a large number of Nigerian immigrants. It is estimated according to census, that there are 12,000 Nigerian in Houston. This number is disputed by the Nigerian community leaders, who put the number close to 100,000 (Casmir, 2008). From this large pool it was not difficult finding participants for this study.

Nine Nigerian Igbo couples that have been married for 20 years or more were selected. Purposeful sampling was utilized. “Information-rich cases” or informants were chosen (Patton, 2002, P.230). Participants were chosen because they had knowledge of the same experience (Morse, 1994). They understood what it meant to be married for 20 years or more. Those who have experienced the phenomenon qualify as candidates to be selected (Creswell, 2007 & Higginbottom, 2004). The researcher does not live in the Houston area but gained access to participant through relatives and friends who live in Houston. They served as gatekeeper (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Rossman and Rallis, 2003). They helped to locate “information-rich key informants” (Patton, 2002, P.237). Those who were interviewed would

recommend other couples that were their friends. This is the snowball or chain sampling (Patton, 2002) technique. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) advise that qualitative researchers use “the snowball techniques or other technique to locate subsequent participants or setting that are very different from the first” (P.57)

Participant's ages ranged from 42 – 73 years and number of years married, 22 – 40 years. Educational level attended; Associate in Nursing, Registered Nurse (RN) to PhD. The educational attainment of this sample needs to be highlighted. Incidentally 5 of the couples out of the 9 has one member who earned a PhD, 2 had both earning PhDs. This is not uncommon among the Nigerian community. This has been well documented by writers. Casmir (2008) of the Houston Chronicle, citing the census data bolstered by an analysis of 13 annual Houston – area surveys conducted by Rice University observed “Nigerian immigrants have the highest level of education in this city and the nation, surpassing whites and Asians”. Casmir stated further “although they make-up tiny portion of the US population, a whopping 17 percent of all Nigerians in this country held masters degrees, while 4 percent had a doctorate, according to the 2006 American community survey conducted by the US Census Bureau. In addition 37 percent had bachelor’s degrees”. When these numbers are compared with the US population, Casmir states, “8 percent of the white population in the US had master’s degree, according to the Census survey. And 1 percent held doctorates. About 19 percent of white residents had bachelor’s degree. Asians came closer to the Nigerians with 12 percent holding master’s degrees and 3 percent having doctorates”.

In an effort to triangulate the data, the researcher also interviewed two Nigerian-Igbo clergy persons. Data triangulation here was used, as Burns and Grove (2005), referencing, Kimchi, Polivka and Stevenson (1991), proffered, “to obtain diverse views of the phenomenon

understudy for the purpose of validation” (p.225). The clergymen live in Houston metropolitan area and have ministerial duties among the Nigerian Igbo community. They were chosen because of the rich information they could provide regarding the phenomenon in question (Patton, 2002). They know the Nigerian Igbo culture well and have ministered to the community for many years. The Nigerian Igbo couples would preferably go to see the clergy first when they encounter difficulties in their marriage than going to a therapist. This was a statement made to the researcher during one of his interview with participants. Sampling decision in phenomenological research is predicated on the ability to enlist information sources that can help to answer the research question: (Fetterman, 1998, Morse, 2000, Morse & Singleton, 2001, Nwabugwu, 2007, Patton, 2002).

The researcher also enlisted the expertise of a Nigerian Igbo marriage counselor to serve as a reviewer or validation reader of the study (Creswell, 1988, Or in Lincoln and Guba, 1985 referred to as peer reviewer or debriefer). The reviewer provided an invaluable assistance in seeing that the data interpretation fit together logically and that no other better interpretation could have given the same data. The peer reviewer helped in making sure that interpretation of participant statements and meaning units were made to participant’s experience. The peer debriefer also signed a confidentiality statement (Appendix c). In all in all the demographic data of the participants were minimally documented to provide adequate confidentiality.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

The researcher is generally recognized as the instrument in qualitative research, but is not without utilizing some tools. One of the tools the researcher used in this study was semi-structure interview with open-ended questions. The questions were structured so that the couples

describe their experience of being married for 20 years or more and what meanings were ascribed. The following were utilized as guide questions

1. How would you describe the experience of being married for over twenty years?
2. What meaning does this experience have for you as a couple? As an individual?
3. What has been helpful in maintaining your marriage?
4. What has not been helpful in maintaining your marriage?
5. What obstacles have you overcome to stay married?
6. Is there any other information you want to share regarding your experience of being married over twenty years?
7. What characteristics have you noticed about other Nigerian immigrant couples who have been able to stay married for 20 years or more?

Couple Follow-up and Final Interview Questions

The following questions were asked during the follow-up and final interview session and the following were discussed with the participants:

1. Are there any other thoughts or ideas you have had since our last interview regarding being married for over twenty years?
2. Would you like to amend or add to any part to the transcript?
3. What else would you like for me to know?

Questions similar to those above were also used for the Nigerian Igbo clergy who have ministerial duties among the Nigerian community in Houston. The question they were asked were as follows:

1. As a pastor who has ministered to Nigerian immigrants, how would you describe long-term marriages among them with regard to couples that have been married for over twenty years?

2. What meaning does this experience have for them as a couple? As individual?
3. In your opinion, what has been helpful in maintaining their marriage?
4. In your opinion, what has not been helpful in maintaining their marriage?
5. What obstacles do you think they have overcome to stay married?
6. What other characteristics have you noticed about Nigerian immigrant couples who have stayed married for twenty years or more?

Clergy Follow-up and Final Interview Questions

The following questions were asked during the follow-up and final interview sessions after the audiotapes were transcribed:

1. Is there any other thought or idea you have since our last interview regarding Nigerian couples who have been married for over twenty years?
2. Would you like to amend or add anything?
3. What else would you like for me to know?

The researcher chose the semi-structure interviewing as the means to collect information and gain insight into the experiences of the Nigerian couples that had been married for 20 years or more. The researcher was guided by the overarching focus of phenomenological research as Patton (2002) expressed it “what is important to know is what people experience and how they interpret the world” (P. 106). An important aspect of interviewing is to establish rapport (Fontana & Frey, 1994, Maxwell, 2005). For Patton (2002), “Rapport is built on the ability to convey empathy and understanding without judgment” (P. 366). Having been a marriage and family therapist for many years, this is a skill that the researcher has had an experience in. The semi-structured technique helped the researcher to make sure a specific set of topics was covered by all the participants in the group (Polit & Beck, 2004). The written question or topic guide is

locked in Appendix C. Polit and Beck (2004) state that “ this technique answers that researchers will obtain all the information required, and gives respondents the freedom to respond in their own words, provide as much detail as they wish, and offer illustrations and explanations” (P. 342). There was a follow-up question after the first interview (Appendix C).

After making the decision that participant or subjects (Erford, 2008) who met the criteria for this study were located in the Houston metropolitan area, the researcher made phone calls to his friends and relatives who live in the area. The researcher explained to them what the study was all about and the criteria for selecting participants. The contact persons gave the researcher names and telephone numbers of couples that met the criteria. The researcher made contact with the couples and explained the project to them. For those who were agreeable and able to participate an appointment was set up with them for the first interview. The interviews were conducted during the weekend when the researcher and participant would be off work. The interview locations were the homes of the participants or in the case of the clergy; it was at the rectory or parsonage. The initial interview consisted of the collecting of demographic data, the signing of the informed consent form (for couple participants, Appendix A; for clergy, Appendix B; for the Nigerian therapist, Appendix C) and the interview. The interviews lasted about 60 minutes and were audio taped. After each interview the researcher took about 30 minutes to reflect on the interview and make notes. The audiotapes were transcribed and the transcripts were sent back to the participants to look through and the follow-up and final interview followed suit.

Data Analysis Plan

Consistent with principles of phenomenological approach, data analysis began as soon as the first interview was completed and the audio recording transcribed. Marshall and Rossman (2006) echoed this as they stated “in qualitative studies, data collection and analysis typically go hand and in hand to build a coherent interpretation” (p.155). The method of data analysis in this study is the Husserlian descriptive method as articulated by Giorgi (1985, 1997). Initially Colaizzi’s method was considered but because of logistical problem in getting to the participants for member checking of the result. Giorgi’s was chosen because like the other two phenomenological methods Colaizzi (1978) and Van Kam (1966) the same end result of the description of experience and generation of essential structures or themes would be arrived; and it is also the only one that relies solely on the researcher for its analysis (Polit and Beck, 2010). This decision is consistent with Polit and Beck (2010) who stated that in Giorgi’s view “that it is inappropriate to return to participants to validate findings or to use external judges to review the analysis” (p. 473). This is counter to same elements of Colaizzi (1978) and Van Kaam(1990) method. Giorgi (1985) lists the essential steps of his method as follows:

- (1) One reads the entire descriptions in order to get a general sense of the whole statement.
- (2) Once the sense of the whole has been grasped, the researcher goes back to the beginning and reads through the text one more with specific aim of discriminating “meaning unit” from within a psychological perspective and with a focus on the phenomenon being research.

- (3) Once “meaning units” have been delineated the researcher then goes through all of the meaning units and express the psychological insigne contained in them more directly
- (4) Finally, the researcher synthesizes all of the transformed meaning units into a consistent statement regarding the subject’s experience”. (p.10)

The researcher read all the protocols of 11 transcripts, averaging 28 pages to get the “global sense” in order to determine how the parts are constituted (Giorgi, 1997, p.8). The meaning units were written down on 3 x 5 in index card. The cards were arranged according to similarity. The outliers were also taken note of. The cluster of meaning units, were reexamined using “the method of free imaginative variation” (Giorgi, 1997, p.9). The participant’s everyday language in which the meaning units were expressed was transferred into structures or essence. Several essences were isolated and were used to write the thick description of the findings. This was not, without going “back to the raw data and render intelligible the clusters of variation that are also contained in the data” (Giorgi, 1997, p.10).

Ensuring the Trustworthiness of the Study

The use of the terms validity and reliability in qualitative research has been a bone of contention. Generally qualitative researchers prefer the use of other terminology Creswell (2007) referencing Ely and colleagues (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz. 1991) stated that “using quantitative terms tends to be a defensive measure that muddies the waters” and does not do justice to qualitative work (p.202). Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed the following terms when dealing with the trustworthiness or soundness of a research, “credibility”, “authenticity”, “transferability”, “dependability”, and “conformability”, as “the naturalistic equivalents “for internal validation”, “external validation”, for internal validation”, “external

validation”, “reliability and “objectivity” (p.300). Credibility is the “believability or true value and data or conclusion drawn from the data (Erford, 2008; Glense, 1999; Tilley & Long, 2014). Transferability is the applicability or generalizability of the result to other context and locale (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tilley & Long, 2014). Dependability or auditability refers to consistency of the result when audited by other researchers over time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Erford, 2008). Confirmability deals with freedom from bias or neutrality. It is the ability to show that the result is purely forbidden the participants within their context and locale (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Erford, 2008).

There are many ways to establish the credibility of qualitative research. It is not vital, as Tilley and Long (2014) point out, “for all the criteria to be incorporated into each study project” (p.237). Furthermore, Burns and Grove (2007) make the point that because the expected result within qualitative research and quantitative research differ from each other; rigor or the standard for trustworthiness is construed differently (Burns, 1989; Dzurec, 1989; Morse, 1989; Sandelowski, 1986, 1993). They describe rigor in qualitative research as “associated with openness, scrupulous adherence to a philosophical perspective, thoroughness in collecting data, and consideration of all the data in the subjective theory development phase” (p.91). This study accepts and abides by the forgoing prescription for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research.

Chapter IV

Results

The chapter presents the data collected from nine Nigerian Igbo couples, which live in the Houston areas as they describe their experience of being married for 20 years or more. Included also are data from 2 Nigerian Igbo pastors who have ministerial duties within the community.

The participants address the following question that was used as interview guide.

How do long term Igbo Nigerian immigrant couples describe the experience of being married for 20 years or more years (Appendix B)

Data were analyzed using Giorgi phenomenological method. Fifteen essential structures were gleaned from the couples' data analysis. The clergy participants highlighted other essential structures that were not emphasized in the couples. In presenting the essential structures the researcher has attempted to tell the story in the purest possible form for the reader to capture the flavor of the participants experience and how these were enunciated. The frequent use of direct quotes from the interviews transcripts was used. In doing so, the researcher allowed the participants to speak for themselves. Matthews (2005) stated that "the hallmark of qualitative research data is that those who are studied produce them" (p. 800).

"Thick description" is the term used often in presenting qualitative data (Geerts 1973, Denzin 2001, Patton, 2002, p. 43). For Patton (2002), description is "the bedrock of all qualitative reporting" (p. 438). While Heppner, Kivlighan and Wampold (1999), see thick description as the most basic means of presenting qualitative data. They define it essentially as "an unadulterated and thorough presentation of the data" (p.263). This may include "lengthy excerpts from interviews, field notes and existing materials (text and/ or description of artifacts)" (Heppner et

al 1999). In presenting data result the researcher has used copious excerpts from the interview. When presenting a thorough and unbiased report, Creswell (2007), cautions that “all writing is “positioned” and within a stance” (p.179) and that the way we write “is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class and personal policies that we bring to research” (p.179).

Table 1.

Essential structures as described by couple participants.

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1. Successful navigation of problems related to extended family
 2. Understanding that every marriage is unique with no comparison
 3. Mutual trust and understanding
 4. Appreciation of the marriage experience
 5. Communication
 6. Living within ones means
 7. Ability to be flexible and dynamic
 8. Team work
 9. Eliminating interference from others
 10. Infidelity
 11. Involvement in spiritual and religious activities
 12. Seeing marriage as a learning process
 13. Finances
 14. Raising of children or upbringing of children
 15. Acculturation issues
-

Table 2.

Essential structures as described by clergy participants.

-
1. Ability to forgive and to tolerate.
 2. Preference to go to the Priest or religious leader
 3. Awareness of unacceptability of divorce.
 4. Effective management of issues surrounding sex.
 5. Being constantly aware of the love element in marriage.
 6. Managing the over inflated image of a cozy life in the US for the newly arrived wife.
-

Essential Structures as Described by Participant Couples (Cp; Husband, H; Wife, W)

1. Successful navigation of problems related to extended family.

Extended family is the number one issue the participants pointed out that could make or break a marriage. Or, in the words of couple seven husband “Extended family can do and undo a marriage”. At the back of it all is the Igbo understanding of family. A person is born into a family, is named by it and defined by it. Njoku (2001) stated it succinctly that in the Igbo psyche, “a concept of an individual in isolation from the family and community would be a monstrosity” (p.37). The Igbo family system as Onyenwenyi (2002) indicated “is usually described as extended not like the nuclear family of the Western culture” (p.420). The problems associated with it are hydra-headed. Virtually every participant had something to say about it. The researcher could sense the passion with which the issue was discussed. Several excerpts have been chosen to highlight some of the related problems and how the couples dealt with them.

Cp 3 H: One of the main reasons the Nigerian marriages are falling apart here is not necessarily pressure from the family here, it also involves the pressure from home.

Cp 3 W: Some people have two family responsibilities.

Cp 3 H: The people at home are building that pressure. The pressure is coming from both sides, from the man's side and then the woman's side. Most of the time, the responsibility of the family here is being neglected, so that is why you see most people here, the man does things the wife doesn't know and the wife does things the man doesn't know and that brings conflict. That's one of the major areas of the pressure.

Cp1 W: Another reason is family interference too, because a lot of people like their family, if anything happens to their own, and they would like to tell their brother or their sister or their mother. "My husband has done this, or has done that", then they will tell them don't do this, or don't do that. They will come back and try to run their family down with that. Something like that can create a lot of problems. Like in our case, since we have been married, I would not come home and say to my father and say my husband has done this or to my brothers or sisters, this is what he has done. Even when we went home from London, my father actually called us and said he was so happy because some people come home and they come with problems. When we came home we didn't come to say "settle this for us". A lot of people that come back from overseas usually come with a lot of problems. The two of you were young and have a lot of kids and then come home, not even one day, my father says, this is what my husband has done, I can't take it anymore, or this is what my wife has done that I can't anymore. I thank God for that; it is God who has been keeping us to try to work harder to make our marriage work and it has been working so far. Don't let your family get into it; try not to tell them everything that

goes in and out of your family. Once you start telling them everything that happens, or telling them this and that, then that marriage is not going to be healthy at all. That is another thing that creates a problem.

Cp 2 W had the following to say in response to her husband's statement.

Cp 2 W: like my husband said earlier, he is from a very large family, extended family and we value that family, he came from a very large family, so there is so many brothers, sisters, nephews cousins, nieces everywhere. Some of them married outside the home. So we, being here in America I guess they feel we plucked the dollar from the tree. They don't know we have our own responsibilities. We have six children here who need to be brought up, we have to pay mortgage, we have to pay tax and we have our own budget back home, but they don't see that the way we see it, so everybody from my side and from his side depends on us. Sometimes they call us at 2:00 a.m., 3:00 a.m. or 4:00 a.m. and the phones are constantly ringing. When somebody died at home and they would ask for money for the burial or for something else that happens, or they would ask for money for someone to go to school. We don't mind doing that, we don't mind helping if we have it, because we will not allow my brother to go hungry, but if they would understand that we would give what we have, and then it would be very helpful. But the down side of it is when they call and we cannot afford to give it them when they want it at that moment. It brings stress on us that we are not able to fulfill their immediate need, we may in the next few weeks or months, but at that moment when they call and demand, if we don't give, it hurts us, and my husband will be upset, he is not able to do this for his people right now and myself too, so that is the down part of it. It's good to help where it

is appreciated from our extended family, because when we go home, these are the people whom we rely on, but then there are limits to certain things.

Extended family was also seen as a duty or obligation to one's family of origin.

Cp 2 H: Essentially, that is the kind of concern, the limitation, sometimes the bother we face because we are always our brother's keeper, but like she said, there are petitions of our people at home and they are too much and they don't know what we go through here to make a dollar, they think we just pluck it from trees, even if we try as much as we can, but we can't satisfy everybody. Even when we don't go home for Christmas, we send a lot of things through other people for them. So, there are constant demands and conflicting demands.

From what has been said above regarding extended family, some couples acknowledged the positive side of the custom. Cp 3 W had this to say:

Cp 3 W: For the most part extended family is helpful because you are taught that. That culture is instilled in you for example. It is instilled in you that you have a family to take care of. Like my mother tells me, "they are your brother-in-law, they are your mother-in-law, and they are your husband". That culture tends to bring things together. Sometimes when they come here, they deviate from our culture and learn the culture that says "look, I don't have to take this; I can't do this, bye". However, to me, extended family is just a part of the culture. For the most part it is good because if you are in Nigeria they helps you doing things, but I think we should not use the word extended family, maybe dependency. Because of the Nigerian situation, they think that people here are rich and with that in mind there is too much pressure, they say, "Give me this money, give me this or give me that". In terms of demanding so much from people the women can say that.

Some women may say “why would I do this” I have seen some women here that build a house in their husband’s house but neglecting their parent’s house. I see some women here that their mother-in-law came back and then supported them with their marriage.

The same sentiment is echoed by couple five husband:

CP 5 H: Extended families are very good, where it is practiced but I don’t think it’s practiced all over like this, back home your extended family is good because when there is any misunderstanding between the husband and wife, they call in the people in the community or their friends then the friends will come in and try to resolve the situation. That is where the extended family is helpful and for a place like this, where they don’t have extended families, I would tell some of them when I was doing all this counseling that one of the things that suffers is that when they don’t have extended family and that what they do is when they have a misunderstanding, either somebody on the wife’s side or somebody on the husband side will be saying “look this is too much, you cannot have it, look for a divorce, just quit and call it quits, don’t do that”, that’s where the lack of extended family will help to ruin to marriage. That is also where extended families help to ruin a marriage. Assuming somebody has a mother or father or brother or sister who is bad, when she comes into your family and come to dominant the issues there, she will tend to pollute your mind. If it is the wife, if it is the woman’s mother, helping to pollute the mind of her daughter; if it is the man’s mother trying to pollute the mind of her son, against the husband or the wife or the mother of the wife against the husband, so those types of things help to break marriages here. In a society where extended families works, when they come even though a mother on the part of the husband or the mother on the part of the wife will try to poison their minds, that extended family, the community will

step in. Some of them will try to tell the woman, the mother-in-law to say, “Look, what you are doing is not good, you are helping to break their marriage”, which is good, but where they don’t have such type of extended family, nobody advises them. They will just go on their own way, you have seen this enough, and you have done this enough, just quit, file for divorce but one of them who feel that she has an edge, will just file for divorce.

To the statement that “extended family can do and undo a marriage” made by her husband, couple seven wife with an advising tone to couples added:

Cp 7 W: I think that says it, when we first got married, I think within less than a year, we had one of our brother-in-laws living with us. He wasn’t very helpful. He was not very helpful because especially as a new couple, he does not know everything about me yet. He is still learning me and I am still learning him and here is this person playing games between the two of us and then my mother-in-law too. So I would advise couples that when they initially get married, until the ten years, not to allow any family member to come and stay with them. That’s my advice.

There is also an understanding of the preeminence of the nuclear family in the scheme of thing.

Cp 8 H: Yeah, the extended families can make or break a marriage, more than they can make it as a matter of fact in our own experience, many times there are many issues arising from such extended relationships which have intruded into the marriage but I guess the saving grace is the idea that at the end of the day when the dust settles down, you still have your own wife and your own family, the children to deal with and to take care and that issues of this magnitude will come and go, but your family must remain with you. So, once you really have left the family on the injunction of your bible, what

God has joined together and no man should put asunder. You defend that with all amounts of zeal and energy knowing fully well that there is value in not allowing extended families to intrude into it and break up because they really have nothing to offer. The converse is that it is not a thing you can be lax about; you can't go back to your family. They are all a problems to you so you might as well deal with the issue and take care of it and then keep your family. So, we have been able to manage that on some of those annoying times when families have been intruded into the relationship.

For the Igbo everything is communally oriented. The extended family issues carry some societal ramification. Couple eight husband made the point.

Cp 8 H: The communal concept of family, as extended as it is really is another value that I can say without reservation, we've come to accept that. The extended family really conditions relationships in such a way that what affects you can be looked upon from what others are definitely going to say. If you shame the family, you shame the community and you don't want to look bad and you know the community really will be shocked that you have strayed away from the tradition of respect for the family, the community and the entire people that are affected in this and essentially what I am struggling with in terms of putting it in some straightforward way is that" it takes a village to raise a[family]"; that is also the Nigerian concept we have observed also that really makes it possible for me to see Harry's children somewhere and if I don't like what they are doing , so I'll just say something about it and not worry about what Harry is going to say or tell Harry that "can you look into this, I didn't like what I saw". That is the concept of what we value really in terms of the extended; I don't know whether it's

family or not, extended culture we have brought from Nigeria into this place. So every family is another family's gatekeeper.

2. Understanding that every marriage is unique with no comparison

There is a dogged understanding of the uniqueness of marriage. No two individuals are alike. In the same token, when two 'un-likes' marry they create an unlike union. Some elements of this idea were buttressed by the statements of the couples that follow:

Cp 6 W: Personally, I would say make sure you know who you live with and first and foremost, do not compare yourself to somebody else because what works for you may not work for the other person. Know who you are dealing with, know who your husband or who your wife is and try to really understand that person because the things that makes one marriage work may not really work for the other people. So, you make it your own. Make sure he is your confidant, make sure you discuss most of the things together and make sure that what you tell your friends about your relationship, everybody has an opinion and they will always tell you something, make sure you think about it before you act on it, because when you are outside looking in, you may have all the advise but you are not in the one in that situation. Make sure you keep the line of communication open and do not compete with your husband especially if you're from Africa, Nigeria so that you can help your part of the family first, don't do that. Make your family number one and then what ever you can do for the other people, but do not compete with anybody and it will work out as long as he is your best friend.

Cp 6 H: I would say the same thing. My advice to any young couple is to recognize that every household or every marriage has its own culture. So, build on it because you will not find two homes that are identical on how they live so as she said, what worked for a

family may not work for this family and if you attempt to imitate what happens or a behavior that is practiced in family “A” it may create a disaster in family “B” because one of the couples in family “B” may not be as tolerant as his or her counterpart in family “A”. So, you must develop your own ways and avoid certain others, especially negative acts of what you are learning because it has made an impact as something that you would want to bring into your family.

When asked by the researcher how their children understood the idea especially when they come back home and say to them, “but my friends parents let them go, why don’t you let us go, or let them have this or that, why can’t we? Couple eight wife had this to say:

Cp 8W: I think another thing true to that is that you have a formula for your own relationship in a marriage. We cannot bring in what is happening in somebody else’s home. I can’t compare him with somebody else and I don’t expect him to do the same. We have our problems, we resolve it without thinking of ways to going to her side “hey, I want to pick her side, or her husband was stupid, why can’t you cook? “, no, you have your own formula. How you handle your affairs in your own house, it doesn’t matter what they are doing because you don’t know what you will find behind the door. That’s what I say, because you don’t get involved in the other couples. Then we are just as simple as you want to be.

Cp 8W: What I’m trying to say is that what works for me, or what work for us would not work for somebody else. We know how to, like the formula I am saying; we know how to handle each other. If we have any issues, we know how to address and take care of it; bring it out in the open. We resolve every single problem without saying “well, the other day you did this” no, we resolve issues as they come and move on.

Cp 8W: Yeah, like I said earlier, don't compare. Comparison always messes up a relationship. You do not compare your partner with somebody else or whatever that goes on in somebody else's home, just be yourself and do what you are supposed to do best. We just see that, because we talk to other people who have problems and most of the time that's where it is coming from and adding to what he said, families, extended. He comes from polygamous home and I came from a single, it was quite a challenge for me to learn how to deal with each and every member of his family.

3. Mutual trust and understanding.

Reciprocal trust and understanding was another important element in the couples' experience. When the researcher asked the question: how have you lived all these years in the midst of other divorces around you, which I am sure you know two, three or four Nigerians who have been divorced? Couple three wife responded without equivocation:

Cp 3 W: I think it is mutual understanding. It is having patience, understanding with each other and respect; mutual understanding, respect and patience in marriage and then I must have the culture because you have to think about that and go back to that.

Personally I feel marriage does not have to be everyday, honey, honey, there would be challenges like he said there are some up and downs, but it takes understanding of each other when to stop if you are upset or talking or you see that the other person is upset and it's getting to the point that it's upsetting you, you probably need to stop. Analyze the situation at that point and than just give in. There is nothing like I am winning.

Sometimes you have to yield and you have to respect each other. You have to respect your husband and the husband has to respect the wife.

Cp5 H I think the major thing boils down to understanding each other. Once you understand each other, you can overcome any obstacle.

Cp 6 H: And also the sense of trust. We've learned to trust each other. That's very, very important. If trust were lacking in the marriage, that marriage wouldn't go too far.

CP 6 W: I'm not the kind, I'm jealous that's true, if he tells me something I believe and so I hope he never gives me any reason to doubt that he is telling me the truth and I thinking he is the same way, I hope. Trust is important in a relationship. We can't be going around trying to find out what somebody is doing 24-7 because that will drive you crazy. That means that relationship is not really working.

Cp 7 H: What she has told about not insulting your partner in the presence of the other; and one other one that I know is a major one, is that each person must give the other person 100% belief; not trust, I'm not talking about trust here, 100% belief that, that person knows what he is doing. In other words, personally, I hate too much corrections and nobody likes it. If you have to correct every step of the way, then you will have to be correcting everything and you will bore down your partner.

It was interesting that couple seven husband did not like the use of the word trust and when pressed on it by the researcher he answered:

Cp 7 H: Trust in the sense that, if you go to trust you are talking about infidelity or going out; I give you trust to go where ever you want because I love you, I trust. That's why I don't like to use trust, because I don't think trust; trust is important in marriage but the most important even better than trust is never to give your partner reasons to worry about. For example, if I tell my wife "trust me" and I go out there and don't come back till 4 o'clock in the night and I can't even tell her where I have been to; what kind of trust is

that? So you see what I am saying? Tomorrow, I go out there and I say “trust me” and then when I come back I’ll be smelling another lady all throughout my shirt but I’m asking you to trust me; what kind of trust is that? Meanwhile, I’m showing her that I’m messing around outside but using the word trust to hold her down from saying anything; “Don’t you trust me?” No, so that’s not trusting. So don’t give each other any reason to worry about. So if I were to go out there and I tell her exactly where I’m going, so she won’t be worried and if she calls I’ll answer the phone and tell her where I am so she won’t be worried. Don’t give the other person any reason to worry about and that’s better than trust.

Cp 8 H moved away from the trust explanation to speaking about not being critical.

Cp 8H: Understanding that she is very emotional and there are times when an issue is best left alone even when such an issue is annoying because the converse in terms of the reaction may be worse than the issue you are trying to deal with and so you back off and let her talk about it at some convenient time without having to force the issue. There is nothing, it might be so urgent that it must be dealt with at the time it is happening because the sense of putting some distance to it creates an environment where communications flourishes other than discord. Like she says, I like soup, I am a traditionalist, it has been my style and then I like a particular soup, not all kinds of soups. I don’t like it thick and when she cooks that kind of one, I don’t even want to worry about whether it is thick or not thick, I use water to pour into and get it to the level I want it and eat it like that. So, those are some of the things we have understood each other and that way and not bother with actually crying over suggestions that you know you can adjust to or react to.

4. Appreciation of the marriage experience.

There was a glowing admiration of the marriage experience as presented by the couples. Their experience was positive but not without kinks here and there. There was a humble recognition of the hand of God in preserving their marriage and a strong commitment to the institution of marriage. The element of luck was also identified. This is an important variation that is note-worthy.

Cp 5 H: In my experience it has been a nice union for that length of time even though we have some very little squabbles, which are normal when two people who were brought up differently come to stay together and to live together. So, I would say that we have been doing pretty well but at the beginning it was rough.

Cp 6H: It has been a very rewarding one in that it has provided us the opportunity to discover more and more of what can keep two different individual to live in harmony.

Cp 6W: It has been exciting experience that you come into this relationship. You think you know, but being young, excited about being married and then you find out that you are really compatible or not compatible and you start working on your differences and eventually you find a common ground to make this relationship work. It has been an excited experience and an exciting journey. We have come to know each other so well that it has worked out so beautiful.

Cp 7 H: I don't know to be honest with you. I don't know what to tell you, that's what makes it okay or what makes it get to 20, but I think very honestly that there are too many contributors; one is luck and blessing. You actually thank God for the blessing of being able to stay in the marriage and for giving you a lot of time, the patience to condone certain things you think would have offended you, so it's a blessing to be able to forgive.

It is a blessing to be able to ignore certain things; it is also a blessing to be able to sometimes feel that you are wrong. It is even a blessing sometimes to find your own fault. If you can tell yourself within you, "I think I did this wrong, I was wrong". Then, it is a blessing because not many people can actually admit even to themselves that something went wrong and they contributed to it. I will tell you most of it is actually some would say a blessing. On the other hand, you also have to add your own personality. I think I had to add my own request, what you want; do you want to stay or do you want to leave? If you tell yourself that you want to stay, you want this marriage to last, a lot of times that works into it and the other part of it is that you really cherish your partner. You may be very, very angry with your partner, you may be very upset at certain times, not whether you are right or wrong, but the fact is you may be very angry and some people who did not know they have been wrong and get angry. It does happen and okay, eventually you find out, "Oh my God, I'm being angry for something I'm wrong in". Sometimes people stick out and sometimes they don't but one of the major aspects of that part of it is that you cherish your partner because you want her to be with you. If you don't really cherish, for lack of using the word love, because everyone claims "I love my wife, my wife loves me and we do this". The main thing is you don't want to part with her, you prefer to keep her, which also includes admiration; that you have an admiration for your partner. I think that is a lot of the combination of so many of them.

Cp 1 H: Stories are made every day by married couples, you know, living with somebody you love and coming home to somebody you love, sharing meals with somebody you love add huge flavor to our relationship. It is full of pleasant experiences. Sometimes, there are a few difficulties especially in the early stages when people are

getting to know each other, but after that, you already know the dos and don'ts and what your partner likes or dislikes. So, then on, it's all a very pleasant experience. I hope I am speaking for her too.

Cp 1 W: I think I have the same view. Initially, we try to know each other. Like, you know how it is, back home when you are going to get married you don't become boyfriend and girlfriend to know each other but you just start off marrying somebody, and so you live together and try to learn each other and understand each other, but after a few years, we learned to understand each other very well and since then we have been living in harmony. But not that from time to time you don't have some problems, but it's not like problems you can't discuss or solve, so that is why it's been a pleasant experience so far so good.

Couple one husband saw marriage as a stress reliever. He found a way of not letting work related stress spillover into his marriage.

Cp 1 H: Marriage relieves stress because you get stressed out there, when you are at work and so one and then if you have a loving wife, a loving family, the moment you walked through the door, you keep all that stress where you picked it up from, and you know that here, you are coming into people who love you. So, I would say that the marriage, in our own case, has helped us deal with the stressful life. We leave it here. Because we don't bring it home, you know, with the advent of cell phone and so on. If I'm getting stressed at work, I will call her and we will start talking about it over the phone and laughing over it or if she gets stressed at work, she will call me and we will start lightening the mood before we even leave work. So, one thing I will say, we are rarely drive that stressed home. If we go and get the love and affection that we have for

each other helps to forget about it. That puts it in its place, which is the stress is just out there and it stays out there. You come home; you put down a different mood that's the way I look at it. So, in our own case, the marriage has rather helped us. Rather than the stress bringing down the marriage, the marriage has rather become a tool to deal with that stress.

Cp 2 H: I think it is something very special. It is a very happy experience because, you know there is a saying that when I was child I behaved like a child and when I became an adult, and then I threw away all my childish behavior, so it's a very big contrast. When somebody was single or a bachelor, that time is really was just for you. So, getting married is a very special experience because you share all your joys together especially the type woman that the almighty God gave me. She is somebody special. She has all the qualities any man can dream of. So, I think married life to me is a very special gift from God. It's a very happy one and the Almighty has blessed the marriage also with six children. So it is something I would not trade it for anything. It is a very happy and joyous phase of life it is another metamorphosis in the in the stage of life and I wouldn't trade it for anything. It's a very happy and joyous experience.

Cp 2 W highlighted the importance of recognizing the "otherness" in marriage and the role that children play as a source of bonding for couples.

Cp 2 W: In addition to what he has said, being married has made me grow so much here and more experienced and with all the experiences that come with marriage. Like he said, your life is no more self-centered. You have to think of the other person first. In our culture for example, your husband can't come home and wait for food. You know you have to at least make sure there is food ready in the house. Even if he comes home

and you are still cooking, at least he knows there something there. He does not have to go outside and look for food. So there is that responsibility and the joy too with the children. Because without children, then there is a vacuum in the marriage, but our marriage has been so well blessed by God and we are very grateful to him. Looking at the joy in our children and the health, that's something you can never trade for something else. It's been a very wonderful experience and I could never ask for a better man.

Like aged wine the longer it stays the better it becomes, the better it is appreciated. The same can be said of the marriage experience of couple seven husband as he stated in the following: For him he made the decision to remain married or to work at making his marriage last.

Cp 7H: Personally to me, ask me my experience and I will tell you that you don't begin to understand the values of marriage until after a very long time or the values of your particular marriage. It took me up to fifteen years to begin to say, "No I really want to be married". The first experience is joy. You know I have this beautiful woman and this beautiful girl, "Oh my God this is mine", you know that type of thing and you have her to love and cherish and she will see and then it turns into "what in the hell am I doing with this girl? She is terrible, get rid of her, I don't want to stay with her. I can't take this every day, I cannot take this, and this is getting worse". Then, it turns into "Wait a minute, this can be done, and it is able to handle. I can ignore things". The moment you can begin to ignore things, you begin to see the good part. Then you begin to feel, "What am I talking here? I don't think that anyone would be better. I don't think I can get a better one, plus look at all these good things she is; and hey! I'm angry about this, I am very upset about this type of thing, this behavior; I don't like it, I can't take it". Then, by

the time it's ten years, you begin to see "well this person really has been nice; this is what she can do, she has done this and she has done that". She has a way of doing so many good things for me and then by the time, it is fifteen years to sixteen years, "well we can fight about little things and if she fights, at times I'll fight, but it doesn't remove the fact that I've seen so many goods come from her"; then things begin to settle down. So, my advice to young couples usually is, you need to give up to fifteen years to see it before you can decide that it's not good. You can't make a decision that is not good until after you have given fifteen to twenty years.

5. Communication.

When asked what has been helpful in their marriage to keep them married so long, and what do they identify as the magic of good relationship, couple eight wife answered; and it was the general answer that most couples gave.

Cp 8 W: I think good communication. Communication is actually the key. I keep going back to respect and also bearing in a mind where we all came from Nigeria how you are supposed to treat your spouse, your husband is the head of the household and you don't mix it with another western culture. As long as you have that in you, that's what tells you where you come back home, this is how your husband is supposed to be treated, I think that for me, that's what keeps me to know what marriage means for woman coming from the background we all come from. God blessed us in communication of one on one, I still have in the back of my mind, "this is my responsibility, I should take care of my family, and my husband comes first".

Cp 1 W: Communication is the key and understanding of one another and sharing with one another. Like his pain is my pain and my pain is his pain. Once there is

understanding that way, things will be a lot easier. Like, a few days ago a lady called me to ask me about my husband, like when he is coming back from work. I told this lady at 7:00 o'clock at this time he is leaving work; he is going to get home around this time. So when she called back later, the information I gave her when I was at work was exactly same as I told her. You know what she told me "how did I know he would be there? You know your husband well. You know his routine, you know what he does, and "I said, "Yes, believe it." We talked to each other. He knows everything I am doing and that is really what helps us a lot and the trust, because that is the key. If you don't trust each other, then you would not be able to live in harmony, but we have that trust since we got married and we hope it keeps us to maybe 50 years to come.

Cp 1 W made the point that learning how to communicate in marriage starts way back from the individual's family of origin; a point her husband went on to expatiated.

Cp 1H: I am going to add to that. These things start from the beginning. In the beginning everybody is feeling his or her way in the marriage. The mistake people make is to shut everybody off. Maybe the first time I made a mistake, she brought it up and then if I hushed her down, she may have difficulty next time bringing it up. If you listen to your spouse, hear what he or she has to say and put it into to consideration, that can encourages communication. Next time there will be no fear of discussing things that he or she felt needed to be addressed. So the line of communication should be kept open right from the beginning. Once you've set that standard, it grows as you grow in the marriage. As she mentioned, being slightly older than her, it could be intimidating at the beginning if I didn't give her the audience in certain matters, then she will bottle that in and never speak it out again even when she doesn't like something, she rather bottle it

inside than discuss it. There may be an explanation for that, that will be satisfactory, but if you didn't ask, she will never know. So, that's my addition to that.

Cp 8H: Open communication as she said, respect for each other, not taking each other for granted and actually making sure that as open as the communication linkage is, there are no boundaries that need to be crossed in a sense. The truth of the matter, really, now that I have been forced to even start thinking about it, because it's been kind of little common, just go through life without this kind of exploration, but it is the sense of the quality in the individual that seems to find each other and use more respect on the basis of the substance. Then again for me, you may go back to what was the attraction in the first place, really. People get attracted to each other that I keep going back to if there is no substance in you, there is no value. If you are not smart or you're not intelligent, you can't speak or you can't write, you're just bringing beauty into the relationship; something really is not relevant enough. It's going to fall apart at some point in time. But one has to be really forced to think through about it. I mean this is the first exploration I am having to this idea, is to sit down and process what has keep us together and what keeps it but I know we have this open communication and respect for each other and her pain is my pain and her glory is my glory and there doesn't seem to be any separation. We were simply meant for each other from the beginning.

Communication engenders trust; genuineness and can help to reduce stress. Couple eight wife maintained that she and her husband through communication have established such a relationship that is open, non-pretentious and impervious to outsider innuendoes.

Cp 8H: That's the same line of thinking. This interview has given me an opportunity to think through some of these things. I got a lot of thinking about this but for some strange

reason things have been able to work out. Maybe we are lucky, I would say. I didn't know how it works, but it continues to be the fact that my life prior to and after meeting her is an open book. There is nothing she doesn't know about me. I mean, how I lived my life as a young man and how I have been living my life as a married man and the same thing goes to her in a sense. So we've been open. It's just communication without boundaries. We met each other after a lifetime so there is nothing secret about prior to meeting each other that would cause us to hide that aspect really because as you go about and run into people up and down, you may run into a suggestion you have covered and it shows itself up on you in a sense that brings about things. So it's open communication, not trying to hide, I really like to be myself, 24 hours a day 7 days a week. How I want to behave here is the way I want to behave outside and when you see me you know that's all. I don't know any other language to cover this other than we understand each other so well. I don't know how it has happened enough to accept each other very fully and trust and obey.

Cp 8 W: There is a lot stress in this society that can destroy relationships, a lot of stress. You come home stressed and then if you don't talk about it, luckily you work not 2 to 3 miles away from each other and then we still use one car to go to work and we have the opportunity to call each other, he can call me "hey, what happened today in the office" and we will talk about it and I say "well don't worry about it" if there is time we discuss it later then the same way I will call him for lunch or go out for breakfast sometimes, so we have really come to appreciate each other so much that we communicate very, very well phone calls from Nigeria. Know how it has happened enough to accept each other very fully and trust and obey.

6. Living within ones means.

The popular parlance cutting ones coat according to one's size, or cutting one's needs according to one's means came to mind here. The Igbos have similar proverbs. They say: "*nga aka ruru onye ka ona ekowe akpa ya*" one hangs one's bag only where one's hand can reach. Not complying with this kind of principle would have some serious ramifications. One would resort to doing things one would not have done ordinarily, like stealing, to get one's needs met. The Igbos abhors theft. To call someone a thief is one of the greatest insults you can give him or her. Watching couple two wife as she spoke alluding to culture playing a part in their marriage, the researcher could sense that she had this kind of Igbo adage at the back of her mind.

Cp 2 W: Again, culture plays a part in our marriage. In regards to money, and that depends on the individual, we do not regard material as more important than who we are and we try as much as we can to cut our cost according to our size. So if we cannot afford it. We can dream, but if can't afford it we don't rush into that. We gradually plan for when the time is right and when the time is right we can obtain that, but like I said, we cut our cost according to our size. With the children, we try as much as we can to put them first. Whatever they need that has to do with finances, we take care of them first. Because taking care of them first will prevent the roving eye, like my husband, outside the family, if they have what we think they need, not what they want, then there is a minimal cause from them to go out there to look at things that do not belong to them. So, the children come first, as long as the children are financially taken care of in their needs, my husband's and I come later. So we try as much as we can to live within our means, not above our means.

7. Ability to be flexible and dynamic.

This essential structure reminded the researcher of a section title of Skolnick's (2011) article where it stated that "marriage is a movie, not a snapshot" (p.216). There is dynamism encoded in it. Those involved will be ready to change as the scenes change. The scenes are the myriad events of life, the good and the bad, the joyful and the sad. The couples expressed this as follows:

Cp3 H: what doesn't help in a marriage is being too tight, holding on to grudges. When you say when somebody is talking and you don't listen to that talk, in other words there is no solution. Because the solution will come by listening to what you are saying and the other person listening to what you are saying. You may not agree, at that time, but when you go back on your own, you will come to realize, "what is it that this person is saying? Could I have done it a little differently?" If you don't have that type of mind to go back and retrospect then you're not going anywhere. If you are that person that says, "it has to be this or never" then it's not going to work it out. So you have to learn to be flexible.

You might hold on, but when you hear what the other person has to say, give a leeway.

Cp3 H: Flexibility plays a major role. Like I said that even given the same situation at a different time, you are going to get a different reaction. So when you come out that place and these situations come up, all you got to do is learn to treat that thing as it comes up.

There is no preplanned or pretext that you say, "Okay, when this happens this is what I am going to do" because it may not work. So treat each situation as it comes.

Couple three wife stepped in to state that in marriage you have to be "receptive to changes and receptive to whatever happens, whatever situation at that time". While her husband continued to emphasize that marriage is a give and take

Cp 5 H: The thing that is not helpful to keeping marriages together is having an attitude of “This is me, that’s the way I am” because what that does is the person is acknowledging that he can’t change. He has been focused; he has been programmed that way. So such things do not help the marriage at all. Because marriage is give and take you cannot say, “I was this and this is me, that’s the way I am” and you cannot say, “My father did this so I will do that”. The reason I give this example is that I had friend, he wanted a second wife and he went home and was negotiating for the second wife, the wife knew about it and confronted him. So, the man said his father has three wives therefore he is going to have three wives. He cannot depend on one wife. So I told him okay, sure your father had three wives; you want to be exactly like your father, why didn’t you stay back home? Your father did not come to America, you should have stayed back home if you want to be like your father, stay there and don’t come here. Then we will know that you want to do exactly like your father. That’s it, by leaving home and coming here, you have to continue to adjust, do certain things, not the way your father did them, but the way you know to have your own family, not your father’s family. Your father married more than one wife because of the condition of the situation there. Yes, they married more than one wife to get the labor the need for family, but here, you don’t do that; you work and your wife works, so you don’t need to marry two wives. You say that, when we go to the farm and we get ready to cultivate a large area, no, that was the difference. But he insisted on marrying wives, they did that. However, they ended up separating.

8. Team work. Belief that Marriage requires the cooperative work of both partners

For the Igbos the making of marriage is a collective affair, the family, kinfolks, and community. Those who live it out would have to live a community life that entails teamwork,

where, as the Igbos say the right hand washes the left and the left washes the right. They also say that *igwebuike*, unity is strength, and that the broom strands are strongest when they are put together. With this backdrop, coupled with the fact that the couples do not have the kind of domestic help they would get if they were in Nigeria, they have learned to rely on each other in doing the daily chores and the raising of children. Sometimes men doing chores that are not considered manly in Nigeria

Cp 3 W: I think I can relate to marriage as a kind of over something that has to do with team work. It takes the two people and with the two of them, there will be some challenges and then there will be some tough times like he said, but again, it takes the two people to work together and make it work.

Cp 1 H: One other thing that I see that may create problems for couples sometimes is not just the idea of people doing their own thing. They are not acting in a kind of synergy. If you're a couple, you should consult each other in whatever you are doing, because, I have heard the stories, not even stories, my own experience, as she mentioned, one of the spouse not pulling their weight. In many cases that is the case. In other cases, that is self-induced situation. When for some reason one person goes out and wants to work and work and get all the money. Even when they have 10 bucks for the guy to go look for something, they either bury themselves in their work, and at some point, and the end the other person relaxes, becomes a remote control, housekeeper.

Cp 1 W: After that, let's say the wife is the only one making the money, though her husband could make the money, but husband is maybe so lazy that he does not want to work, don't want to do anything, so the woman is making the money. In some cases I see the woman very resentful. Like, "why am I doing all this and he is sitting down there

doing nothing and spending all the money”. In that case it causes problems for them because if one person is the one making it and the other person is only spending it without trying to help out. Not that’s a problem, but he is just lazy, he doesn’t want to work hard and the wife can work hours, still come home and do the cleaning in the house, I see many people having problems in that issue. Like, okay, I have to start keeping my money, because if I keep my money, he wouldn’t get access and maybe that would make him to get up and go and work and contribute to the common account so it has a bit of disadvantage in that case. But, most of the time, if it is handled well, like he said earlier, everybody would understand each other and what we need to do then, it wouldn’t be much of a problem, but in the case one person is pulling their weight and the other person is not pulling their weight, then it causes problems.

Cp 5 W: Like my husband said, back home the men have rigid ways of doing things, but here if you use that rigid way, the marriage will not work because for example, when you have children, after we had the twins, I cannot take care of them by myself; bath them, feed them, carry them. Going to church, I cannot carry them by myself, but I tried. When I clean, I cannot do it by myself, but my husband when he knows that we have to clean the apartment, he will tell his boss that he will be late so he helps me. He helps doing things for the kids at home or holds them and feed in the night, alternates feeding them. Back home, usually the men don’t do that but you find your maid to help you, but here we don’t have a maid or extended family to help you. So the culture here has made it possible for us to see that the men can do the same things to help the woman to her a little happier and comfortable.

Cp 8W: Another thing I wanted to add is even though you do your job as you take care of your family the way you see best, but you cannot accomplish that alone. Being in this country helps with our combined chores because if he comes before me, he will not hesitate to start making dinner (farina) for himself or maybe call me on the phone, “what are you going to eat? I’m going to make food, do you want some?” something like that or he can stop by I can say “on your way back, can you stop and buy such and such a thing?” back home it’s looked at very favorably.

Cp 9H: And the job in the house, she knows what she should do and I know what I should do. Everybody takes care of what is his own commitment in the house, what is your responsibility. Like I do most of the laundry and she does most of the cooking. I know she is the person to cook. At home, the husband sits and then the wife cooks, does laundry and serves the meal to the husband to eat and then the wife picks up the dishes and does the dishes herself. No, here it’s not so, everybody shares, so that the burden will not be on one person. So when you share the responsibility, then one person will not be feeling the stress of I am overworked in the family and that’s sometimes what disintegrates some of the marriages here and some of the Nigerian marriages too.

9. Eliminating interference from others.

Interference here is implied interference from others and not extended family. But as can be seen from the excerpts below it is hard to separate them

(Cp 1 H): One other thing that I noticed that doesn’t help much in marriage to some people is interference from others. When people have to ask other people’s opinion on how they want to relate to their spouse. It has not happened in our case, but I had occasions to counsel other people on that and I feel that when it comes to that, if you have to ask somebody for opinion or for suggestion on how to relate to your spouse,

that is not a healthy approach to marriage. That is the kind of thing that could create a problem in marriage because not everybody you ask is going to give you honest and helping opinion. People have different views of how to relate to people. I have had people say, like in one case; I was counseling a friend of mine who said, "I'm putting my feet down". I told him, "Now once you use that statement that means you already lost it." It shouldn't come to that. It shouldn't come to a point where you have to put your feet down. That means you already have lost the moment already. So, the best thing is to anticipate things, be considerate and don't allow the relationship to get to the point where one of you has to put down their feet, because that now means a kind of a forceful approach to keeping a relationship. That is, "you have to do this or else"

Cp 7H: Usually, you could tell when a bad intruder begins to tell you different things from each other. They tell you different things when you are not there and different things to your wife; and when you are there, different things to you. Now, it doesn't matter if that intruder is a relative of either one, because, usually one of the visitor is either related to the wife or related to the husband. If you allow that relationship to come first before the truth to yourselves, then that person will break you. If you don't allow it, you can tell each other the truth that this person is not a good influence to both our marriage and then get rid of it. For example and I will give you a definite example; in my own particular case, I found out that my mother was not being a good influence. She was not being a good influence and I was honest about it. If I started fighting for my mother, my wife and I would break up.

When the researcher restated the last statement: you had to fight for your marriage first to shield it from interference from others, (Cp 7 H) responded:

Cp 7 H: Not necessarily, I had to fight for the truth first. I had to tell the truth to my wife and tell the truth to my mother. Each person had told each one the truth of where he was going wrong. My mother did not accept. My mother wanted to be right against my wife and I said to my mother, “you cannot go against my wife then I would allow my wife to go against you”. She chose to abstain, to go away from us. That was her choice until today but the only way she would be part of me is that she accommodates my wife because, first of all I wanted to say the truth and that’s what I’m talking about. If her brother or sister is doing something wrong, she will know. If my brother or sister is doing something wrong, I will know because I have to open my mind.

Cp 7W: No, there are cases where you don’t really know because you are thinking that this is a loving person, and is for your best interest. There have been millions of couples in Nigeria who have a lot of issues because of one in-law or the other because at the time that was my reason for saying give your marriage some time before you start letting someone live with you. Get to know each other first before you add another person that you are trying to learn because this is how I look at it, if you get married in your mid 20’s, you have been with your siblings all this while and then you get married. All of a sudden your husband is a new person in your life; you’ve known your siblings all your life, you think might have some kind of resentment towards this man who is taking a lot of your time. It’s natural, you cannot fight it, so you might work for maybe 10% of the couples to where they know, but they are not mature. They are really not old enough to see through this game. I can tell you from my own experience, there were games I was not old enough to see through but now I can see through that game from ten miles away. I can smell the

game so that is why I think I am still of the opinion that people need to give their marriage some time before they start opening up to visitors.

10. Infidelity.

This essential structure has connection with the issue of trust. It is a trust killer as couple one wife stated below:

Cp 1 W: Another obstacle I can see that may cause problems in marriages is infidelity. Money is one of them; infidelity is another big one, actually more than money. That is what I see many people having problems. Sometimes people can endure so many problems with their marriage, but when it comes to infidelity, that's where the problems come where it is very hard to trust each other again when that happens. It is very, very difficult to get that trust again. But, if they do get back together to try to work it out, in the back of their mind, the mistrust is still there. The trust is no longer there. So, what they do is like they hang in there, "I don't know if I am going to trust him or her" he/she may go again and do something. Even if you love that person, I love this person to death, but this particular thing is a no, no. That is the most difficult one that cause a lot of problems. Even in the Western world and back home it has started causing problems. In the past it didn't really matter so much, men do whatever they want to do, but these days it's causing a lot of problems and it's causing a lot of divorce.

When the researcher asked couple one wife to speak more about infidelity in Nigeria, she continued:

Cp 1 W: In the past, you know, the man sees another woman while he is married. The woman had no say about it, but these days the reverse is the case people has already behaving like they do here, so it's causing so many problems too. From what people talk

about that divorce is getting frequent back home, whereas years ago it is not heard of that something like that can cause a major problem in marriage.

11. Involvement in spiritual and religious activities.

The researcher perceived some strong sentiments as the participants spoke about this issue. That was not surprising given the Igbo understanding of religion. It meant everything to them. It was life as one of the earlier colonial officers A. G. Leonard in 1905 noted that the statement: they eat religiously, drink religiously, bathe religiously, dress religiously and sin religiously, could be applied to the Igbos (Leonard, 1968). In visiting participant homes, the researcher observed some evidence of their religiosity. The researcher saw pictures of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Crosses hanging on the walls, Bibles. An incident the researcher remembered was one of the morning appointments the researcher had with a couple. The researcher got there and knocked on the door, the couples open the door and invited the researcher in and offered him a seat telling him to wait and give them few minutes for the couple to finish their morning prayers and bible reading.

(Cp 5 W) One other thing that holds your children and you together in the marriage is God. I believe this is what he wants that man and woman stay together and praise him from their heart, and raise their children up the way they should go, so when you are not there, they are still practicing what they taught them. God says to raise them up and he continues and you feel happy when you are there or not there. Some people have children but they're married, I don't think they're happy. They may pretend to be happy, because it's a lot of work to do by one person.

Cp 2 W: For instance, our faith in our God. The church comes first at home. You go to church; I almost spend a whole day at church. That is where the spiritual richness comes from. Again, that is where the importance of family is built on.

Cp 2 W: Our marriage is built on love, but solidified with faith in God. Growing up at home played a wonderful part in our married, but you wanted a story. When I was growing up in high school at home, I made a promise to God, I had said one day, I was poor and said Lord, "I would like to be a nun, but I don't think it's my call, but if you would give me a man who would let me worship you, a Catholic man who would let me worship you the way I believe I should worship you, that our very first child would be an altar server." and you yourself should know, you know that girls do not serve mass. I never knew I was going to come to this country then. This was as a teenager growing up, but eventually when we got married and we had our child, our first child was a girl. In this country, too, girls were not serving mass then, but the most awesome thing that really solidified my faith in God was something that happened, our first child being a girl received her first Holy Communion at the age of seven, and after that one day, after mass we usually go to daily mass, then I was a stay-at-home mom and I always took the children to morning mass, so, I was standing in the foyer with our priest and the lady who coordinates altar service. The lady said, you know, she needs altar servers, but right now it's hard to find children and I said "you know if F was a boy she would have served mass, I wish girls do serve mass." She said "well why don't you go home and pray about it." I said "Mrs. G, she past two years ago, I say it's not possible for girls to serve mass. She said go home and pray and I came home and I prayed for thirteen days. The thirteenth day, I was here the phone rang and it was this lady, she said, "O, do you still

want your daughter to serve mass?” I say “hmm, you are pulling my leg right?” She said, “no, the Pope has given the Bishops consent, girls can serve mass.” I said “no!” She said “yes!” She said, “When can I come over?” I said “right now!” and I was pregnant with one of our children and just packed up and I ran to the church and I did the form for her. So our daughter was the very first girl to serve mass and ever since then, the six of them right now serve mass, even though she doesn’t actively serve mass but if she comes to the church and there is a need, she will serve because confirmed adults can serve too and they all have become adult but in those days we can’t serve anymore or lectures in church. Some of them are CCD teachers like my husband had mentioned earlier.

Cp 4 H: Also, being Christians, going to church, committed to the way of Christ, it has definitely helped. Hearing that sermon every Sunday, teaching Sunday school ourselves, you know we stay together than even break your own marriage because of a flimsy excuses. These are things that I can say that have helped us stay together. We are committed to stay together. We have been blessed traditionally, my wife and I are titled in the church, I’m a knight, and she is a lady. All aspects of both traditions, our community way of life and in the church, we have grown up substantially. I don’t think the result would be a breaking of marriage.

Cp 6W: We have tried to get our children into it; they are involved in the church, baptized and receive communion and confirmed and it has played a role. We always pray when we have any major things to do and we pray as a family together and we go to church. We may not participate in some of the other things like extracurricular a lot, but at least we keep up the family masses and any major religious events we try to participate

and we try to get our children involved. God is number one and we have to really put him first in everything we do. We pray about it.

Cp 6H: Yes religion plays a big role in the positive outcome of the marriage in the Catholic Church because it puts extra emphasis.

Cp 8H: Yeah, we go to church every Sunday. I take seriously my faith to the family church from God knows when and we have maintained the tradition and it's been so helpful and that is another aspect of the culture here that allows you the opportunity to sample all these churches, really go from one place to the other because there is nothing here that prevents you from not going to church. If you don't want to go, you don't go. There are too many things that can distract you from your Sunday obligation, but yet to be able to maintain that consistently enough really means you have been grounded in that faith that sustains you on the way of being to your religion.

Cp 9W: Always contain whatever happens in that house. Try to resolve it and again, I always tell some of them to talk to their sponsors who were there when they got married, they can help or even the priest. I prefer to go to the priest than to go to somebody else because they are there to help and to give you the right advice, I mean if you are a Christian but if you are not, that's where you don't listen or you don't pay attention to what they say.

12. Seeing marriage as a learning process.

The early Greek philosopher Heraclitus is accredited to have posited that everything is in a state of flux that one cannot step into the same river a second time. In a sense life is changing. Likewise marriage is in a state of flux. Research acknowledges this as Skolnick (2011) stated that: "a variety of studies show that over a relatively short period of time, marriages and families

can change in the ways they interact and in their emotional atmosphere” (p.216). With changes come learning. This is what these nine Igbo Nigerian couples were attempting to express in this essential structure as the following excerpt show:

Cp3 W: That is the truth. Even though we are married for so many years, there is still room to learn each other. You think that by now everybody knows each other, but like he said, maybe hundred percent situations was supposed to be the same in every given situation, but there is still some days that you will be like, “Oh I thought I knew her” then you learn this person more. It is a continued work; it’s not something that you can say okay I’m through, let’s do this now.

Cp 3H: It means a lot to me. When we said “I do” at the altar, that I do is in good time or bad times. Even though some people in bad times split and even some people split in good times because of some kind of disagreement, but the way I look at it is that my children are the blessing of this marriage and two people are responsible for those kids. I’m not always a fan of single parents, so by trying to figure out how the marriage will survive gives my kids training that marriage is not always a bed of roses. Even the roses have thorns, so that you have to learn to work things out in difficult times and in good times.

Cp 3 W: To me, a long-term marriage like this one signifies wisdom; it signifies a part of culture or home training culture or Nigerian culture because the longer you stay the more you learn from it and then the fear of God. There is God’s hand in that marriage. That’s what it means to me according to up God’s law; what God has joined together. What it means to me is teamwork; it means wisdom, fear of God and then also our culture.

Cp 3 W: I am not talking about the Americans, I'm saying not only Nigerians, but a lot of people do not want to work because marriage is like a work. Marriage is not like something that you okay let's go there it takes a work for it to work out. So, some people don't want to work. They don't want to inconvenience themselves to continue with that, but I feel that some people are taught like that in their upbringing. Marriage is something that is not easy; you have to work to make it happen. Some people cannot withstand the pressure and that is why they breakup.

Cp 6W: Like in the beginning, the obstacles we may have had in the beginning we are learning each other. You come into to this relationship thinking maybe "Oh this man I'm going to change him" and he thinks maybe this woman I'm going to change her, but you come to see that you just have to learn to tolerate each other and see what each other have. Because, sometimes, if I'm mad at something, I just don't talk about it at that time. I put all my thoughts together and then I'm going to come back and say, "Look, this is this or this is that" and then he does the same thing too. So, right now, thank God we really don't have a lot of things, we've learned from our past experiences. One thing that has helped us is that we supported each other to go to school and we've always supported each other instead of supporting anybody else. If there was a time I was thinking, "Maybe I should go out and do my PhD and he is the kind that will always say, "do whatever you want to do" and he would have supported me if I had continued. When he was going to school, I was always there because all the time I was thinking, "Yeah, it's for us" I never thought he was doing it for himself or you know it's for his own good. The only thing, I was thinking it's for the family. Thinking in that line has really helped us that we are always working for each other not against each other. The kids came and

we have put through school just by working too. None of them have been on scholarships, it's been working well. If I am putting overtime, I'm thinking maybe it'll help to pay the fees; we have always worked it out that way. When we discipline these kids, even if something he does not like, he will not come in front of the kids and say "why did you do that?" he may wait until I finish what I want to say "why did you say something like this?" or I may go back to him, but we never come back or try to stop the person or rebuke each other when we are talking to the kids. It has worked out for us. I think the growth has been really good.

Cp 8H: Nobody goes into marriage with some kind of a manual as to how it operates and there is a sense of the center of gravity of what works so you only have to seek and find your own. For some it is trial and error and for most it is trial and error until you find that particular point that the linkage establishes itself and you know this is the commoner and this is how it works and that is why no two marriages are the same really. If the couples have taking time to understand each other, you have to understand each other and we have understood each other. If you don't understand you husband and you husband doesn't understand you, that is a recipe for disaster really because then every joke means something other than a joke. Every serious talk means something other than a serious talk because each of you is operating the discussion from some uninformed perspective you have not been able explore and identify for each other.

13. Finances

The popular parlance that money is the root of all evils seems to be an understood principle here. The couples' awareness of the scourge that money could bring on marriages and relations was well articulated. They have discovered the financial formula that worked for them and have shared it in these excerpts:

Cp 7W: Actually, trying to work things out the best honest way you know how and the number one thing that creates a lot of divorce among our people is money.

Cp 7H: I will tell you one other aspect of it, which she maybe or she does even know or does even remember, while what she is true but at the same time, there is an aspect of honesty inside that you must have to look at. The fact that we shared that everybody keeps his money, we have agreed on that, and then everybody uses the same money for the interest of the family. It is like department management departments. You make your money, we give you the departments you have to manage and I make my money and give me departments to manage but one other aspect of that reality is also for you to look and see when it is becoming too edgy for your partner. Even though it is shared, it may after some time become too heavy for your partner and you have to be open. In other words, she is open and open and transparent and when she says, "I cannot do this" I know she is telling the truth. But she is not open, I will think she has all the money but refusing to meet her obligations, and she may think the same way. So that even though it's written and divided, it is not carved in stone. Occasionally, I find myself taking back some of those duties that she was supposed to be doing and sometimes I push back one or two of the duties back to her. I can take some, I push back some. If I see that it's too heavy, I can take some again. So, while we are going that, we always adjust them

without even saying it, without even discussing it, it's just a matter of being plain honest to it.

Cp 1 H: I can only see from marriage counseling to my friends. Where finances have always been an issues in many marriages from people I have talked to. When people pay much attention to individualism in marriage that can create a lot of problems. We come from a society where when a lady gets married, she now creates a new family and that new family has begun from the husband and their children and that's where all her attention is. I've known some other families where the difficulty has been that either the wife wanted to keep the money she gives to herself in order to support her siblings and so on, forgetting that in this marriage that you are going to have children, you are going to have own life to build and so on. That can cause problem in the man and also there are some men who also keep their money to themselves without their wife having access, these are things that bring distrust. She either feels that she is not a full fledged member of this family if you have to keep your finances secret to her and so on and then she may want to do the same and then from then on conflicts start to come in. I think that is another aspect that having lived in the western world for as long as I have, I have seen it break or make marriages. Where as simple issues as to what happened to the family money or why couldn't we afford this, when we have this and so on. So, I think that is a very important aspect of staying married, realizing that your money is kind of a common wealth for your immediate family here and any decision to use elsewhere should be discussed and consensus reached. In most cases you realized that you do agree that is something that is worth doing and then whether it is helping a member of her family, or helping a member of my family, we agree that is a good thing to do, there's no problem.

When asked how they have been able to manage their finances without difficulties.

Couple one husband responded:

Cp 1 H: The way we manage it is that we have always treated our income as common wealth. It doesn't matter who gets it, because what you have to realize is that if get it, it is at her own expense and if she gets it, it's at my own expense because that time she is out there she is trying to make it, we could have had it that time to ourselves. Sometimes, when I am away, trying to make money, she is deprived. So when that money comes in, I would not say I have made it, therefore, she won't know about it. We have always treated our income as common wealth and if you trust somebody you're married to and you can trust your life to that person. What is money or wealth? If you can trust your own life to your spouse, you can also trust your finances to your spouse. It is when your spouse like you should not have access, that's when they do get access, they are more likely not know how to treat it. So, from the beginning, whether we were making money or struggling, it was common. Again, it goes to the point of leaving things to you. If you don't treat it as a common wealth, she may be making up ideas of what you have and you will be making up ideas of what she has, which may or may not be reality. So, that's why you see some couples think, "You didn't get it, I know you have that money, but you don't want to bring it". There is nothing there to hide. You have access to it, you know how much is in there, you know why it is in there, why you don't want to touch it or why you want to spend it, so there is nothing to hide. So, I think my advice to other couples is that treat your income as common wealth. Let each other know about it and have access to it. You are adults. Unless one spouse has a problem, like a gambling problem, there is

no reason to keep some things away from each other. Unless there is a good reason to do that, the earlier you start the better.

Cp 1 W: After that, let's say the wife is the only one making the money, though her husband could make the money, but husband is maybe so lazy that he does not he want to work, don't want to do anything, so the woman is making the money. In some cases I see the woman very resentful. Like, "why am I doing all this and he is sitting down there doing nothing and spending all the money". In that case it causes problems for them because if one person is the one making it and the other person is only spending it without trying to help out. Not that's a problem, but he is just lazy, he doesn't want to work hard and the wife can work hours, still come home and do the cleaning in the house, I see many people having problems in that issue. Like, okay, I have to start keeping my money, because if I keep my money, he wouldn't get access and maybe that would make him to get up and go and work and contribute to the common account so it has a bit of disadvantage in that case. But, most of the time, if it is handled well, like he said earlier, everybody would understand each other and what we need to do then, it wouldn't be much of a problem, but in the case one person is pulling their weight and the other person is not pulling their weight, then it causes problems.

Cp 2 W: Again, culture plays a part in our marriage. In regards to money, and that depends on the individual, we do not regard material as more important than who we are and we try as much as we can to cut our cost according to our size. So if we cannot afford it. We can dream, but if can't afford it we don't rush into that. We gradually plan for when the time is right and when the time is right we can obtain that, but like I said, we cut our cost according to our size. With the children, we try as much as we can to put

them first. Whatever they need that has to do with finances, we take care of them first. Because taking care of them first will prevent the roving eye, like my husband, outside the family, if they have what they have what we think they need, not what they want, but what they need, then there is a minimal cause from them to go out there to look at things that do not belong to them. So, the children come first, as long as the children are financially taken care of in their needs, my husband's and I come later. So we try as much as we can to live within our means, not above our means.

Cp 8H: We have a joint account from day one and bills I take care of and sometimes she does take of it and if I have some free time or extra time and she is busy I get her to take care of them or I will tell her to do that and take care of these little things. She has access to the funds I have, nobody abuses the fund. If I have need for some money, she knows what that money is all about and if she has need for any amount, I know what it is without worrying about whether she is using it for one thing or another. This goes into the trust and the respect and the fact that you don't want to lose any sleep. What do you know about something? Because you know it's not there, it's a joint venture.

Cp 8W: We have joint credit cards, not that I have some that he doesn't know about, everything is joint. It has not been a problem.

Cp 9W: Yeah, he said something about finance today; you know that's where the biggest problem is between couples. A lot of couples don't get along well when it comes to money. You know men, though you're not married, but you know that is in you too, men is telling you too about how to spend it, where it should go, you know, so that's the number one problem, here that I sense among people. In our case here, money hasn't been an issue here. It's that I could have it, but what mean is it doesn't really matter who

makes what. So, I believe whatever I make is for him and whatever he makes is for the children and me. So we have no division. We just have one joint account. All our bills are paid by direct deposit. I don't really care how he writes checks or he doesn't look into how I, but we all know that we will have to be careful not to do something that will destroy our credit or writing checks when we are not supposed to be writing knowing that if you got bills coming and we decide to divert to something else unnecessary, but we have been managing that aspect of our lives. From the kind of job I do, I really don't make him see that maybe I make more he does or he makes more than I do. What we care here is how to pay our bills and take care of our children. Money has never been an issue, who gets what and we have been trying our best to avoid that aspect because it's the number one problem among couples here that are not together today.

Cp 9H: As long as you continue to say "it's my money", or your husband says "it's my money" then the road continues to widen, but when you say "it is ours" then that spirit continues to come closer together and you will grow stronger. Because once you continue to have separate things for yourself, the husband has different things for himself. We know we have two cars, but if there was a way we can just maintain to have one car, we would have done it; like if we had the same job, working in the same place, we would be using one car, but she works at a different place and I go to a different place. There is no way to do that.

14. Raising of children or upbringing of children

Children are valued segment of the Igbo community. They are there for the perpetuation of a man's lineage and also a form of 'insurance' for the parents. An Igbo proverb says: he who has children is richer than one who has money. It is a curse not to have children especially male

issues. The raising of children is taken seriously. Njoku (2001) stated this about Igbo culture that, “In the training of children in this culture, there are no half measures, no room for mediocrity...the children are the mirror of the family in the community” (p.79). Like everything in Igbo culture, child rearing is a community affair; it is started early and the dictum: spare the rod and spoil child is not forgotten. With this kind of background one can appreciate the plight of Igbo parents raising children in America as the struggle with the issues attested to in the pages of these excerpts.

Cp 5 H: We are not having a problem with them. Both of us grew up in the same culture. We all grew up and those who brought us up grew up from the same culture, so we have not had problems with them for two of us the way to raise them up. But rather the kids themselves, since they were born here, they try to do certain things the way it is done here. So what they hear from me is the same thing that they will hear from their mother because two of us have the same philosophy. So, when they hear the same thing and, then it's okay. So whatever they are doing I feel is bad and I know it's bad, their mother would say it's bad, so we have not had any problems with the way to bring up the kids.

Cp 2 W: Again, we try as much as we can to keep them focused and keep them occupied. Like right now, one of them is in church right now. She is in the youth ministry preparing for the activities they have tomorrow. An idol mind is the devil's workshop. So if they are occupied most the time, then, they have less opportunity to think of other things and again, we always tried to show them or talked to them about good morals to look up to and follow and we will try to let them know where we come from. That we have a culture, a culture that is quite different from this culture and we let

them know the importance of our culture. Certain things that people here may do and it will seem okay, but in our culture it is not okay and we let them know that eventually one day they will go back home and they can go back home and live outside that culture that the family comes from. So the most important thing, most of the time is to let them know where we come from. We try as much as possible not to say we are from Africa, we try to let them know we are from this particular place, town, state and country in Africa.

CP 2 H: Yes, it is true, because for example, let me tell you a case in point, recently, you know these kids they learn a lot from their colleagues and they were asking for cell phones. I vehemently objected to that and they argue, “oh all my friends have phones so we can call” so, I really objected to it, because to me, I have a standard and that is the moment they are about to finish in high school, then the person will be entitled to a telephone, because I know now at this time, once you are finished with high school, you are more or less entering into adulthood. When my wife pleaded with me that “please get our boy a telephone and our second daughter, the one in track”. So I set up a time I would do, but eventually, she was able to convince me and as I looked at it, I even admitted to only two of them, I included our fourth daughter, the one that is in the church now. So we got them three cell phones. As time goes on we have been observing that they have not been abusing it and it turned out to be also good because from time to time, you know, we keep track of them. So, that is kind of something that can be a point of contention that when you look at it and a second thought and analyze it objectively, you find out that it is also good for the family. Another thing is that we try to control the way they watch television here. Because, the children here can easily learn so many bad things, especially when the parents are not at home. So, we try to control it, try to set up

a time Monday through Friday, which are the days for school, we try to make it point of duty for them not to watch television. Then, on weekends they can watch television and we try to also discourage them from watching those very computer DS. Then the computer is also the same thing. We try to monitor that and then we try to also make sure that we know the company they follow, because at times you look at somebody that they say they are their friend and you check it out, you don't appreciate that person, so as much as we can, we select or inoculate or it is not panacea of sacrosanct that you are going to avoid that, but we try to do whatever we can to minimize it so they follow good company.

Cp 6H: Whenever, if I initiate a disciplinary process, she goes along with me. She doesn't differ. We try not to differ with each other once one of us has initiated a disciplinary process on any of our children and we don't argue, we avoid the difference on each other because we recognize that they are our kids and any corrective measures she takes on any of our children would be for the good of the family; we always stick together when a corrective measure is being used to discipline any of the kids.

Cp 7W: Another one is kids, how to raise the children. That's a major one because you come from two different backgrounds; you have two different opinions on how a child should be raised. Sometimes you are telling me, "well my dad would have done this and my dad would have done that", and I'm just going to let you go, your dad must have been crazy, mixed up. My father would never say this, so you see it's the background and so you learn to work things out. Don't come into the marriage thinking that you came from a perfect background. Here, you are coming into your own and you can share

experiences with your spouse. Your spouse will tell you, when you are in my household, this is what we were given and this is what we did. Because of that it works.

CPL 7W: Don't say negative things about each other in front of the children because the children will use it against you when the time comes. They play you two against each other; "after all mom said this, after all dad said this". So you have to be careful because the children are like sponges and they absorb whatever goes in.

Cp 7H: Also, I think that is true, it is sometimes a difficult aspect. Personally, I believe that there are certain things that the man will give the ultimate permission and there are certain things the woman will give the ultimate permission and I try to stay away from each person. You should actually try to stay away from the territory in which he doesn't have the power. It would be wrong to give a child the permission to go ahead and do something, which you know you have not found out from the other person who had the ultimate power there; the ultimate authority there. There are many things that she has the authority there and there are certain things I have the authority to decide. It is always best to send the child over to the side and say, "go ask your dad, because that's something I can't give you permission on, or go ask your mom, I can't give you permission." I'll give you an example. If my child says, "I want to get some soup" or something like that, should I take from this or from that? I would say go ask your mom because that's not my territory. If my child says, "I want to go out at night, I want to go out to this party" I would not expect my wife to give the permission without asking me because when anything happens, I would be the one to go out in the night. I would be the one to go out and find the money. I would have to take responsibility of anything that happens out

there. So that is why I say, if you really want to have your children go right, each person must know the limitations of the his authority.

CPL 7H: Therefore, if she complains about works to be done in the house, I will say simply, “I do my own work, the much I could”. If the car goes bad, she doesn’t go to fix it for me even my own I have to fix it. For that reason, certain things in the house, she has to do. We have learned to bring help. Our maids have been our children. They do everything a maid would do and that’s part of the training. Every one of our children can wash plates, can cook some food, can keep house clean and can wash their own laundry. We don’t do their laundry; they do their own laundry. We don’t iron their cloths; they iron their own cloths. That’s the way we trained them because we don’t have a maid. It is not true that in this family that the husband does not help. Your children go right; each person must know the limitations of the authority.

15. Acculturation issues.

Nigerian families experience acculturative stress while attempting to live in two worlds, American culture and Igbo traditional life (Nwadiora, 1966). Nwaorgu (2000) found acculturation threatens the marriage stability among Igbo couples in the United States. The researcher noticed a strong cultural attachment the participating couples had observable from the way they received the researcher in their homes. At the homes the researcher visited there was a demonstration of classic Igbo traditional hospitality. There was performance of the traditional ritual of presenting Kola nut (*oji*). Uchendu (1965) noted that “the kola nut is the greatest symbol of Igbo hospitality” (p.74). Onyenwenyi (2002) went further to state the significance of the non- presentation of the kola nut as “the sure sign of enmity is the refusal to offer *oji* (kola nut) to a guest or refusal to accept *oji* from a host” (p.419). From the interaction with the couple

participants the researcher had a good sense that they were steeped in Igbo cultural tradition. And also the way they navigated the influence of the American culture showed their ability to straddle the two cultures, utilizing aspect that are helpful and jettisoning what is not.

CP 6 H: There is something inbuilt in us that is our culture. Before we came over here, we saw a big difference between our culture and the American Culture and I think we saw both cultures as oil and water or as day and night. Knowing that embracing the American culture can have a negative effect on our relationship because that is not what we are used to and that is what is generally seen as being outside. Before we came here, we knew very well what the role of the male is and what the role of the female is and even though we tried not to reverse, but circumstances in many cases made us to reverse the roles especially knowing that they are temporary. So for instance, males are not expected to cook at home but there was a time when we were struggling and knowing that the struggle will lead us to a better brighter future there were certain things that I did that would not be expected of me coming from a different culture, which is common in the American culture. The good aspects of the American culture, we did embrace to help us because in the long run it would be to our benefit.

Cp 3 W: Definitely, I would have to say financial. I feel like sometimes there was a time that financial was there and then also getting used to this society, adapting to the culture, the American culture. Because when I first came here it was difficult obstacles.

Researcher: Tell me more about the culture, changing from the Nigerian culture to the American culture.

Cp 3 W: Starting from when I came here, I just finished high school and then I came here, just before having kids, I started right there from having my first child. In Nigerian

culture usually when you have your first child, your parents would be here helping you, but I was here by myself and nobody helped me. I was going to school, taking care of the kids, and I am pregnant, it was very, very hectic. So for child to adapt to that, it wasn't easy. It wasn't very easy. To me that was one of the things. I wasn't married in Nigeria for a long time, but I feel like there is more to deal with here. There are more financial obligations. As a woman, usually in Nigeria, you have some people to help you with your housework; you will have assistance from people, but here you don't and sometimes you will be here the mother, the husband and a professional person. To me combining the three of them sometimes can be very, very stressful.

Cp 3 H: Men don't go into the kitchen back home. They don't know how to cook and some of us try to transcend that into this place here and it doesn't work. I was talking with one of my friends who have to wait or go to bed without eating because the wife is at work and the wife did not cook and that's why he couldn't eat, the wife did not prepare the food and I laughed at it. The reason why I laughed is at home a woman is at work; the children or the maids knows when madam will come back and they already know the instructions and they get that thing done before the wife comes back. Here there are no maids and any man that will go and fold their hands and say I'm not going to look for something to eat because my wife will come back, is not an ideal situation. I try to get away from that thinking. As an ex-military man, you have learned to survive. Also, my mother had females first and I have only one brother and we stay back home while my parents will go to work and we have learned to survive while they are working because during the farming time you can only eat when those people come back.

Cp 3 W: We attach value to marriage. We value marriage in my country, but here, I hate to point fingers on something, but sometimes we tend to forget where they come from. They tend to forget their place in the circle of life and, sometimes, that really can change. I believe in a traditional life, like wearing traditional cultural dresses, our thing that makes a woman and makes a man. To me that matters. I have this good belief in marriage and then also in family. I have to believe that the woman is supposed to dress that way and the man is supposed to act certain ways. Some people think they change their own culture to American culture where they just become totally different and to me that can also bring a problem in the family.

There was an awareness of trying not to deviate totally from one's culture

Cp 3 H: we know that we didn't come from here. We were not brought up in this society and for us to come here and try to jump into the ways of these people here is not necessarily going to work.

Cp 3 W: I also feel like our people can withstand the pressure. Some of the reasons why these people here, is that they don't want to compromise. They are like "I can't take this". Sometimes it takes that "let me just inconvenience myself for just a little bit or just take that pressure just a little bit to make the marriage work out".

Cp 4 W: I had our son at home. I didn't go to work or to market or anything until three months. I stayed at home with the baby three months, nursing or breastfeeding the baby. Breast feeding is the only thing, there is no option about bottle feeding because you are at home with the baby and people go to market and bring you stuff whether you send them or they voluntarily bring you some. But here, there is no time. You have the baby today, or two weeks, then that's the longest you stay in the house and that's going anywhere.

Maybe when you are carrying the baby home, you branching to the store to buy some things and then very soon you have go to work, your work is calling you whether they want to replace you or when are you coming back and your school, if you are student, your papers are getting behind, you miss classes. I remember having my second daughter here with one hand I carried her and with the other hand I'm writing my paper. With one side of breast I'm nursing and change this side. I remember one of the teachers taking my assignment to the school and bringing me what others studied. In my graduate work, I remember my classmate taping the work and bringing it home for me while I had a baby. I would just be listening to what they did in the class, and responding to all that, so it's not so much fun here compared with home. Because, home, things are steadier and you have more people around you and you have people to learn from. Here you see young women don't have whom to learn from, their parents are not around and the relatives, they are so busy themselves to offer a helping hand. CPL 7W: The major obstacle is that now we are having to play too many roles, the role of a house help and then the role of a wife and the role of the mother. Where as in Nigeria, helping in the house is out of the question. It creates a lot of tension between our women and their husbands. Unless our men are trained to help around the house and that can be a problem because here you are in this country, you struggle as a father/man would struggle outside of the home. When you get to work, they don't ask you. They don't tell you "since you're a woman you work late today," no, it's the same to everybody and then you come back and sometimes in the meetings I attend, we tend to share that opinion that sometimes our men will put the same demands that they would have put on you in Nigeria but here it doesn't really help. So we, women see that now you go to work and

you work and then you come back home and then you really start working. The children have been a lot of help, pretty much. We've been blessed to have them.

Cp 8 H: For me, it wasn't difficult. It was more or less a transition, being able to have the competency enough to transit into a different environment in order to survive in that kind of environment and it come from being able to make the necessary adjustment.

Now I came in here when I was still a young man and came by myself, lived by myself and went to school. I didn't expect any money coming from Nigeria and so I went to school, I walked and inculcated in myself the discipline that needed to make possible for me to survive and so when she came along, it became kind of an orientation and so we knew that the family thing to survive in this country and to achieve academically move towards mutual objectives and then to be able to relax and enjoy life, more or less.

Acculturation, yes, is second place only to the extent that those values are necessary for us to survive may not be the ones that you suck into, you getting into problems with drugs or all the other related aspect of this stressful survive.

Cp 8 W: Yeah, we've always come and go initially like he said. We didn't even talk about it but we knew from the day go, that we need to go through school, get married, have children and they go through school. There is also the tendency for you to copy a lot of western life, which mostly don't work when you really think of where you come from so we see those things I still practice what I am supposed to be doing as a married Nigerian woman. There are a lot of changes but still they did not affect the relationship in any way.

Cp 8 H: Well, you know the Nigerian system is chauvinistic, which comes from our culture. The man is the alpha and omega and the woman has absolutely nothing to talk

about in the Nigerian culture, really, but within that context even in that imbalance, women still respect their husbands and do all the chores and take care of their family, even in that chauvinistic kind of society but the respect really is the factor in it, because my dad even though when you get married it doesn't come with some package or manual or you could see the relationship, I learned a lot from the relationship he had with his wives he had and so it was cordial. I never saw them quarrel any day during my youth and even after I had grown up they had misunderstanding quiet alright but not this kind that would allow the husband to beat the wife as if she is a slave or something but coming into this society, there is some kind of a transformation. This society recognizes and appreciates women and it empowers women in the relationship and so the man more or less takes the secondary position so the society respects women and if you come from a background really where already the respect has been incorporated in your psyche, the transition is not difficult to women's thing. Of course there is a law here to bind you into behaving the right way, you begin to stray away. So, this society allows women to flourish and that everybody has the opportunity to climb to the level of their confidence, their ability and work together in terms of making the environment work. So, I don't know whether it really answered your questions or not.

Cp 8 W: Yeah, I believe I come from an old school in the sense that what was instilled in me is to take care of your family and also I think it's a lot easier to take care of your family, you do what you are supposed to do and you appreciate it. I think it makes a lot of difference. I know from back home, your job is to cook and nourish. Actually, I think you pay more attention to everybody in your family but yourself, but in this case, we've never lived at home. We were married here, we've lived here but I appreciate him

so much because even though I do what I'm supposed to do, he gives me full support and he appreciates me. That's what I think in this relationship is 50/50. Maybe if we were in Nigeria it probably wouldn't have been 50/50. He consults me in everything and I consult him, unlike back home where the man has to make all the decisions even if you find out and question then it becomes a problem but not in this case. So I can tell you that some of the American culture also favored the relationship to a certain extent.

Cp 8 H: There is a sense of liberation for women. The society has empowered women but that sense of empowerment has also created another convex to self liberation as if really that even in the sense of relationship, you are on your own, I am on my own, we have all joined together by bank account. You don't have to know what my account is. My money is my money, your money is our money and can go and come any time without you having to stop me. We are not your slaves. We are married, we have our own rights and you have your own rights. That sense of liberation really, the American marriage system is something we have disavowed in a sense because it is not helpful. It contradicts everything we know to make a relationship work.

Cp 8 W: You choose the good ones that will help you in your everyday life, but the other ones most likely will destroy your relationship. You just want to leave those alone but I cannot come back and ask him "how come you have not cooked?" He can cook if he wants to but I cannot come in and then expect him to be home and he didn't cook and that's it we are not going to eat today and he will out and buy a hamburger or something, but that is the American way of life and even it's happening in the Nigerian culture where those things we know that don't mix with your beliefs and your values, so just leave those alone. Take the good ones.

Cp 9W: Like when I started having kids, I was doing night duty then. When I leave here at 7:00 p.m. and I don't come back until almost 8:00 a.m. the next day, he is the one here with the kids. He would be home with the kids. He will make sure that those kids, he gets them ready for school, feeds them. When I started fixing my daughter's hair because I'm not there to do that and he cannot let the baby girl go to school with her hair looking that, most men here like to do that, it just the situation. It's not that it's something, I mean he wasn't forced to because you know I want him to do it, but it's just according to what they say at home that condition makes crawfish to bend, so that's the reason why most of our men especially him, you know he was able to do most of the things. Most of the time, I wouldn't be there to do. Like when he comes home from work, he is not going to wait for me to fix him or fix the kids something to eat, so whoever is at home, takes care of that responsibility. That's the way it is, but all I would have to do is to make sure is that at least he is not going to start making a new soup or making a new stew but some of these Americans things we buy and put in the freezer that the kids would want to eat we make sure we have them and he will get them ready for them. If I'm here, I will do the same thing. I will not wait for him, if I'm not here; he is not going to wait for me because he has to do what he has to do to take care of everybody in the family while I'm away. So that's the way it's been.

Cp 9H: Yeah, the primary thing is that the man is the head of the family and the survival of the family depends on him. When I mean survival, it doesn't mean, I mean the marriage that survived depends on how he handles it. If he wants it to survive, he should apply some principles like trying to make sure that everybody feels happy, and belonging, you belong to this family and your survival and your progress depends on this

family, like our kids. We don't let them just to fly around like that. We always try to bring them together. So, all those things that exist at home have helped me to always guide my family here. When I see anyone that is trying to go astray, I try to gather him to control. To control their movement, the movement of the kids and my wife helps too, to control the movement of the kids. True to their values, what advise they need and make sure they get it because if they don't get it, but we are going to supply it. So, when kids get what they want from their parents, they feel they belong. They feel they belong to the family and the question of staying together. At home, we don't hardly have divorce, I mean you can rarely see wife and husband separated, even if they are separate, it's a question of time the wife will still come back. But here, and as soon as I came here, I've always make sure that question of separation of husband and wife doesn't even come into my memory. I keep it and I pray all the time.

There seems to be some agreement among participant concerning the benefits of acculturation for marital longevity. For some it has a positive effect, for others its effect is negative.

Essential Structures Reported by Participating Clergy(Clp)

The essential structure added by the clergy were not items diametrically opposite to what the couple participants stated but were nuanced with the clergy and pastoral overtone. They were issues relating to forgiveness and tolerance, love element in marriage, unacceptably of divorce in Nigeria, issues about sex, and religious leaders help tackling marriage problems. Some of these issues were not stated directly by the couples.

1. Ability to forgive and to tolerant.

The clergy participants found forgiveness and tolerance a common issue in their ministry to Nigerian couples.

Clp 2: Selfishness. You just know yourself, you don't care about the other person; the way she feels or he feels, you want to take advantage of him or her, that is what selfishness is and that is a big obstacle.

Clp 2: Apart from selfishness? Yes, well, not having the spirit of tolerance when you never forgive and forget. That is a big obstacle.

2. Preference to go to the priest or religious leader.

Marriages are entered into under the watchful eye of the couples', families, middlemen and the community. After the traditional wedding, the church wedding follows for those who go to church. The priest or the pastor becomes another layer of those involved in the making of the marriage. When marriages get into problem, the people involved in the making come back for the fixing. Here in America where the marriage network is not available, the priest or pastor assumes the role of elder, middleman, community and so forth.

Clp 1: I'm talking mostly for those who go to church, those who I see in the church and it doesn't matter which church. With those in my church, I have experiences of people who have had problems and naturally they will always come to me. Either the woman comes to complain or the man comes to tell you what his wife is doing and then from there I arrange counseling for them. I have not heard of cases where my member jumped or took a case to the court and then later on they bring it back to me as a secondary result. It has always been they will come and let you know what is going on.

The researcher asked clergy participant one whether couples came to him simply as their pastor or on pure religious ground.

Clp 1: If they did, it is a mixture of both. One is that we have respect for elders in our community and their children are taught to be that way. They see the pastor or the

Reverend as an elder and that somebody that is taking care of them of spiritually; naturally the tendency will be to complain to that father figure in their life. They are at home, naturally the first person they would go to would be their parents to talk about that, but in this environment they will see you as somebody that one; for the fact that they have confidence that what they tell you remains that way, so based on that confidence or index, they will naturally come to you first. They talk with you and they didn't hear it in any other place, the more they will have greater confidence. Naturally, people will ask questions like if you have a problem and you know somebody who has had it before and he tells you what he did, there is the tendency that you may go that route. In a society that takes pride in going to jump into the court, that will be their attitude, but where somebody has consulted a minister and many times the result was good then tendency would be that other people will follow suit. So I would say one, also maybe for the fact that our people are religious, and also for the fact that by virtue of coming closer to the church, they know that the church provides that kind of source in times of crisis.

Clp 2: I think that some of them who have gone to counselors failed because some of them went and then came back to me. Why they failed is because some of the counselors will not even understand where their problems are coming from and some of them charge a lot and they are not prepared to pay all that.

Clp 2: When they have marital problems they don't run to the medicine man. They will go the priest. I'll give you an example, this last time I was in Nigeria I visited a priest and he came briefly and told me that he was trashing a marital case and so we didn't have time. So he was there with them in this group and that group but in Nigeria it is different thing because they have other support. They have Umunna. They have relations and ndi

akaebe (witness), they have all those things, and so they have more. It's a very cultural traditional base for the marriage and therefore the resolution is built in; it is within the culture. The culture provides how you are married and then if you have problems, how you solve it, you resolve it; but when they come here, they are cut off from that.

Clp 2: First of all, marriage is not an individual thing in Nigeria. It is a societal thing, therefore, your family and the other family. So every stage of it involves the society. So to break up a marriage, you also have to go the same the route. So if there is a problem, for example, the first thing is that the two of you will try to resolve it and if you can't, then, sometimes you resort to parents. Sometimes they invite, especially Christians, the witnesses or the sponsors, or sometimes they appeal to *Umunna* . So, you see, society can help and sometimes they just invite certain friends and they look at the case and then give them their own ruling or judgment or advice. Many times they abide by it.

Clp 2: If it is not working they will finally go to the priest and maybe even some of these people could advise them to go to the priest if they believe that will help. The point is that they have so much resource.

3. Awareness of unacceptability of divorce in Nigeria.

This highlights the expectation of longevity in marriage. Although there are acceptable grounds for divorce in Igbo culture as has been stated in chapter two, marriage is enter into for long-term. Marriage is forever and not for divorce. Since it is frowned at in Nigeria, one would not be the one to bring that shame on one's family in Nigeria by divorcing.

Clp 2: I don't see any special meaning other than the same meaning that any other person who has been married for 20 years or older. There is a sense of pride and the joy and happiness they have been married for 20 years or so. Otherwise, I don't see any

other thing. There is more in what they have produced than for example, there is more pride in saying “this is my boy and he is studying medicine at the University of this”, more than, “oh we have been married for 20 years”. Suppose they have been married for 20 and have no issue. They don’t express with the same self-confidence and pride as they would if they had issues. So it goes hand in hand with what they have achieved within that period of time. One reason for that is that among Nigerians, you are expected to marry for life, so that your marriage lasts 20 years, you are expected to. It is no big deal as such, because that is what it is expected to be. Their parents marry for 20 years, 40 years, or 50 years.

Clp 2: What have you achieve is more important to them than what has brought them to 20 years of living together. For anybody, many Nigerians, say “so what, you are supposed to” you are expected to. Once you joint in matrimony, you are expected to; this is for life. It is like saying 40 years now; I am celebrating my 40th birthday, that’s right, so the same attitude they have when they say we are celebrating our 20 years of marriage. It is same attitude, but it is not like, “hey, we are living together, everybody should come and shake my hand” no, because you are expected to live together; it is expected that you be living together 20 years, 40 years, 50 years as long as you are alive.

Clp1: It’s not as bad. Even though it is happening, it is not as rampant as here, remember what I said about our culture and where we came, it is a taboo in our place. The woman goes to her husband and after some time if she goes back to her parents, they don’t welcome the lady again, but in this community where we live is commonplace. So when you remember where you come from there are chances that you will guide this in your house more jealously, you don’t want it to happen. You don’t want your family to

be stigmatized with divorce even though people here don't call divorce anything; we still see it as failure in life.

4. Effective management of issues surrounding sex

It was interesting to note that this was not a topic of importance in the interviews with the couples. Perhaps for this group it was not. But a point of note is that the Igbos are very private people, not willing to wash their dirty linen in public. There is a proverb that says that the palm wine tapper does not disclose all that he knows in the collection of palm wine from the tree. Furthermore they understood this as an academic exercise not a therapy. The clergy participants made a good point because these were their experience as they encounter Igbo couples in their pastoral counselling.

Clp2: Yes, also usually one thing that they never mention is their sexual life. Their sexual life is very important. This is the untold story in almost every marriage. For me it is supposed to help pull them stronger and stronger, but sometimes they mix it up with other things. Say for example, the woman may use it as a punishment. Then, also sometimes some men are more active than the woman and do not respect her condition and it could also bring a problems.

5. Being constantly aware of the love element in marriage

The love element here is not any form of love but pure biblical love.

Clp 2: The first thing that will help them is to realize what marriage is about. Marriage is the union of people who love each other and also that it is a sacrifice. There is a lot of sacrifice involved in marriage just as there is sacrifice involved in love with two people who love each other. They have understood that love implies sacrifice. So then for marriage to last they have really to destroy the self, in other words, in religious terms,

you have to mortify yourself. Therefore, selfishness is not good in marriage. It does not help. You must be ready to sacrifice for the other person, and therefore, it is through their sacrifice that they can nourish the love between them. Love is not such an abstract thing as some people think. It is not so abstract, it has to be concretized in our actions, dissolving myself into ourselves, it becomes us and with the children it becomes all of us; that is what keeps it. Therefore, again there has to be a spirit of tolerance and forgiveness also understanding. Marriage is a process of learning. At first people presume that they know each other, but when they are married they discover, they begin to discover things; what they discover is their flaws, which if they had opened their eyes, they probably would have detected early before marriage. So, the question is, how do you deal with such flaws if you are not patient enough? That is one thing that makes some marriages to dissolve. You have to be patient, you have to understand the other person, you have to have some understanding and sympathy, in short, and you both have to love. Learn how to love and what love means. That is what I think would help marriages to endure. I've always referred them to St Paul's masterpiece. In I Corinthians 13, there is a reference point for marriage, what love means. If the people should read it and read it and then apply it to their marriage, I think that would help them.

6. Managing the over inflated image of a cozy life in the US for the newly arrived wife.

This essential structure is another interesting one and one that most Nigerians could relate to. The clergy participant stated the issue clearly in the following excerpt:

Clp 2: The way they are married these days. It used to be that people opened their eye to look and see, but now there is so much hankering for America. I want to come to America, to the point that they don't examine the man very well. Once anybody is told that somebody

in America he or she wants to marry the person, they kind of jump a number of things they would have done in cultural marriage. Normally, they would look very well; see whether the people have some kind of sickness or disease or their status in life and so on, before they jump into it. So those things are now overlooked because they just want to rush to American. But when you come here you begin to see and then the people here also put up some kind of profile. They present themselves as people who are great. Somebody says, "I am a manager in Circle K"; what is Circle K? You don't know, but when you come here, you know that Circle K is just one small store where they sell gas. But a manager in Circle K Company, they will think that it is a big thing. One hundred and twenty-five or they call it a skyscraper that's where you find champagne with air conditions, no, it's not that and then some of them are taxi driver, what they tell you, I'm doctor such and such a person, that's fine, he could be a doctor, but there's no job. He doesn't have a job, he is driving a taxi, but based on what he has been sending home, he is a doctor to somebody and says he has a PhD, you come here and your doctor is driving a taxi. So things like that and there are a lot of other things and then some of them come, they may be striving in one way or the other, but as soon as the woman comes and yes they try to put her into medical field where she will be making money, once she starts making money, the man relaxes. So there are things like that, which I mention in my paper. More on the perspective of the women and it might help to at least to see some of the problems they do have.

The researcher has taken liberty to present plentiful excerpts from the interview transcripts in this data reporting. This was done deliberately to help the reader capture the intensity, tenacity and sensitivity with which these nine Igbo Nigerian couples who have been married for 20 years or more describe their experience. In the bid to provide an accurate report,

the researcher would be remiss not to have done so. The essential structures express the substance or quiddity of what long-term marriage among the group was all about. The researcher had the hope that the overwhelming number of excerpts served their purpose to bring the reader to the heart and soul of long-term marriages among Igbo Nigerian immigrants.

Chapter V

Discussion

In this final chapter an overview of the research procedure and findings are presented. The findings are discussed in the context of existing literature on long-term marriage and what that would mean for immigrants Nigerian Igbo couples and also with implication regarding clinical practice. The limitation of the study and recommendation for future research are also explored.

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological research was to explore how nine Nigerian Igbo couples who live in the Houston metropolitan area and who have been married for 20 years or more describe their experience and explain what made their marriages work. Data from two clergymen who live in the Houston metropolitan area and who have ministerial duties for the Nigerian Igbo community were also utilized. A Nigerian Igbo family therapist served as peer debriefer. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Giorgi's (1985) psychological phenomenological method was used to analyze data. Data analysis yielded 15 essential structures presented in Table 1 from the couple participants and six essential structures presented in Table 2 not directly mentioned by the couples were identified by the clergy participants. Copious use of participant's words was used to report findings.

Discussion of Findings

The study findings are similar to other results on long-term satisfied marriages. Fenell (1993) identified the following: Lifetime commitment to marriage, loyalty to spouse, strong moral values, respect for spouse as best friend, commitment to sexual fidelity, desire to be a good parent, faith in God and spiritual commitment, desire to please and support spouse, good

companion to spouse and willingness to forgive, and be forgiven. These are similar to those stated in the essential structures of the study participants. The clergy participants added to this list: willingness to forgive and be forgiven and commitment to sexual fidelity as well as ability to successfully navigate sexual issues. It was interesting that the clergy participants mentioned it and not the couples. The Igbos as stated earlier are very private people and do not “wash their dirty linen in public” as the saying goes. The clergy participants learn about this in working with Igbo couples in their pastoral counseling.

Commitment was another essential ingredient identified in long-term satisfied marriages (Bachand & Caron, 2001; Fenell, 1993; Kaslow and Hammerschmidt, 1992, Lauer & Lauer 1990; Robison & Blanton, 1993). Lauer and Lauer (1990) made an important observation about commitment in marriage. They highlighted the bilateral aspect of commitment, which asks when couples say they are committed in marriage, and what are they committed to? Is it to their partner or to the institution of marriage? Or is it to both? Lauer and Lauer (1990) in their study found out that the participants in their study viewed their marriage as sacred and were also committed to their partners. With this result at the background, Lauer and Lauer made a comparison of couples in unhappy long-term marriage and those in long-term happy marriage. The striking result was that couples in unhappy long-term marriage were committed to the institution and not particularly to their partner; whereas those in happy marriages were committed to both their partner and institution. This is a significant finding with regard to long-term Nigerian Igbo marriages. Usually the idea of being in marriage purely for satisfaction is not paramount in the Igbo traditional way of conceiving marriage. Marriage is seen as a sacred obligation to the self and to the community. Through marriage one's lineage and community is perpetuated. The couple participants in this study have shown that having this overarching

concept of marriage does not negate commitment to one's partner. This is buttressed by the glowing picture they painted of their marriage experience. Couple six (wife) stated, "It has been an exciting experience and an exciting journey. We have come to know each other so well that it has worked out so beautifully". Couple one (husband) spoke of having "admiration for your partner, not wanting to be apart from her". The couples had, therefore, a strong commitment to the sacredness of marriage and commitment to their partners.

Religion and spirituality were other factors advanced in the literature as contributing to longevity of marriages (Fenell, 1993; Hampton, 2008; Lauer & Lauer, 1990). In a study investigating the essence of the lived experience of Christian African-American couples that have been married for 25 years or more, Hampton (2008) found a strong showing between marriage longevity and spirituality or religion. In reporting the findings, Hampton (2008) stated "no other factor warranted as many responses as the impact of religion, faith, or spirituality on the marriage" (p. 122). This religious component of the longevity of marriage was very much echoed by couples in this study. Couple two (wife) stated it: "our faith is our God. The church comes first at home. Our marriage is built on love, but solidified with faith in God". Couple three (wife) stated: "To me, any long-term marriage, there is God's hand in that marriage". This aspect of the result is not surprising giving the way the Igbos envision the role of religion in their lives. In 1906 a colonial officer who lived in Igbo land made this observation about the Igbos: "they are, in the strict and natural sense of the word, truly and a deeply religious people, of whom it can be said, as it has been said of the Hindus, that "they eat religiously, drink religiously, bathe religiously, dress religiously and sin religiously". (Leonard, 2012/1906, p. 429).

Acculturation issues have been shown to impact the stability of marriage. Immigrant families have to grapple with this problem as changes in their way of life bring about new behavior that impact the normative values existing in their original culture (Berry, 1992; Nworgu, 2000). It is evident from the present study that a successful navigation of acculturation issues is key to longevity of marriages. The couples have learned how to make acculturation changes in their own way. For instance, the issue of male/female roles; couple six (husband) expressed it this way, “Before we came here, we know very well what the role of the male is and what the role of the female is and even though we tried not to reverse, but circumstances in many cases made us to reverse the roles especially knowing that they are temporary”. This is in line with immigrant study as Nwaorgu (2000) stated that “Nigerian immigrant males and female display differential adjustments in the area of gender roles with females acculturating faster toward egalitarianism (p. 99). Some couples in the study did buy into the idea of being equitable in shared responsibility, mirroring what the literature regarding gender roles in an egalitarian American marriage. Couple eight (wife) appreciated her husband for not holding onto Nigerian Igbo non-egalitarian gender role structure: “ I appreciate him so much because even though I do what I’m supposed to do, he gives me full support and he appreciates me. That’s what I think in this relationship is 50/50. Maybe if we were in Nigeria it probably wouldn’t have been 50/50. However, there were couples that refused to accept some aspects of the American culture. Couple eight (husband) spoke in strong term regarding the issue of women liberation as it related to marriage: That sense of liberation really in the American marriage system is something we have discovered, in a sense because it is not helpful. It contradicts everything we know to make a relationship work”. In a general sense the couple participants’ response to acculturation issues was mostly utilitarian. In the words of couple eight (wife) “you choose the good ones that will

help you in your everyday life, but the other one most likely will destroy your relationship, you just want to leave those alone.

There are some elements in the study that can be better understood in the context of the Nigerian Igbo culture. The number one essential structure in the study is the successful navigation of problems related to extended family. The participating couples regarded extended family issues as Achilles' heel that could make or break marriages. This is so because of the unique position of the extended family in the life of the individual. As has been stated earlier, for the Igbos, there is no individual without a family, or community; every relationship is socially constructed and construed. Marriage among the Igbos, as Awolalu and Dapamu (1979) stated "is not just an affair between a man and a woman. It involves the whole family (Umunna), and to some extent, the whole village" (p.186). The Igbo attitude to marriage is captured in the Igbo adage: *Otu onye adighi alu nwanyi*, not only one person marries a woman. Smith (2001) made this observation about the Igbos "Very few Igbos cut ties to their families, and the obligation to kin can be a constant burden, even when couples establish nuclear households hundreds of miles from home: few Igbo marriages are unaffected by the influence of extended families" (p.133). It is evident from the above that effective management of issues surrounding extended families is a gateway to a successful marriage.

Another unique finding from this study is the essential structure from the clergy participants: managing the over inflated image of a cozy life in the U.S for the newly arrived wife. Clergy participant two spoke at length and vehemently about it. The researcher thinks that it is an issue that most Nigerian Igbos would relate to. Clergy participant two stated the case this way. "The way they are married these days. It used to be that people opened their eyes to look and see, but now there is so much hankering for America. I want to come to America to the point that they

don't examine the man very well. Once anybody is told that somebody is in America he or she wants to marry the person, they kind of jump a number of things they would have done in the cultural marriage". The clergy participants have highlighted the important role that the Nigerian Igbo traditional marriage process played in the longevity of marriage. This was corroborated when the researcher interviewed Eke (2008) who was the village secretary for the process. He stated that everything done in the marriage process had a purpose to help those involved realize that entering into marriage was a serious business the family and the whole community have been invited to participate in. Some observation needed to be made regarding the clergy participant two notation of "managing the over inflated image of a cozy life in the US for the newly arrived wife." Clergy participant two may have seen "over-inflated self" as a problem. There is, however, no parallel allusion to this problem by any of the couples. Furthermore, and even more pertinently, it is not clear from clergy participant two assessment that there was not an over-inflated self in long lasting marriages.

As has been stated previously a lot is known about resilience as it pertains to child development mental, health theory and research. Walsh (1996; 2003; 2012) has called for a family perspective, shifting focus from individual resilience to relational resilience. Walsh (2003) argued that since resilience perspective which is grounded in systemic orientation, "looks beyond the parent child dyad to consider broader influences in the kin network, from sibling bonds to couple relationships and extended family ties" (p. 2). A point well noted in the light of the present study that seeks to situate the survivability of Igbo immigrant marriage in the ambience of resilience framework. Walsh (2003), by linking resilience to extended family which is a very vital bond in the Igbo tradition, provides a possible factor influencing longevity of marriage. All couples interviewed had strong sentiment on issues surrounding extended family.

A fact buttressed by the statement of couple seven “Extended family can do and undo marriages.” The researcher, as stated earlier, is proposing a framework for marriage resilience. There is need to conduct more research on other immigrant communities to isolate what elements that are contributory to marriage longevity among immigrants.

The Nigerian Igbo couples in this study, whose marriage has survived while those around them fell apart, identified fifteen essential structures of themes, (table 1). It is interesting to note that these essential structures which in some sense describe what long-term marriage looks like among these Igbo couples are also the same elements that have brought down other marriages. This is evidenced in that statement that Walsh (2006) made in reference to Wolin and Wolin that “the paradox of resilience is that our worst times can also become our best” (p. 7-8). These couples have mastered the art of dealing with these issues and how to live with them. Resilience incorporates the concept of flexibility. The Nigerian Igbo participating couples were able to adapt to the American and Igbo cultures and utilizing what was helpful to them in both. There was no swallowing hook line and sinker the American or Igbo culture.

Implication of findings to clinicians

Clinicians working with Nigerian couples need to assess the impact of acculturation stress which arises from the struggle of living in the dual world of American culture and the dictates of Nigerian Igbo tradition (Nwadiora, 1995; 1996). This assessment has to be done not in a general sense but as it applies to specific couples. A spouse may be more acculturated to issues related to role reversal than to issues related to child rearing. But the key is for the clinician to keep an eye on what is pragmatic for that specific couple.

Nwaorgu (2002) made a similar observation regarding therapist working with Nigerian Igbo couples that they “need to be aware of the traditional family hierarchy, gender roles, power

structures, and the acculturation rate of Nigerian immigrant couples, so that they do not unknowingly label or take sides according to the general norms of the mainstream United States culture” (p.107). In the same vein Nwadiora (1996) pointed out that following the patriarchal family structure in forming alignment at the beginning of the session is more helpful than jumping into the more democratic stance, which is prevalent in Western therapy.

Sue and Sue (2003) stated that “a culturally competent helping professional is one who is actively in the process of becoming aware of his or her own assumptions about human behavior, values, biases, preconceived notions, personal limitations, and so forth” (pp. 17 – 18). This is important in working with Nigerian Igbo couples. For instance when couples speak about family they may not be referring to the nuclear family only, the extended family exerts as much influence as the immediate family. There is no word for cousins in Igbo language. Ones cousins are ones brothers and sisters. The unique perspective which Nigerian Igbo couples bring to therapy regarding patriarchal structure, gender role, family values need to be seen from their world-view and not the therapist. This is important to avoid what (Nwaorgu, 2000) described as “the error of seeing family idiosyncrasies as cultural norms or seeing cultural norms as family idiosyncrasies” (p. 107).

Another area, the clinician working with Nigerian Igbo immigrant couples may consider is in the use of those Nwadiora (1996) referred to as “cultural helpers” (p. 135). These are older Nigerian couples they know and trust. These in a way serve the role of elders in the traditional sense. In Nigeria these couples would have the support of the sponsors, the community as a whole. The couples in the present study did not highlight the use of the so called cultural helpers. However they were inclined to the use of religious leaders and priests. Couples who go

to church regularly and welcome the idea of going to their pastors should be encouraged to do so (Nwadiora, 1996).

Limitations

The general limitation of this study stems from the research design. Creswell and Clark (2011) asserted that “qualitative research and quantitative research provide different pictures, or perspectives, and each has its limitation. When researchers study a few individuals qualitatively, the ability to generalize the results to many is lost. When researchers quantitatively examine many individuals, the understanding of any one individual is diminished” (p.8). Generalizability has been a bone of contention for qualitative researchers. Some have argued that it should not be considered a limitation. Merriam and Associates (2002) argue that “qualitative research draws from different assumptions about reality; generalizability needs to be thought of differently from quantitative research” (p. 28). They acknowledge the use of the concept of reader or user generalizability in qualitative research, as articulated by Walker (1980) who stated that: “it is the reader who has to ask what is there in this study that I can apply to my own situation, and what clearly does not apply” (p. 29).

Another limitation of this study includes interview data limitations (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) listed these as “ possible distorted responses due to personal bias, anger, anxiety, politics, and simple lack of awareness since interviews can be greatly affected by the emotional state of the interviewee at the time of the interview” (P. 306). Furthermore, interview data are prone to “recall error, reactivity of the interviewee to the interviewer and self-serving responses” (Patton, 2002, p. 306). The reactivity of the interviewee to the interviewer, in the present study is possible given the fact that the researcher is a catholic priest who is acquainted with some of the participants. There is also the issue of couples saying things in lock step, the husband not

saying things to irritate the wife and the wife vice versa. It was evident in one of the interview sessions. Before beginning the interview the husband asked the question if it would not be better to interview the spouses separately. The researcher explained that the present study was focused on the marriage dyad and acknowledged that interviewing couples separately would be a possible future study.

There was also logistical limitation. The researcher lives in another city and to commute to Houston where the participant live to conduct the interviews. The interviews were scheduled on weekends when both the researcher and participant were off work. There were mitigating circumstances that necessitated the cancellation of scheduled appointments. For example, a couple scheduled to be interviewed received a call from Nigeria about the death of the mother of one of the spouses, a few minutes before the researcher arrived for the interview. Another couple scheduled for interview had to rush their child to the hospital following injuries sustained on the football field. Yet another couple had agreed for an interview but the husband never showed up. The cancellations bought hardship for the researcher who had to travel back without obtaining any interviews and also affected the constant interaction with the participants.

Recommendation for Future Research

A recommendation for future study arises from interview data limitation as noted above (Patton, 2002). The husband of one of the couple participants had intimated at the beginning of the interview for him and his wife to be interviewed separately in order to get an unfiltered response. A future study whereby couple participants are interviewed separately from their spouses would be desirable. The current essential structures identified by the marriage dyad would be compared to those generated by interviewing couples individually. This study will

help to forestall the issue of participants being more mindful of each other's position and reaction and holding back on comments they would deem potentially conflictual.

In addition, future research should also interview the grown up children of the couple participants to interview them to see what they think helped the marriage of their parents last long. Others to be interviewed could include those who had known these couples for a long time.

Finally, a quantitative method that utilizes a large sample with statistical tests of significant relationship would be a good complement. The advantage being that it would allow for a large sample with more variations. A quantitative method would enable, for example, the examination of the relative effects of income, education, religiosity on the longevity of marriage. Secondly, the researcher would be able to determine statistically which of the essential structure or factors suggested have the most significant effect on the longevity of marriage.

Conclusion

With the somber note struck at the beginning of the study, regarding the state of Nigerian Igbo immigrant marriage, the couples surveyed brought back hope that the institution of marriage is still alive and well in the community. Reading through the many pages of the transcripts of the study, one could not help but come to the conclusions that these couples had strong commitment to the institution of marriage and through their faith have vowed to make their marriage work. All of them take their religion seriously.

Although there were 15 essential structures identified by the participating couples, there is one variation that needs to be highlighted again. That is the variation enunciated by couples seven, who stated that there are many contributors to the longevity of his marriage but credits it

all to luck and God's blessing. It shows the overall appreciation of the marriage experience by the couples and their strong faith in God.

Streubert and Carpenter (1999) stated that "all research affects the study participants in some way" (p.17). They acknowledge that for qualitative research to be worth its salt, serious attention should be paid to "discovering the emic view, that is, the insider's perspective" (p.17). It is the researcher's hope that the research has impacted the participants in a positive way and that justice was done to their emic view. And to the consumer of this research, the researcher echoes the words of Eisner (1991), while in writing about generalizability in qualitative research, suggested that the researcher at the end of the study, "might say something like this: " This is what I did and this is what I think it means. Does it have any bearing on your situation?" (p. 204).

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Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT FOR COUPLE PARTICIPANTS Long-term marriages among Nigerian immigrants: A qualitative inquiry

Description:

I understand the purpose of this study is to explore how Nigerian immigrant couples describe their experience of being married for over twenty years and what meanings are attached to their experience. I understand this research will require an interview which may last up to one and one half hours. In addition, the researcher will conduct a follow up interview in which we may provide any additional observations or corrections. I further understand these interviews will be conducted in accordance with my schedule and at a location of my choosing. I also understand the interviews will be taped recorded and transcribed for evaluation and further study. This research will be conducted by Principal Investigator- T. Kizito Nwachukwu, Third year Doctorate Student, at Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi.

Confidentiality:

I understand we will be given a code name and the information collected will be strictly confidential and that any identifying references about me will be omitted or altered in order to protect my identity. I understand accuracy is important and the researcher will use the exact words as taped recorded when appropriate. I have been informed the researcher may discuss the content of the interviews with a peer reviewer. I also understand the researcher may retain the information gathered in this study for use in future publications. I understand all tapes and confidential information will be kept in a secured, locked filing cabinet at the Principal Investigator's home and will be destroyed after two years.

Compensation:

I understand participation in this study costs nothing and there will be no monetary incentive.

Risks and Benefits:

I realize the anticipated risks of this study are expected to be minimal, but if emotional discomfort is experienced, I may request a referral for counseling. Such a referral will be made to agencies that provide services free of charge or on a sliding scale. I further understand possible benefits of participation involve the opportunity to share stories and life experiences that might be useful to others. I realize that this study may provide greater awareness and understanding of the challenges and life experiences that are part of being a couples.

Right to Withdraw:

I understand I can stop the interview and/or withdraw from the study at any time. My decision to do so will not carry any retribution to myself or others.

Page 1 of 2 _____, _____
Initials

Voluntary Consent:

If I have questions of the researcher or his faculty advisor, I can contact them by telephone or e-mail: Principal Investigator- T. Kizito Nwachukwu (361) 779-5060 tejike1@aol.com, or the Faculty Advisor- Dr. Kaye Nelson (361) 825-2739 Kaye.Nelson@mail.tamucc.edu.

I certify I have read this Informed Consent. I further certify the Informed Consent has been explained to me, and I understand its contents. Any questions I had were answered. If I have additional questions or concerns about this study or my rights as a participant, I have been informed that I can contact Renee Gonzales Institutional Review Board Compliance Coordinator at (361) 825-2497. I have been given a copy of this consent form. My signature below signifies it is my free will that I agree to participate in this research study.

Any questions regarding my rights as a research subject may be addressed to the Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board. All research projects that are carried out by investigators at Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi are governed by requirements of the university and the Federal Government.

------(Husband)

----- (Wife)

Participants' Signatures

Date

------(Husband)

------(Wife)

Participants' Printed Names

Principal Researcher Signature

Date

Principal Researcher's Printed Name

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent for Clergy Participants Long-term Marriages among Nigerian Immigrants: A Qualitative Inquiry

Description:

I understand the purpose of this study is to explore how Nigerian immigrant couples describe their experience of being married for over twenty years and what meanings they have attached to their experience. I understand this research will require three contacts with me: (a) an initial contact in which the researcher will explain the research and provide an opportunity to discuss and ask questions so that I may agree to participate or not; (b) a second interview lasting up to one and one half hours in which discussion on my view regarding how Nigerian immigrant couples, married twenty years or more, have sustained their long-term marriage and their perceptions of the meaning of long-term marriage; and (c) a follow-up contact to approve the results of the interview and possibly offer additional information. I further understand these interviews will be conducted in accordance with my schedule and at a location of my choosing. I also understand the interviews will be taped recorded and transcribed for the purpose of evaluation and analysis to compile data for this study. This study will be conducted by Principal Investigator- T. Kizito Nwachukwu in partial fulfillment of the requirements for his degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi.

Confidentiality:

I understand I will be given a code name and that my identity will not be revealed either by description, presentation, or publication, and that any identifying references about me will be omitted or altered in order to protect my identity. I have been informed the researcher may discuss the content of the interviews with a professional colleague but will keep my participation anonymous. I also understand the researcher may use the information gathered in this study in future publications. I understand all tapes and identifying information will be kept in a secured, locked file cabinet at the Principal Investigator's home and will be destroyed two years after the research is completed.

Risks and Benefits:

I realize participation may require 2 to 3 hours of my time but any risks are anticipated to be minimal. I further understand possible benefits of my participation include the opportunity to share my views and life experiences that might be useful to others. I realize this study may provide greater awareness and understanding of the challenges and life experiences that are part of being a couple.

Right to Withdraw:

I understand I can stop the interview at any time and/or withdraw from the study. My decision to do so will not result in penalty to myself or others.

Page 1 of 2 _____, _____
Initials

Voluntary Consent:

If I have questions of the researcher or his faculty advisor, I can contact them by telephone or e-mail.

Principal Investigator: T. Kizito Nwachukwu
(361) 779-5060
tejikel@aol.com

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Kaye W. Nelson
TAMU-CC Unit 5834
6300 Ocean Drive
Corpus Christi, TX 78412-5834
(361) 825-2739
Kaye.Nelson@tamucc.edu

I certify I have read this Informed Consent and that the Informed Consent was explained to me and that I understand its contents. Any questions I had were answered. If I have additional questions or concerns about this study or my rights as a participant, I can contact Renee Gonzales, Institutional Review Board Compliance Coordinator, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, (361) 825-2497. Any questions regarding my rights as a research subject may be addressed to the Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board. All research projects that are carried out by investigators at Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi are governed by requirements of the university and the Federal Government.

Participant's Signature

Date

Participant's Printed Name

Principal Researcher Signature

Date

Principal Researcher's Printed Name

Page 2 of 2

Appendix C

Informed Consent For Therapist Participant Long-term Marriages among Nigerian Immigrants: A Qualitative Inquiry

Description:

I understand the purpose of this study is to explore how Nigerian immigrant couples describe their experience of being married for over twenty years and what meanings they have attached to their experience. I understand this research will require three contacts with me: (a) an initial contact in which the researcher will explain the research and provide an opportunity to discuss and ask questions so that I may agree to participate or not; (b) a second interview lasting up to one and one half hours in which themes from interviews and transcripts of discussion on how Nigerian immigrant couples, married for twenty or more years have sustained their long-term marriage and their perceptions of the meaning of long-term marriage; and (c) a follow-up contact to approve the results of the interview and possibly offer additional information. I further understand these interviews will be conducted in accordance with my schedule and at a location of my choosing. I also understand the interviews will be taped recorded and transcribed for the purpose of evaluation and analysis to compile data for this study. This study will be conducted by Principal Investigator- T. Kizito Nwachukwu in partial fulfillment of the requirements for his degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi.

Confidentiality:

I understand I will be given a code name and that my identity will not be revealed either by description, presentation, or publication, and that any identifying references about me will be omitted or altered in order to protect my identity. I have been informed the researcher may discuss the content of the interviews with a professional colleague but will keep my participation anonymous. I also understand the researcher may use the information gathered in this study in future publications. I understand all tapes and identifying information will be kept in a secured, locked file cabinet at the Principal Investigator's home and will be destroyed two years after the research is completed.

Risks and Benefits:

I realize participation may require 2 to 3 hours of my time but any risks are anticipated to be minimal. I further understand possible benefits of my participation include the use of my expertise in discussing and analyzing information that might be useful to others. I realize this study may provide greater awareness and understanding of the challenges and life experiences that are part of being a couple.

Right to Withdraw:

I understand I can stop the interview at any time and/or withdraw from the study. My decision to do so will not result in penalty to myself or others.

Page 1 of 2 _____, _____
Initials

Voluntary Consent:

If I have questions of the researcher or his faculty advisor, I can contact them by telephone or e-mail.

Principal Investigator: T. Kizito Nwachukwu
(361) 779-5060
tejikel@aol.com

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Kaye W. Nelson
TAMU-CC Unit 5834
6300 Ocean Drive
Corpus Christi, TX 78412-5834
(361) 825-2739
Kaye.Nelson@tamucc.edu

I certify I have read this Informed Consent and that the Informed Consent was explained to me and that I understand its contents. Any questions I had were answered. If I have additional questions or concerns about this study or my rights as a participant, I can contact Renee Gonzales, Institutional Review Board Compliance Coordinator, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, (361) 825-2497. Any questions regarding my rights as a research subject may be addressed to the Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board. All research projects that are carried out by investigators at Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi are governed by requirements of the university and the Federal Government.

Participant's Signature

Date

Participant's Printed Name

Principal Researcher Signature

Date

Principal Researcher's Printed Name

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Appendix D

Couple Questions

Long-term Marriages among Nigerian Immigrants: A Qualitative Inquiry.

The following questions will be asked during the interview:

How would you describe the experience of being married for over twenty years?

What meaning does this experience have for you as a couple? ...as an individual?

What has been helpful in maintaining your marriage?

What has not been helpful in maintaining your marriage?

What obstacles have you overcome to stay married?

Is there any other information you want to share regarding your experience of being married over twenty years?

What characteristics have you noticed about other Nigerian immigrant couples who have been able to stay married for 20 years or more?

Follow-up and Final Interview Questions

The following questions will be asked during the follow-up and final interview sessions when the general themes and summaries will be discussed with the participants:

Is there any other thought or idea you have had since our last interview regarding being married for over twenty years?

Would you like to amend or add to any part to the themes and summaries that we have made?

What else would you like for me to know?

Appendix E

Clergy Questions

Long-term Marriages among Nigerian Immigrants: A Qualitative Inquiry

The following questions will be asked during the interview:

As a pastor who has ministered to Nigerian immigrants, how would you describe long-term marriages among them with regard to couples who have been married for over twenty years?

What meaning does this experience have for them as a couple? ...as individuals?

In your opinion, what has been helpful in maintaining their marriage?

In your opinion, what has not been helpful in maintaining their marriage?

What obstacles do you think they have overcome to stay married?

What other characteristics have you noticed about Nigerian immigrant couples who have stayed married for 20 years or more?

Follow-up and Final Interview Questions

The following questions will be asked during the follow-up and final interview sessions when the general themes and summaries will be discussed with the participants:

Is there any other thought or idea you have had since our last interview regarding Nigerian couples who have been married for over twenty years?

Would you like to amend or add anything to the themes and summaries that we have made?

What else would you like for me to know?

Appendix F

Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

In view of the high confidentiality and anonymity required of the subjects used in this study, I commit to following all legal and ethical standards in transcribing all interviews.

Participants' identities will not be revealed and any references to information that might identify the participants will be omitted or altered in order to protect the participant's identity.

Pseudonyms or code words will be used in place of real names and will use exact words as recorded on the audio tapes.

Transcriber's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date