Weaving Christian Spirituality into Women's Wellness: Narratives from the African Diaspora in Canada

by

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Abstract

This research highlights the significant role spirituality plays in how a group of African diasporic women in Canada understand and experience wellness in their daily lives. The central research question that I pose is: *How do Christian African diasporic women in Canada make sense of and experience the interweaving of spirituality and wellness in their daily lives?*

Wellness as a construct emerged following World War II to challenge and offer an alternative to traditional biomedical views of health as not merely the absence of disease (Panelli & Tipa, 2007). Generally, wellness has been understood to be a highly integrated, synergistic, multidimensional concept that exists along a continuum rather than as an end state (Adams, Bezner, Drabb, Zambarano, & Steinhardt, 2000; Harari, Waehler, & Rogers, 2005; Miller & Foster, 2010; Roscoe, 2009). Since then there has been an extensive amount of literature that has focused on defining and measuring wellness using various constructs and quantitative psychometric scales (Roscoe, 2009). However, despite the vast research that has gone into conceptualizing and measuring wellness, there has been little empirical research examining the lived experiences of wellness and how the various dimensions of wellness may be interrelated (Roscoe, 2009).

Utilizing Roscoe's (2009) seven dimensional holistic model of wellness, which entails social, physical, emotional, intellectual, occupational, spiritual, and environmental components, my study provides an empirical qualitative investigation of how the spiritual dimension is integrated into the broader experiences of wellness as a whole. This examination captures the rich background, depth, and meaning of such experiences in the everyday lives of Christian African diasporic women in Canada. Because such experiences do not exist within a vacuum, I also highlight the important role of diaspora in shaping the women's lived experiences. Faist's

(2010) model of diasporas, as consisting of three key variables—reason for migration, transnational connections and activities, and settlement abroad—also guides my analysis of the context of the women's lived experiences.

I use a narrative methodological approach to structure my research and in doing so construct two research stories/narratives utilizing an amalgamation of participants' words derived from the transcribed one-on-one interviews conducted. The first narrative illustrates the women's journey within the African diaspora and the second highlights how their experiences of wellness are inseparable from their Christian faith. The women in this study, while maintaining a certain level of transnationality, have settled very well in Canada and have established it as home. This is evident through both their words and their emotional and psychosocial sentiments about life in Canada as well as their attainment of their intellectual and occupational goals in their new homeland. Spirituality proved to be a major positive force woven into the wellness experiences of diasporic women. While they understood wellness to encompass Roscoe's various dimensions of the term, their faith had a significant influence on how they experienced each of these dimensions. The findings and analysis from this study help to redress the paucity of research on the lived experiences of wellness as well as the experiences of African diasporic women in Canada. Thus, this research will be beneficial for those engaged in the settlement and wellbeing of this particular immigrant group as well as those interested in the fields of wellness studies and the African diaspora in Canada, particularly in terms of the role that faith can play in members' of this community lives.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Nike Ayo. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Weaving Christian Spirituality into Women’s Wellness: Narratives from the African Diaspora in Canada”, No. Pro00041257, January 13, 2014.

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1.0 Introduction

Africans have become one of the fastest growing groups of newcomers to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2008a). Several researchers demonstrate that Africans, across the continent, tend to be deeply spiritual (Adogame, 2007; Mbiti, 1990) and when they migrate they carry their profound faith cross the continental borders with them (Adogame, 2007). In my dissertation, I am interested in the significant roles spirituality and religion play in the lives of African women in their new homeland. I am particularly curious about how spirituality might contribute to the wellness of this community and its individual members. More specifically, I explore the role of spirituality in how Christian African diasporic women in Canada understand and experience wellness in their daily lives. The central research question that I pose in this study is: *How do Christian African diasporic women in Canada make sense of and experience the interweaving of spirituality and wellness in their daily lives?* Understanding the factors that may support and foster wellness among diverse groups, including newcomers to Canada, is important in order to facilitate their ability to thrive within society.

My interest in this area began during my Master's research where I explored lay perspectives of health among a group of Black women in Canada. My desire was to help fill a gap in the social science health research literature whereby representations of Black Canadian women are scarce. By virtue of snowball sampling the participants interviewed were all Caribbean Canadian women of the Christian faith. It was this faith that was integral to their understanding of wellness which they opted to talk about spontaneously more so than the construct of health. For them, their faith informed the meaning of wellness. I found the results from my Master's study to be intriguing and therefore decided to follow up on this line of research by moving from the exploration of what does health/wellness mean, with spirituality

being central to the understanding of wellness among a community of believers, to now asking the question *how* is spirituality and wellness woven into wellness as understood and experienced by African diasporic Christian women. My own Christian faith has compounded this interest. I have personally experienced, as well as witnessed among other people, the various ways that this faith has helped to foster wellness. As explained above, the proliferation of spirituality, particularity Christianity, within the African continent, and thus diaspora, makes this unique population well suited for such a study.

I begin this dissertation with a review of the literature on spirituality, religion, and wellness. My focus is on the conceptualization of these terms and their intersections. Spirituality and religion can be understood as related to a search for the sacred (George, Larson, Koenig, & McCullough, 2000; Hill et al., 2000) whereas wellness entails a positive approach to living along several interrelated dimensions including physical, spiritual, social, intellectual, occupational, and emotional domains (Roscoe, 2009). An abundance of literature has shown both spirituality and religion to have significant positive outcomes on health and wellness (Ellison, Hummer, Cornier, Rogers, 2000; Hummer, Rogers, Nam, & Ellison, 1999; Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Larson & Larson, 2003; Marks, Nesteruk Swanson, Garrison, & Davis, 2005; Meraviglia, 2004; Rosmarin, Wachholtz, & Ai, 2011). However, such research has largely been limited within a biomedical perspective that has emphasized spirituality and religion's relationship to psychological and physical morbidity and mortality. Furthermore, the wellness literature does not generally explore the lived experiences of the phenomenon. My research aims to redress these issues by offering a space for Christian African diasporic women in Canada to articulate their lived experiences and ways of knowing, particularly as it pertains to their understanding of the connections between spirituality and wellness.

In offering such a space to represent and hear traditionally marginalized voices, I present a second literature review that provides meaningful and insightful background about the African diaspora in North America and the significant role that faith plays among this population. The aim of this second review is to provide important contextual information that will aide in better understanding the women's lives.

I situate my research within an interpretive paradigm as interpretivism aims to foster understanding, meaning, and explanation from the research participants' viewpoint and not the researcher (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2011; Lauriala, 2013; Schwandt, 1994). Thus, as an interpretivist researcher, my focus is on listening to these women's voices and not critiquing them, their practices, or their religious beliefs. Narrative inquiry is an ideal methodological approach that compliments the interpretive paradigm as it privileges participants' voices as researchers aim to understand people's lived experiences and meaning-making processes (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005). In essence narrative research focuses on how individuals derive meaning from life experiences, formulating such experiences into personal narratives that shape identities (Riessman, 2002). My methodology chapter further explicates why and how narrative inquiry, within an interpretivist paradigm, is a suitable way to analyze my topic and how I used it to help gather, interpret, and present my findings. To ensure the ethical conduct of this study I also consider the main principles of research ethics in this chapter.

Subsequent to this, I present my findings in the form of two narratives, one that contextualizes the participants as transnational African diasporic women representative of the New African Diaspora; that is, as mostly highly educated, middle class immigrants who have generally come to Canada voluntarily as economic migrants. The other narrative highlights the interconnection of spirituality and wellness in their lives. It is important to note here that as

women of the African diaspora born and raised within the continent their spirituality is highly reflective of the evangelical variety of Christianity that is prevalent within continental Africa irrespective of denominational affiliations. Thus, their spiritual practices are not experienced within a vacuum but are imbued with African cultural styles of Christian worship. In my analysis in chapter six I employ Faist's (2010) three-part model of diaspora which consists of reasons for migration, transnationality, and settlement abroad. Roscoe's (2009) multidimensional framework of the wellness construct informs my analysis in chapter seven. Finally, my conclusion highlights some of the contributions and implications of this study, limitations, and the potential to conduct future research in this area.

2.0 Literature Review: Part One

Spirituality, Religion, and Wellness: Conceptualizations and Intersections

Developing an in-depth understanding of the weaving of spirituality into the wellness narratives of Christian African diasporic women in Canada requires an examination of a number of different bodies of literature. These include the meanings and significance of spirituality and religion, the conceptualization of wellness, the transnational experiences of the African diaspora in Canada, and their intersections.

2.1 The Conceptualization of Religion and Spirituality

There is no universal definition of religion and spirituality (Gayle, 2011; Dyson, Cobb, & Forman, 1997; George et al. 2000; Hamilton-Mason et al., 2012; Tanyi, 2002). Gayle (2011), for example, argued that spirituality and religion mean different things to different people, based on their diverse backgrounds, lived experiences, and belief systems (see also George et al., 2000). While there is great diversity in the understanding of spirituality and religion, shared meanings of these concepts exist both within and across cultures (Gayle, 2011; George et al., 2000). Some social scientists have used these terms interchangeably to describe ideas about God, a higher power, the sacred, the Divine, and transcendental experiences (Utsey et al., 2007; Gayle, 2011). However, much of this scholarship tends to agree that spirituality and religion are distinct yet interrelated phenomena (Burke et al., 1999; Coates, 2007; George et al., 2000; Hill et al., 2000; Klassen, 2003; Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Mattis, 1995; Swartzentruber, 2007; Tanyi, 2002).

To unpack how the social science literature within North America has traditionally conceptualized religion, it is helpful to look at the Latin roots of the word religion, *religio,* which means a 'rebinding' or 'binding together,' signifying a bond between humanity and a higher than human power such as God (Hill et al., 2000; Schultze, 2010). Schultze (2010) extended this explanation of the root meaning of the word to signify a restoring or rebinding of broken

relationships between human beings and God, one another, the physical world, and themselves. How this rebinding occurs, whether by specific belief systems, values, practices, doctrines, or institutions, can be understood as the framework in which religion exists (Furman, 2005 cited in Coates, 2007). In other words, religion is a highly multidimensional concept (Hill et al., 2000).

While various dimensions characterize religion, it is commonly understood as being embedded within formal institutional settings, a feature that also distinguishes it from spirituality. Thoresen and Harris' (2002) explanation of religion as "a societal phenomenon, involving social institutions composed of members who abide by various beliefs and adhere to certain rules, rituals, covenants, and formal procedures" (p. 4) is emblematic of such traditions (see also Burke et al., 1999; Steiger & Lipson, 1985; Tanyi, 2002). Yet, Pargament (1997) cautioned that this distinction could lead to an artificial or inaccurate separation between institutions and individuals. It is religious institutions that often encourage individualized religious expression (George et al., 2000). These individualized religious expressions tend to be classified as spiritual practices, a point to which I return below.

Despite religion being relegated to the boundaries of formal institutions or an organized entity (Cawley, 1997), and spirituality regarded as an individualized practice, the two concepts are not necessarily as distinct as the literature typically presents. For most people, spirituality occurs within the context of an organized religious institution (Hill & Pargament, 2003). Indeed, definitions of religion tend to emphasize the institutionalized nature of sacred belief systems and practices, while definitions of spirituality tend to focus on the individualized attributes of them. With respects to spirituality, key themes prevalent in the academic literature pertaining to this concept include the individual search for meaning or purpose in life, a personal relationship or connectedness with God or a higher power, and self-transcendence, which encompass the

adherence to a higher truth. For instance, Tanyi (2002) examined the concepts of spirituality and religion over a span of 30 years starting in the early 1970s to find that many researchers conceived spirituality as "an individual's search for meaning in life, wholeness, peace, individuality and harmony" (p. 502). Contrastingly, Dyson, Cobb, and Forman (1997) found that personal relationships with self, others, and God was a central theme, and that spiritual wellbeing was dependent on having healthy relationships amongst these three areas. These relationships also provide a framework through which other key themes of spirituality emerge, including the individual quest to find meaning or purpose in life, hope, connectedness or relatedness, beliefs, and other expressions of spirituality. Furman (2005, cited in Coates, 2007) provided a concise definition of spirituality that speaks to each of these three central elements: "the search for meaning, purpose, and morally fulfilling relationships with self, other people, the encompassing universe, and ultimate reality, however a person understands it" (p. 1). I further describe these central elements below.

Many researchers have supported the idea of spirituality being centred in personal relationships (Berkel, Armstrong, & Cokley, 2004; Mattis, 2000; Mattis, 2002; Musgrave, Allen, & Allen, 2002). Musgrave, Allen, and Allen (2002) suggested that spirituality, while difficult to define, could refer to an inner quality the individual possesses that facilitates a connectedness with the self, others, nature, and, more traditionally, a Supreme Being. This traditional understanding of spirituality highlighting a relationship with a Supreme Being or God is prevalent throughout the literature (Hamilton-Mason et al., 2012; Mattis, 2002; Musgrave et al., 2002). Berkel, Armstrong, and Cokley (2004) compared spirituality to religiosity among African American college students who defined spirituality as an individual relationship with God or a transcendent force that provided meaning and purpose for one's life. Este and Bernard (2006)

echoed this sentiment in their study of spirituality among Nova Scotians. They stated that "[s]pirituality is an individual's connection with a sense of a Higher Power or Supreme Being" (page number not provided). This emphasis on having a personal connection or relationship with the Divine is highly relevant to this study for two reasons: first, Christianity itself is based on a personal relationship with God; and second, as will be demonstrated in the findings and analysis chapters, the women interviewed strongly ascribed to this belief and it was their personal relationship with the Divine that greatly fostered their sense of wellness.

The search for purpose or meaning in life is another central theme related to the concept of spirituality. The Latin root of the word spirituality is '*spiritus*,' ('the breath'). Thoresen and Harris (2002) described the breath as the most vital aspect of life and extended their analogy by depicting spirituality as dealing with life's most vital and animating concerns, such as one's purpose or meaning. Klassen (2003) also pointed to the centrality of meaning in her conceptualization of spirituality as the inner, personal search for "Ultimate Meaning," in contrast to religion, the "outward, social, often institutional" aspect of this same search. Watt (2003) also explained spiritual development as "the process one engages in to search for meaning" (p. 33), but also highlighted that this might not include religious practices, such as church attendance or formal procedures. Whatever way people conduct this search for meaning, the quest remains a critical attribute of spirituality. Autton (1980, cited in Dyson et al., 1997) has described this journey as a universal phenomenon essential to life itself, whereby failure to find life's meaning or purpose can lead to spiritual distress or feelings of emptiness or despair. Such feelings are contrary to the experience of wellness. Therefore, understanding how spirituality may contribute to wellness may in part require an understanding of the meaning and/or purpose in life that one garners through their faith.

Self-transcendence is also fundamental to spirituality (Mattis 2000, 2002; Tanyi, 2002) and encompasses one's ability to surpass personal boundaries and gain a wider perspective conducive to finding meaning in life experiences (Coward, 1996). Research on spirituality has applied self-transcendence in relation to adhering to a higher truth. For example, for Christians, such adherence may entail having faith in God and the Bible as the Word of God. In doing so, the believer is able to attain a deeper perspective beyond material reality and find meaning, hope, and comfort in the midst of adverse life conditions. Benjamin and Looby (1998), who spoke of the role of spirituality within the therapeutic counselling setting, similarly asserted that achieving spiritual transformation is possible when one embraces a heightened perspective in life based on a new frame of reference that transforms one's life in thought and in spirit. The idea of transcending difficulties and suffering is relevant to this research project. Immigrant women living in a vastly different social and cultural context from the one they grew up in may face many new challenges in their host countries such as minority status, "starting over", language barriers, and cultural differences. My research investigates the possibilities for experiences of wellness in light of the challenges that may occur in one's life and how the spiritual faith so prevalent in their native lands shape such experiences.

Although many scholars distinguish between religion and spirituality, Hill et al. (2000) argued that such polarization is problematic for at least two reasons: "1) virtually all religions are interested in matters spiritual and, 2) every form of religious and spiritual expression occurs in some social context" (p. 64). Despite the growing division between religion and spirituality, many people continue to practice and experience their sense of spirituality within some form of an organized religious context (Marler & Hadaway, 2002). However, Dyson et al. (1997) have called for a broader interpretation of spirituality that does not exclusively relate it to the concept

of religion in order to be more inclusive of all people. However, they also acknowledged that separating the two concepts entirely is unrealistic due to the prevalence of religious traditions in our culture, particularly the Judeo-Christian tradition in the West. Finally, Streib and Hood (2011) embraced the interrelated dynamic of religion and spirituality and took it a step further by asserting spirituality is nothing but "privatized, experience-oriented religion" (p. 448). While they do not provide a definition of religion, they reference a number of other scholars (e.g. Hill et al., 2000 and Pargament, 1999) who define it in terms of a search for the sacred. From this perspective, spirituality is an extension of religion.

Both religion and spirituality emerge from a shared search for the sacred (George et al., 2000; Hill et al., 2000). Hill et al. (2000) defined *sacred* as referring to "a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual" (p. 66). Thus, to consider something sacred it must have a divine quality about it, whether in its character or its relation to the Divine (George et al., 2000). Religion and spirituality are attempts to respond to the sacred through beliefs about ultimate reality or truth and efforts to live life in accordance to such beliefs. This sacred core "helps to distinguish both religion and spirituality from other social or personal phenomena" (George et al., 2000, p. 104; Hill et al., 2000). While certain lifestyles and ideologies may be deeply valued, according to this explanation, they are not spiritual unless they stem from consideration of the sacred (Hill et al., 2000). Christianity emphasizes reverence for the sacred as an integral part of the faith. Thus, it is important to note that for the participants in this study, spirituality is not simply a lifestyle choice, but rather it is integral to who they are at the deepest level.

2.2 The Conceptualization of Wellness

As previously stated, while the concepts of spirituality and religion are central to this research, the notion of wellness is equally important. These terms are not completely distinct as spirituality and wellness are highly interrelated. Before I clarify the concept of wellness and its relationship with spirituality, I begin my discussion of this section with a brief overview of its emergence. I then highlight the various dimensions of wellness and its characteristics while placing a deeper emphasis on spirituality, as some authors have suggested that it is a central component to the experience of well-being (Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992; Eberst, 1984; & Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). Finally, I discuss some of the limitations and gaps in the wellness literature and demonstrate how my research helps to redress some of these issues.

The modern-day concept of wellness emerged following the Second World War and originated within the medical field as technological advances in medicine indicated that health included not just the absence of disease, but also wellness (Harari, Waehler, & Rogers, 2005; Miller & Foster, 2010; Panelli & Tippa, 2007). Whereas health was traditionally associated with freedom from illness and the physiological functioning of the body, the term wellness provided an alternative view that looked at human beings more holistically (Harari, Waehler, & Rogers, 2005). While health is now generally understood in holistic terms, its transformation paralleled the development of wellness as a construct and can be seen as being a result of this movement (Kindig, 2007; Miller & Foster, 2010; Panelli & Tippa, 2007). Consequently, the terms health and wellness are often used interchangeably within the literature (Miller & Foster, 2010). Quality of life, well-being, and human flourishing are also frequently used as descriptors or synonyms of wellness (Corbin & Pangrazi, 2001; Miller & Foster, 2010; Walsh, 2005; see also Ryan & Huta, 2009). However, for the purpose of this research, I have opted to use the term wellness due to

the emphasis placed on its holistic nature and the tendency among researchers, health practitioners, and lay people to revert to narrow biomedical conceptualizations when using the term health.

For example, while the World Health Organization (1948) has defined health as "a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity", indicating the multifacetedness of the construct, many health care services and professionals still tend to focus on the latter part of the definition (i.e. disease) (Labonte, 1993); or as Labonte (1993) put it, they focus on "the reality of 'things' rather than the reality of 'experiences'" (1993, p. 17). Conversely, the conceptualization of wellness, from its very inception, has always been understood in holistic and multidimensional terms that speak to individuals' sense of capacity and connectedness that fosters quality of life and flourishing. As immigrant communities, such as that representative of the African diaspora, continue to move to Canada at rates outpacing the growth of the Canadian-born population (Statistics Canada 2008a), it has become increasingly important to examine the factors that make populations well. This need is particularly pertinent for immigrant populations as their experiences are unique to that of non-immigrant wellness experiences. A key step in developing policies that foster the wellness of such communities and individuals is to have a clear understanding of what wellness is so that the attributes that contribute to it can be properly supported by local and national organizations, services, and policy makers (Dolan, Peasgood, & White, 2008; Miller & Foster, 2010).

Clarifying the concept of wellness is a complex task. Its highly subjective, multifaceted, and dynamic nature makes it difficult to define (Kelly, 2000; Roscoe, 2009; Sarason, 2000; Travis & Ryan, 2004); thus, there is no singular, agreed upon definition for the term. However, many researchers have attempted to conceptualize wellness and in doing so they share many

similarities in their understanding. For example, Halbert Dunn (1959) who provided the first contemporary definition of it (although he termed it "high-level wellness") defined it to be "an integrated method of functioning which is oriented toward maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable, within the environment where he [sic] is functioning" (p. 447). He explained further:

> This definition does not imply that there is an optimum level of wellness, but rather that wellness is a direction in progress toward an ever-higher potential of functioning. Nor does it limit the functioning of the individual to particular body parts – the muscles, the heart, the nervous system, etc. – but rather involves the total individual, as a personality and in all of his [sic] uniqueness. It does not signify that the individual is to perform within a static, unchanging environment, no matter how favorable such an environment might be, but rather that he [sic] functions at a high potential within an ever-changing environment which, to a greater or lesser degree, he [sic] finds ways to modify and to adapt for his [sic] purposes. (p. 447)

Based on this articulation of what wellness means, three main themes emerge: first, wellness entails a movement towards one's increasing potential. It is not a singular or fixed goal to be achieved, but rather, it is a way of living that is experienced along an ongoing continuum. Second, it embraces a changing and dynamic future where one's potential can be stretched. While the conditions one finds him/herself in are important, wellness is not about a set of 'ideal' circumstances, instead it is about the "processes, functions, and values being engaged" (Ryan & Huta, 2009, p. 203) which move toward greater health holistically (Antonovsky, 1996). For example, Ryan and Huta (2009) explained that following a loss of a loved one, which is obviously not an ideal situation, a person's capacity to grieve is an expression of wellness. Third, wellness is an integrated phenomenon that involves the whole person, body, mind, and spirit (Dunn, 1959) among other key dimensions such as social, intellectual, and occupational which are all discussed below.

Similarly, Myers, Sweeney, and Wittmer's (2005) conceptualization of wellness entails a fuller sense of functioning within one's given environment that integrates the different aspects of a human being. Accordingly, they define wellness to be "a way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being in which the body, mind and spirit are integrated by the individual to live more fully within the human and natural community" (p. 252). Jonas (2005) also shared a similar understanding of wellness that spoke to the various dimensions of a person's life and the importance of moving toward one's potential in each of those facets. He explained that wellness is:

> a way of life and living in which one is always exploring, searching, finding new questions and discovering new answers, along the three primary dimensions of living: the physical, the mental, and the social; a way of life designed to enable each of us to achieve, in each of the dimensions, our maximum potential that is realistically and rationally feasible for us at any given time in our lives. (p. 2)

While the aforementioned authors spoke of wellness as being related to three primary dimensions of human existence: body, mind, and spirit, with Jonas (2005) referencing the social dimension as opposed to the spiritual one, most contemporary experts tend to view it as comprising of five to seven dimensions of living (Corbin & Pangrazi, 2001). For example, Adams (1995) defined wellness as a "manner of living that permits the experience of consistent, balanced growth in the physical, spiritual, psychological, social, emotional, and intellectual dimensions of human existence" (p. 15). Anspaugh, Hamrick, and Rosato (2004), Corbin and Pangrazin (2001), Hales (2005), and Roscoe (2009) all reference seven commonly cited dimensions of wellness: physical, emotional (psychological), social, intellectual, spiritual, environmental, and occupational (vocational). In the following sub-section I describe each of these dimensions building primarily off of Roscoe's (2009) review and synthesis of the research literature on the major theories of wellness. Roscoe's (2009) examination of wellness is useful

here due to the integrated analysis she provided of the construct. Furthermore, through her review of the wellness literature she has offered a comprehensive conceptualization of wellness that has added conceptual clarity. Such clearness is essential in understanding its role in people's lived experiences.

2.3 Dimensions and Characteristics of Wellness

Wellness is a multidimensional construct. Each dimension is also highly multifaceted. Therefore, the following definitions offered below are not intended to be complete and final but rather aim to get at the core of what is meant by each domain. Roscoe (2009) provided an overview of these different components based on a synthesis of the research literature:

Social wellness encompasses the quality and quantity of interaction and interdependence with others and the community. It includes the skills and comfort level one possesses to express oneself in interpersonal communications as well as the motivation and perception of those exchanges. It also relates to the ability to provide support to and receive support from others. Having strong social networks amongst family, friends, and in the larger community is an important aspect of social wellness (Miller & Foster, 2010). The notion of respect within such relations is also relevant to this conceptualization.

Emotional wellness, which also encompasses psychological wellness, is an awareness and constructive handling of feelings. It includes a realistic and positive view of the self and life circumstances. Common themes in this aspect of wellness include affirmative and realistic self-concept, identity, and self-esteem. It also deals with self-actualization and one's ability to act autonomously as well as to manage stress. Emotional wellness speaks to an overall positive attitude about life, oneself, and the future. Miller and Foster (2010) suggest that this dimension of wellness develops as one matures.

Physical wellness encompasses an optimum level of physical activity, nutrition, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle (e.g. seeking medical care, abstaining from drug and excessive alcohol use, and other harm-avoidance behaviours). However, this component differs from traditional understandings of health in that it focuses on the individual moving towards his/her own personal physical potential and does not focus on comparing one's state of it with another person's physical wellbeing. Thus, a physically challenged individual can be considered well by moving towards his or her personal potential.

Intellectual wellness speaks to one's optimal level of stimulating intellectual activity. This is achieved through lifelong learning and the continuous acquisition, application, and sharing of knowledge learned in a creative and critical manner. Such knowledge may be used for one's personal development and/or the betterment of society.

Occupational wellness entails paid and/or unpaid work. It references the degree to which one experiences satisfaction and enrichment through their job. It also relates to the freedom one has to express their values, skills, and talents within their vocational setting. Accordingly, such skills and talents ought to make a contribution to the community in meaningful and rewarding ways. A sense of balance between one's occupation and other important commitments and roles is also an important aspect of this dimension of wellness.

Environmental wellness concerns the reciprocal relationship a person has with home life, work life, community life, and nature. It entails a balance between these various facets. Furthermore, it examines the impact one has on his/her environment, one's efforts to improve his/her environment, and the level of control one has over that environment.

Of greatest relevance to this study is that of *spiritual wellness*. Of all the dimensions of wellness, spiritual wellness has received the most attention in the literature and thus is the most

well-defined (Roscoe, 2009). Because of its centrality to my research I have allotted significantly more space for its articulation. In line with the conceptualization of spirituality offered above under the sub-heading *Conceptualizing Spirituality and Religion*, spiritual wellness encompasses the process of finding meaning and purpose in life (i.e. a sense of coherence) and the adoption of life values and belief systems. It also entails acceptance and transcendence of one's unique place in the universe and involves meaningful connections with others as well as a higher power.

Like the other wellness dimensions, spiritual wellness is highly multifaceted; however, the versatility of this construct is particularly complex given the various forms of spirituality that exist. Ingersoll (1998) devised a cross-cultural framework to discuss the dimensions of spiritual wellness across a variety of religions. Based on interviews he conducted with spiritual leaders representative of 11 different religious backgrounds, he came up with ten facets that spiritual wellness comprises of which the leaders all affirmed. The ten dimensions included the following: (a) *Conception of the absolute or divine*. This feature of spiritual wellness expresses itself as a person's image or experience of divinity; (b) *meaning* may or may not manifest as an explicit sense of what makes life meaningful or gives it purpose. What is most important here is the sense of peace that pervades one's experiences; (c) *connectedness*, like the implied root meaning of the word religion (i.e. to bind), speaks to relationships with other people and with God. It can also connote a sense of community; (d) *mystery*, speaks to one's comfort level and ability to handle ambiguity, the unexplained, and uncertainty in life. It may also reflect one's capacity for awe and wonder of the unknown; (e) *sense of freedom* pertains to one's ability to be playful in a variety of ways which are sincere and meaningful but not necessarily serious or purposeful. An example of this might be singing and dancing in praise and worship to God as a family. It also speaks to freedom from both internal and external coercion; (f) *experience-ritual-practice* is intentional

and active, it entails spiritual rituals and practices that support wellness and the experiences that accompany them; (g) *forgiveness* is another important element of spiritual wellness that crosses faith traditions. It is a process that may require significant time but reflects the importance of both giving and receiving forgiveness; (h) *hope* becomes most notable in the midst of suffering and reflects the belief that one's suffering will not be in vain nor last forever; (i) *knowledge-learning* demonstrates openness to continuous learning both about one's self and things external to the self. It is by no means necessarily measured by academic standards but occurs through various life experiences. Ingersoll's (1998) final dimension of spiritual wellness is (g) p*resent-centeredness, which* is perhaps the most abstract or philosophical, is related to being aware of the present moment and attending to what is true and real as revealed to the individual in the present moment.

As already noted, these spiritual wellness attributes are not specific to Christian spirituality. Rather they point toward commonly shared values across religious creeds including but not limited to Christianity. This is useful in that future research may utilize this framework to conduct comparative analyses across religious borders to strengthen the literature base around spiritual wellness. Thus, I have structured the findings and analysis chapter on spirituality and wellness in such a way as to attend not only to the multiple dimensions of wellness as outlined by Roscoe (2009), but also to emphasize the spiritual dimension of wellness with its various facets and how they intersect in the women's experiences.

It is obvious that wellness, although defined broadly, has certain key characteristics. The most obvious, and for which there is clear consensus in the literature, is that wellness is not just the absence of disease (Antonovsky, 1979; Ardell, 1977; Dunn, 1977; Miller & Foster, 2010; Roscoe, 2009). Indeed, one can have an illness but still experience a high level of wellness. More

important is the way one processes such experience in order to foster greater well-being. Relatedly, wellness is also not the absence of life challenges or difficulties. This point is particularly pertinent when one considers the experiences of immigrant communities, especially in their first few years upon arrival to a new country. The challenges that immigrants face, in particular, African immigrant women in Canada, will be discussed in detail in the findings and analysis chapter on immigration and diasporic experiences. Questions of importance here include: to what extent, if at all, is wellness compromised in the midst of such experiences and what are the factors influencing this?; and, what has been, or, can be done by both individuals and the larger community to ensure that high level wellness is maintained during this period? The way I have responded to these questions hold significant implications for fostering wellness among such populations.

Wellness is multidimensional in nature and thus, highly holistic (Adams, 2003; Anspaugh, Hamrick, & Rosato, 2009; Kirsten, van der Walt, & Viljoen, 2009; Miller & Foster). Closely related to this is its integrated nature. In other words, the various dimensions of wellness interact together in a complex synergistic fashion whereby each facet is integral to the whole and no one component operates in isolation (Kirsten et al., 2009; Renger et al., 2000; Roscoe, 2009). This in turn has led many authors to conclude that balance among the different dimensions is also important to experiencing wellness (Adams, 1995; Anspaugh et al., 2009; Dunn, 1977; Greenberg, 1985; Hoeger, Turner, & Hafen, 2007; Lafferty, 1979). For example, Adams, Bezner, and Steinhardt (1997) devised a wellness model which holds the assumption that optimal wellness occurs when individuals have an equivalent level of functioning across all of its dimensions. While most researchers support such a model (Roscoe, 2009), there are those who have suggested that spirituality in particular plays a central role in experiencing high level

wellness (e.g. Chandler et al., 1992; Eberst, 1984; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). Chandler et al. (1992) reasoned that spirituality ought not to be considered an equivalent part of the wellness dimensions, but rather should be deemed as a component pervasive *within* each of the dimensions. In accordance to this they explained: "Working to achieve high-level wellness necessitates the development of the spiritual component in each of the five [sic] dimensions of wellness. Without attention to spiritual health in each dimension, the individual remains incomplete" (p. 171). This argument is based on their belief that the spiritual component enables one to internalize the healthful behaviour changes that foster wellness in such a way that recidivism becomes less likely. Said another way, health promoting behaviours that are rooted in deep abiding convictions, such as one's faith, are seen to be internally motivated and thus are presumably less likely to result in a return to former undesirable behaviours that can negatively impact upon one's wellness.

Subsequent research conducted by Adams et al. (2000) explored the importance of balancing the different components of wellness versus emphasizing areas of personal importance. In their study, participants were asked to rate each dimension of wellness assigning it a numeric value relative to other dimensions. They found that those who rated the various dimensions in a more balanced way had higher perceived wellness but lower psychological functioning scores. In addition, they also found that having an optimistic outlook – an essential part of emotional/psychological wellness – and a sense of coherence – an intrinsic element of the spiritual dimension – was necessary to improve overall wellness. Thus, they suggested that personal preference might be important to consider in light of the emphasis placed on balance as an important attribute of wellness within the field. Further investigation is needed to identify if balance is in actuality necessary to experiencing high level wellness or if some dimensions

supersede others. This is particularly relevant when we consider those who deeply value their spiritual faith. Unlike other dimensions of wellness, spirituality is commonly understood to be a dominant force in shaping the way we understand and interact in the world thereby serving as a way of life (Amenga-Etego, 2012; Beattie, 2005; Mattis, 1995; Mitchem, 1998; Mitchem & Townes, 2008; Musgrave et al. 2002; Townes, 1993; Wane, 2011). My study specifically addresses spirituality and the significance that is placed on it among a faith-based community and how it interacts with other dimensions of wellness.

While those of deep-seated faith may hold a personal preference for the spiritual dimension of wellness, it goes without saying that there are those who do not hold strong spiritual convictions and thus may not elevate the spiritual realm. That one may place a preference on one area of wellness and another on a different aspect speaks to the highly personalized and subjective nature of the construct. Accordingly, many researchers have posited that wellness is a personalized process (Clark, 1996; Dunn, 1977; Hoeger, Turner, & Hafen, 2007; Krivoski & Piccolo, 1980). That is, striving for wellness is unique to each individual as one incorporates their strengths and interests in such a way as to maximize their potential within their own social setting (Anspaugh, Hamrick, & Rosato; Harari, Waehler, & Rogers, 2005). Related to this is the characteristic of continuous movement towards higher levels of wellness and functioning (Anspaugh, Hamrick, & Rosato, 2009; Clark, 1996; Dunn, 1977). Unlike traditional usage of the term health, wellness is not a static goal to be achieved, but rather is a process and journey as one strives toward more successful existence. This is particularly so in light of the understanding that wellness *is* a work in progress.

2.4 Gaps in the Wellness Literature

As demonstrated through this review, the literature on the conceptualization of wellness is extensive (Roscoe, 2009). Since Dunn's 1959 definition of high-level wellness, many other researchers have followed suit providing a broad base for a conceptual framework. However, most of these theories of wellness have remained conceptual and have not been used to structure research questions, nor have they engendered much empirical evaluation of the construct and its dimensions (Adams et al., 2000; Harari et al., 2005; Roscoe, 2009). It has been suggested that to elucidate the wellness concept the definitions proposed in the research literature need to be empirically explored along with the sub-dimensions in order to clearly establish the relationships amongst them (Corbin & Pangrazi, 2001; Roscoe, 2009). Given the multifaceted, dynamic, fluid, and subjective nature of the construct, qualitative assessments will be useful in helping to capture the depth and richness of individuals' experiences of wellness (Lorion, 2000; Roscoe, 2009).

This study moves beyond definitional analysis and provides an empirical qualitative investigation of what a specific dimension of wellness, spirituality, looks like carried out in everyday living among a group of Christian African diasporic women. Through this examination I also explore how spiritual wellness interacts with the other components to foster overall wellness. Highlighting how spirituality interweaves with other dimensions of wellness based on the empirical evidence from this study helps attend to a limitation in the existing research whereby little investigation has been conducted to explore how the various facets relate to one another. By emphasizing spirituality, which has been identified by some as a central component of wellness (Chandler et al., 1992; Eberst, 1984; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992), I also provide much needed insight into the nature of this dimension that goes beyond its conceptualization. Such an

analysis makes an important contribution to the field by helping to make the shift from the conceptual theoretical realm, to the applied, practical, empirical realm.

2.5 Exploring the Relationships among Spirituality, Religion, Health, and Wellness

Research that has examined the relationships among spirituality, religion, health, and wellness has generally been contained within a biomedical perspective. Such studies have often focused on morbidity and mortality as the ultimate measures and outcomes of this relationship. I review this literature to situate the unique contribution of my study as it aims to expand beyond biomedical outcomes to examine the relationships among spirituality, religion, and wellness more holistically.

The past three decades, can be characterized by a surge in research on the relationships among spirituality, religion, health, and wellness. Findings have consistently shown a positive correlation between both spirituality and religion and numerous health indices (Holt, Schulz, & Wynn, 2009; Ochieng, 2010; Rosmarin et al., 2011; Rew & Wong, 2006). For example, such practices have been related to positive outcomes regarding cancer, heart disease, hypertension, immunology and HIV progression, pain tolerance and severity, health related behaviours such as abstaining from smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, engaging in regular physical activity, medical check-ups, and decreased mortality rates (Ellison et al., 2000; Hummer et al., 1999; Koenig, et al., 2001; Larson & Larson, 2003; Marks et al., 2005; Meraviglia, 2004; Rosmarin et al., 2011). When considering psychological health, it has been shown that spiritual and religious involvements relate to better stress management as well as reduced rates of depression, anxiety, suicide, and substance abuse (Ellison, 1995; Fry, 2001; Grundmann, 2013; Koenig, 2009; Musick, Koenig, Hays, & Cohen, 1998).

Much of this research comes from large epidemiological studies. For example, Hummer, Rogers, Nam, and Ellison (1999) conducted a study exploring these relationships using a nationally (U.S.) representative sample of 21,024 individuals from a 1987 National Health Interview Survey. The data was subsequently matched with the Multiple Cause of Death file in the National Death Index through 1995. Researchers then calculated life expectancy based on religious attendance per week. Those who attended religious services more than once a week had a life expectancy of over seven years greater than those who never attended. Additionally, this phenomenon was magnified when just the African American population was considered: they had 14 years longer life expectancy than those who did not attend such services. Hart (2001) found a similar relationship in a study he conducted over a five-year period with a sample in Utah.

Due to the significant impact of spiritual and religious practices on health, the medical profession has also implemented several changes to training physicians. For example, U.S. medical schools have introduced courses to help doctors effectively address patients' spirituality. Primary care and psychiatric residencies have also increasingly implemented training on spiritual faith and health (Larson & Larson, 2003). Considering individuals' spiritual dimension in their health and wellness experiences opens up a much broader path to understanding the human condition.

Based on the literature above it is evident that spirituality and religion play a significant role in how people understand and experience health and wellness (Daaleman, 2004). However, studies on these connections have been primarily descriptive. Recent research, however, has taken these examinations to the next level by asking *how* does spirituality and religion impact health and wellness? What are the underlying mechanisms at play?

Findings suggest various pathways of influence. For example, they may improve health and wellness because of the social support that comes from being a part of an organized religion (Holt et al., 2009; Oman & Thoresen, 2002; Ridge, Williams, Anderson, & Elford, 2008; Seybold & Hill, 2001). Such communities generally offer opportunities for fellowship, formal social gatherings, companionship, and a network of people to provide assistance in times of need. These forms of social support can improve health and wellness by helping to reduce psychological and physical stress (Seybold & Hill, 2001). Social determinants of health research in Canada has shown that participating and contributing to social and cultural activities can help counter the ill health effects of social exclusion (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). Here social exclusion refers to "specific groups being denied the opportunity to participate in Canadian life" (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010, p. 32). The problem of social exclusion is particularly relevant among recent immigrants, people of colour, women, and other traditionally marginalized groups. One's faith can be an important variable in helping to mitigate social exclusion and the potential ill effects that may come about from it.

Another mechanism often identified within the literature is the use of prayer and other spiritual resources to reduce anxiety, increase hope, cope with stressors, and find meaning in life events and challenges (Ridge et al., 2008). Certain principles for living associated with religion that elicit positive emotional states such as forgiveness, love, and hope have also been identified as possible pathways of positive outcomes (Ridge et al., 2008; Seybold & Hill, 2001). These principles for living may have physiological effects related to health through their impact on neural pathways affecting both the endocrine and immune systems (Thoresen, 1999). In contrast, negative emotional states, such as fear and anger, can lead to a physiological stress response that over time can weaken the immune system resulting in greater susceptibility to infection,

increased blood pressure, stroke, and heart attack (Seybold & Hill, 2001). Positive lifestyle behaviours are another way through which spirituality and religion can improve health. Religious commitment can influence health promoting behaviours such as abstinence from smoking, drug use, and risky sexual practices (Oman & Thoresen, 2002; Seybold & Hill, 2001).

George et al. (2000) focused on three mechanisms of the spirituality/religion-health/wellness relationship: health related behaviours, social support, and sense of meaning. They estimated health related behaviours accounted for 10% of the relationship between religion and health, social support accounted for 5%-10% of this relationship, and that having a sense of meaning accounted for 20%-30% of the religion-health relationship. This latter finding is significant not just numerically, but because it supports the coherence hypothesis: religion benefits health/wellness by providing a sense of purpose and meaning to life. Of all the mechanisms identified to explain the spirituality/religion, and health/wellness relationship, the coherence hypothesis has received the most support as studies have consistently shown that having a religiously based sense of meaning and purpose in life has been shown to positively contribute to wellness (George et al., 2000).

The bulk of evidence as to the mechanisms through which spirituality and religion impact on health and wellness can be summarized as (a) social support, (b) behaviour, and (c) psychological factors, all aspects of health and wellness (Masters, 2008). In this model, each of these three dimensions is multidimensional similar to the concepts of health and wellness. Nevertheless, understanding how the individual's faith is implicated in these various dimensions will provide insight into the interweaving of the spirituality-wellness relationship in their personal lives.

In summary, the literature on spirituality, religion, and health/wellness has generally tended to emphasize biomedical health states and outcomes, such as physical and mental morbidity and mortality. In contrast, I aim to understand the role of spirituality and religion in an African diasporic faith-based community's day-to-day lives including the challenges and issues that arise which could otherwise compromise their sense of wellness. In essence, I am interested in how spirituality is woven into the experiences of wellness on a daily basis. The following chapter on African diasporic experiences provides some useful background that will later help situate and contextualize their experiences as African diasporic women of faith.

3.0 Literature Review: Part Two

The African Diaspora in North America, Transnationalism, and the Role of Faith

Etymologically, the term diaspora derived from the Greek word diasperian which broken down means dia-, 'across' and –sperien, 'to sow or scatter seeds' (Pasura, 2014). The term was first used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible to refer to the dispersion of the Israelites from their ancestral homeland into exile. Thus, the Jewish diaspora had become the paradigmatic example in defining the term. Consequently, diaspora was often thought of as groups forcibly removed from their homelands who remained socially marginal in their host lands as they awaited return (Pasura, 2014).

Similarly, the concept of the African diaspora, which emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, also describes histories of dispersal, albeit among African people both within and beyond the continent (Mercer, Page, & Evans; 2008; Zeleza, 2005). This body of literature has tended to paint a grim picture of the experiences of African diasporic communities that has been characterized as "life in a hostile land" whereby migrants have a "shared sense of despair and pain in the diaspora" (Pasura, 2014, p.120 & p.144) (see also Henry & Mohan, 2003; Mensah, 2008). Carter (2003, p. x) goes on to describe African diasporic populations as living an unsettled life of "otherness":

> Diaspora is a kind of passage, yet a passage that encompasses the possibility of never arriving. Of drifting endless on the betwixt and between the world's boundaries. Rather than seeking 'assimilation' as a goal, diaspora is a way of being 'other' among the established, of keeping alive the drama of the voyage of 'otherness' in worlds that seek sameness and homogeneity.

Such representations have been undoubtedly influenced by the social ills and challenges such as discrimination that many in the African diaspora have experienced as well as the predominance of the African American literature and its emphasis on the descendents of the transatlantic slave

trade. Accordingly, Zeleza (2005, p. 51) asserted that such studies can be characterized as moving "between the three tropes of victimization, vindication, and volition, that is, the racial structures of oppression and their impact, the affirmation of the Africans' ... histories and humanity, and experiential and epistemic agency". This mode of analysis which dominates African diasporic studies holds resemblance to an array of literatures on African diasporic women's experiences which follow the automated analysis of gender, race, and class oppression and their practices of empowerment and agency in the midst of their subjugation. In line with this, Victor Anderson (1995) also critiqued this tendency in relation to womanist scholars who have taken up Black women's religious experiences as their point of investigation. He contended that "[t]heir stress lies on the unprecedented evidence of Black women's capacities for survival under unprecedented suffering. Black women's sources tend to be used towards disclosing the heroic, survivalist genius of Black women" (p. 109).

While it is reasonable to argue that the African diaspora in North America reflects peoples with a unique and complex history marked by discrimination, resistance, struggle, survival, and success that spans over 400 years (Duncan, 2006), one must be careful about making sweeping generalizations that overlook the nuances both across and within African diasporic groups. Thus, it is more appropriate to speak of African diasporas in the plural rather than as a singular entity (Koser, 2003) as they reflect varied experiences of migration marked by their forced or voluntary movement from one or more nation states to another (Arthur, 2010).

Adenike Yesufu (2005), who studied the immigrant experiences of African-Canadian women in Edmonton Alberta, noted the problematic inclusion of Canadians of African descent under the grouping of "Black." In this approach, African Canadian and African American experiences are merged under one 'Americanized' phenomenon (Duncan, 2006). Some African

Americans' experiences may be shared with African Canadians (Este & Bernard, 2006). For example, both groups confront specific patterns of discrimination and exclusion that demean their social background, culture, and place in society (Dei, 2008; James & Shadd, 2001; Tettey & Puplampu, 2005). However, caution must be taken in subsuming these categories under one general rubric. For instance, the African American diaspora is mostly a result of forced migration due to the transatlantic slave trade (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2015; Wong, 2000). By contrast, the African diaspora in Canada is mainly a result of voluntary migration stemming as far back to the arrival of Black Loyalists[1], but it is mainly a relatively new population with the majority born outside of the country (Statistics Canada, 2007a). Many in the African American population do not have strong ties to continental Africa, whereas the Canadian African community tends to be deeply connected to the continent and maintains strong ties with the society, family, and friends they left behind (Bacon, 2006; Cohen, 2003; Glick-Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992; Okpewho, Boyce, & Mazrui, 1999). Albeit, even within this group, there is likely to be a weakening of such ties in subsequent immigrant generations.

Similarly, within the Canadian context Owusu (2006) also observed that researchers have had a tendency to lump together the African and the Caribbean communities under the analytical category of "Blacks" despite significant differences in the backgrounds of these two groups (Statistics Canada, 2007b). Caribbean women, being a much older immigrant community, came to Canada in large numbers during the 1950s and 1960s as live-in caregivers as part of the West Indian Domestic Scheme. African women, on the other hand, did not arrive in large numbers to Canada until the late 1970s, mainly as family dependents of male immigrants (Daiva & Bakan, 2005; Okeke et al., 2000).

[1] The former slaves who fought during the American Revolutionary War for Britain and were consequently promised freedom for their loyalty.

Additionally, within Canada, there is an emerging new African diaspora population for whom experiences of social class also greatly differ from that of older African diaspora populations such as African American women and Caribbean Canadian women. This new wave of African immigrants is characterized by highly educated professionals, many of whom are married, and come as members of the family class or economic immigrants in search of a better life. In contrast, many African American and Caribbean Canadian women are unmarried and single parents which place them at a socioeconomic disadvantage. University completion rates among African American and Caribbean Blacks, which contributes to future employment and income, is also significantly lower in comparison to the new African diaspora in Canada (Kassa, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2011a; Waters, Kasinitz, & Asad, 2014). For African Canadians, education has always been stressed as a transformative tool, or means of empowerment in the West (Milan & Tran, 2004; Wane, 2009). Wane (2009) explained that for many African Canadian women, education has been the means through which to dismantle and transform social barriers that would otherwise constrain their self-determination. Therefore, the socioeconomic advantage that this new diasporic group possesses may lessen the impact of gender, race, and class discrimination commonly taken up by social scientists studying Black women's lived experiences. Thereby such dimensions may be less of a defining feature in their lives. The important thing to note here is that there must be recognition of the diversity of experiences both across and within African diasporic groups.

To help understand this multiplicity, Faist's (2010) three-part conceptualization of diaspora proves useful to distinguish some of the nuances. He characterized diaspora as consisting of three characteristics that can be subdivided into older and newer usages. My emphasis in this study is on the contemporary usages of the term. The first characteristic deals

with reasons for migration. Unlike older African diaporic groups in North America whose dispersal were primarily a result of forced migration, the participants represented in this study are voluntary immigrants who came to Canada in search of better opportunities. The second characteristics links cross-border ties between native land and destination country. This theme refers to the transnational practices of diasporic groups which will be further examined below. As is common among contemporary African diasporic groups, migration patterns are often not one-directional but follow multiple trajectories. Thus, such linkages comprise not only country of origin and country of settlement, but also the various countries traversed in between as multiple, circular, and even return migrations commonly take place rather than a singular great journey from one destination to another (Lie, 1995). The various trajectories by which diasporic individuals translocate often require them to sustain diverse global networks with friends, families, and cultures. Consequently, transilience—the ability to maneuver across multiple cultural and national terrains (Richmond, 2002)—has characterized many African diasporic groups.

The third characteristic concerns the integration of migrants into countries of settlement. The quote by Carter (2003, p. x) presented diasporas as "drifting endless[ly]", "never arriving", and living a life of "otherness" and "between" national boundaries, suggests that integration is not a part of diasporic experiences. However, my study has examined this issue further by looking at participants' experiences of settlement and their establishment of a home base in Canada while still maintaining cultural distinctiveness. I have organized my analysis chapter on African diasporic experiences along this three-part model which has enabled me to highlight the distinct lived realities of my interviewees by providing meaningful context to their lives and

thereby enhancing understanding as to how faith may be woven into their experience of wellness.

Studying the particularities of a sub-section of African diasporas in Canada is pertinent given the substantial growth rate of this population coupled with the lack of scholarship that has examined their experiences. Prior to 1967, Canada, the United States, and Western European nations used a preferential and non-preferential countries list (Konadu-Agyemang & Takyi, 2006; Opoku-Dapaah, 2006) in a system of race and ethnic based discriminatory immigration policies. This practice ended in 1967. Consequently, African immigration to Canada has increased dramatically. For example, between 1981 and 1991 the African immigrant population increased 6.3% while the share of the immigrant population in the total population remained steady (Zeleza, 2005). Between 1996 and 2001, there was a 32% growth in the number of people residing in Canada reporting African background in the context of only a 4% growth of the overall population (Statistics Canada, 2007a). More recently, between 2006 and 2011 nearly 146,000 African immigrants arrived to Canada comprising of 12.5% of all newcomers who arrived during that period. This was up from 10.3% of newcomers who arrived in the previous five years, and contrasts greatly with the 7.3% of immigrants who arrived during the 1990s and 1.9% prior to 1971 (Statistics Canada, 2011b). The three leading countries of birth in which recent African immigrants were born were Algeria, Morocco, and Nigeria (Statistics Canada, 2011b). While the African community in Canada remains a relatively small segment of the overall Canadian population, approximately 1% (Statistics Canada, 2007c), the proportion of immigrants from African countries is rapidly growing making them one of the fastest growing groups of newcomers to Canada.

Factors contributing to this community's growth include a desire for a better life and economic livelihood compared to the native lands' "lack of jobs, extreme poverty, political instability, military coup d'etats, ethnic conflicts, deteriorating socio-economic fabric and natural disasters" (Konadu-Agyemang & Takyi, 2006, p. 14). There is also a wave of African immigrants to Canada referred to as "educational migrants" who come here to further their education (Konadu-Agyemang & Takyi, 2006). The increasing presence of the African diaspora in Canada provides an interesting opportunity to explore and develop an understanding of their lived experiences. However, despite their increasing presence, Owusu (2006) explained that it has not engendered much scholarly work on their pre- and post-migration experiences relative to other immigrant groups. This study helps to redress this issue. By examining not only their movement abroad, but also the particularities of their experiences once a part of the diaspora, deeper insight can be fostered concerning their lived experiences. For this reason, I now turn to an examination of the role of transnationalism in shaping their experiences as women of the African diaspora.

3.1 Transnational Diasporas and Differing Levels of Engagement

Closely related to the concept of diaspora is transnationalism. Glick-Schiller et al. (1992) were the first to introduce the concept of immigrant transnationalism in an effort to explain migrants' simultaneous embeddedness in two or more countries (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). Past historical trends and concepts within the social sciences argued that migration entailed a complete severing of native land ties and total settlement in the receiving country. Glick-Schiller et al. (1992), in contrast, observed that contemporary migration patterns demonstrate lasting social connections between sending and destination countries, a phenomenon they termed as transnationalism. Thus, Basch, Schiller, and Blanc (1994, p. 7) have defined transnationalism "as

the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement". While there is no singular universally accepted articulation of what does or does not constitute a transnational activity (Al-Ali, Black, & Koser, 2001), the idea that such cross-border activities are regular and sustained is a common theme in the literature. For example, Portes (1999, p. 464) classified transnational activities as:

> those that take place on a recurrent basis across national borders and that require a regular and significant commitment of time by participants. Such activities may be conducted by relatively powerful actors, such as representatives of national governments and multinational corporations, or may be initiated by more modest individuals, such as immigrants and their home country kin and relations. These activities are not limited to economic enterprises, but include political, cultural and religious initiatives as well.

While it is sensible to speak of transnational diasporas given the ease contemporary migrants can foster and sustain such cross-border ties in light of modern day technological advancements, not all diasporas engage in transnational activities or relations, and likewise, not all transnational practices occur within diasporic groups (Pasura, 2014). Therefore, the two concepts are not synonymous. For example, Africans who come to Canada at a very young age or who represent second and succeeding generations in Canada may have little to no active linkages to their ancestral land. In the same vein, there are those who may engage in some sort of sustained cross-border activity, but remain settled in their country of origin such as occupational transnationals. The degree to which migrant communities and individuals engage in transnational exchanges is mediated by numerous factors not the least of which is the context of departure from the country of origin and the means of incorporation within the destination country (Itzigsohn & Saucedo; Pasura, 2014; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). What is important to note is that, similar to the diaspora concept, transnational connections and experiences vary significantly with different levels of engagement and thus must not be homogenized (Tettey, 2007).

Accordingly, in order to highlight the diversity and complexity of transnational diasporas, Pasura (2014) devised a four-fold classification distinguishing the level of transnationality within the African diaspora ranging from core, epistemic, dormant, and silent diasporas. Core African diasporas are intensively involved in transnational practices and thus hold strong linkages across national borders. Epistemic African diasporas comprises mostly students, intellectuals, and "cyber space activists" who routinely engage in political, social, economic, and cultural discussions and debates regarding their countries of origin. This group can be further characterized by having obtained significant cultural capital in the forms of educational qualifications and middle-class status. Dormant African diasporas, as the term suggests, only engage in cross-border activities intermittently. Silent African diasporas represent those who have fully integrated into the destination country and/or who whose identification does not emphasize meaningful connection to the native land. This diasporic group does not maintain linkages with their countries of origin.

While Pasura's (2014) fourfold classification of the level of transnational activities engaged in by diasporas of African origin is useful as a hermeneutic device to demonstrate the multiplicity of transnational diasporas, such divisions must not be considered as rigid categorizations. Groups and individuals may inhabit more than one category simultaneously as well as pass through different categories at different seasons in their lives. For instance, recent immigrants may exhibit extensive core transnational qualities upon arrival to the country of settlement, however, years later if they are able to settle in the host land they may later exhibit more dormant qualities. And/or, they may share some characteristics of one category such as epistemic by holding advanced educational qualifications and middle-class status, but be relatively dormant or even silent in their transnational practices. Also, it is both quantitatively

and qualitatively unclear how much and what type of transnational practices and activities may place an individual or group in each category. Thus, the sheer complexity and heterogeneity of such groups and individuals, as well as the lack of clearly defined measures of the extent and nature of activities to delineate between groups, makes applying Pasura's (2014) classification system to real lived experiences difficult.

Irrespective of the level of transnationality, it is also important to note that while such identities may, to differing degrees, "extend across national borders and involve participation in both their home countries and new societies of settlement" (Swigart, 2001, p. 3), maintaining ties to the native land or other countries does not come at the expense of establishing deep roots in their place of settlement. This is contrary to Carter's (2003, p. x) assertion about diasporas as "never arriving" and endlessly "drifting". Members of the African diaspora in Canada are as much residents of the Canadian community as any other group and most feel a strong sense of belonging to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2007a). However, for many, their daily lived experiences transcend their new homes and meaningfully intersect with people, activities, finances, ideas, and other resources in a different setting across more than one nation. Religious beliefs and practices are one important aspect of transnationality that is of great significance to this study.

3.2 The African Diaspora in North America and the Role of Spirituality and Religion

Religious transnationalism simply speaks to the idea that as people move, they take their religions with them (Spickard & Adogame, 2010). This is particularly true among the African Christian diaspora whereby Christianity has proliferated across the continent to the point where it is now considered to be the centre of Christian gravity (Adogame, 2007), particularly in the sub-Saharan region in which the research participants represent. Afe Adogame (2007), a leading

scholar in the area of African Christianity both within Africa and the diaspora, explained that with the influx of immigrants new religious communities have flourished, and thus "a deeper understanding of their [i.e. such communities] role is required" (p. 18).

African diasporic studies points to the prevalence and importance of religion and spirituality in the lives of many members from the African diaspora community in North America (Musgrave et al., 2002). Their history in North America has been deeply rooted in the Christian church (Martin & Martin, 1995 cited in Hamilton-Mason et al., 2012; Gayle, 2011; Pachai, 1997 cited in Este & Bernard, 2006; Sanders, 1995). From its earliest phase during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, until now, spirituality and religion have played a significant and transformative role in the lives of many members from this community (Boyd-Franklin, 2010; Mattis, 2002; Mbiti, 1990; Musgrave et al., 2002; Taylor, Chatters, & Levin, 2004). As Taylor et al. (2004, p. 1) stated: "Black religious traditions have persisted over time, geographic location, and social context and circumstance.... [T]he black religious tradition and the Black Church have remained pervasive and central features in the lives of individuals, families, and communities".

The distinct African worship style prevalent among the African diaspora speaks to the inseparable and intricate nature in which religious consciousness is inherently bound to one's culture (Anagwo, 2014). Thus while my dissertation explores the role of Christian spirituality in the lives of African diasporic women, it is important to note that the experience and expression of this religious form does not exists within a vacuum unaffected by culture, but rather is framed against the backdrop of socio-cultural interpretations of Scripture and religio-cultural experiences (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2015). For instance, the type of Christianity I explore below looks different from the Western missionary-based Christianity of colonial Africa and of the mainstream Christianity found within the Global North; African diaspora Christianity is

culturally distinct. As Asamoah-Gyadu (2015, p. 189) has pointed out, Africans "privilege the pneumatic over the cerebral in living out their faith". As such, within African Christianity, what is considered reality is inherently spiritual. Asamoah-Gyadu (2015, p. 189) went on to explain that "[t]hrough the pneumatic forms of Christianity lived and expressed by African diaspora Christians, we can discern what ordinary Africans consider critical to the faith: Jesus Christ is Lord, and by the power of the Spirit, he intervenes in real-life situations". Thus, from this perspective African diasporic Christianity holds two fundamental components: 1) Christian spirituality as a relationship with God, and 2) through this relationship African diasporic people make meaning and find purpose for their lives.

Further, the way which Africans express their spirituality, in line with their pneumatic as oppose to cerebral sensibilities in terms of their faith, is much more enthusiastic, open to the workings of the supernatural through prophecy, visions, and healings as well as other means, and highly expressive in nature. For example, praying aloud, singing loudly, and engaging in 'God talk' openly are just a few ways many Africans express their faith. As such, much of African Christianity can be characterized as evangelical/charismatic. Even the traditionally more reserved denominations such as Catholic or Anglican reflect charismatic branches of the faith in Africa and the African diaspora by Western standards. This is important to note in order to delimit the form of Christian spirituality discussed in my dissertation. While the lordship of Jesus Christ forms the foundation of all Christianity, the understanding, expression, and experience of this premise in the everyday lives of Christians around the world varies because cultures themselves vary (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2015).

However, as Kwakye-Nuako (2006) noted: "Even though Africans are quite religious, and modern Christianity has become more prevalent among immigrants from the developing

world, we know very little about the religious aspects of the recent African diaspora in Canada and the U.S." (p. 121). We know, however, that most African Americans and African Canadians, specifically those coming from sub-Saharan Africa, self-identify as Christians (Boyd Franklin, 2010; Mattis, 2002; Statistics Canada, 2007a). Consequently, in North America there are an increasing number of churches established and led by African immigrants (Olupona & Gemignani, 2007; Tettey and Puplampu, 2005). For example, according to one estimate, there are approximately 50 Ghanaian churches in Toronto (Kwakye-Nuako, 2006) and between 35 to 45 such churches in New York City (Biney, 2007). In Alberta, there are approximately 40 established African churches (Mulatris, 2011). What characterizes them as African is the ethnic composition of the congregation and leadership, as well as the style of worship, which is often more reflective of the exuberant Christian worship style of the native land (Tettey & Puplamou, 2005).

A number of scholars have posited that religious institutions play a key role in African diaspora communities (Adogame, 2007; Olupona, 2007; Olupona and Gemignani, 2007), and many of them have adopted an instrumentalist approach to understand this phenomenon. Ogbu Kalu (2011) elaborated:

> Many scholars deploy the instrumentalist discourse by emphasizing the functions of the religious groups to a population in transition. It is argued that these religious groups cater to the African psyche that is deeply religious; that these churches provide a home-away-from-home, buttress identity, empower immigrants, provide coping mechanisms, social networks, security, employment, legal and financial aid, as well as social services and counseling on how to engage the new society with success. (p.46)

Kwakye-Nuako (2006) further asserted the linguistic and cultural functions of African churches within the community: "linguistic and cultural issues, such as the desire for African immigrants to worship in their mother tongues and to do so in a format and style that they were accustomed

to back home in Africa, are especially important" (p. 123). For Kwakye-Nuako, the African church plays a central role in preserving the diaspora's ethnic identity.

In his ethnographic study of a Ghanaian church in New York, Moses Biney (2007) challenged this perspective. When he explored what African immigrants seek when they attend African churches, he found enhancement of their spirituality and community life to be central, not the preservation of their ethnic cultural identity. More specifically, his participants explained their church attendance in terms of their needs for God's redemption, a community of faith where members are respected and show concern for one another, vibrant worship services, and good moral examples.

Wisdom Tettey's (2007) analysis of the role of the African church in the diaspora incorporated both instrumentalist and intrinsically spiritual perspectives. Using Allport's (1963) notion of intrinsic and extrinsic religion, Tettey contended that immigrants attend ethnic churches for various reasons falling along a continuum of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Intrinsic motivations speak to "recourse to one's faith for meaning and guidance" (Tettey, 2007, p. 237). For instance, individuals might join a church community to develop fellowship with other believers as well as to express and nurture their faith. Extrinsic motivations, on the other hand, speak to utilitarian or instrumental purposes for church attendance (Allport, 1963; Tettey, 2007). For example, individuals might be motivated to join such a community to take advantage of social networking opportunities or to get assistance in immigration settlement issues. However, intrinsic or spiritual motives and extrinsic or instrumental motives are not mutually exclusive (Tettey, 2007) but exist along a continuum (Allport, 1963).

That church involvement is likely to facilitate a combination of both spiritual and instrumental needs is consistent with the reality that for many members of the African diaspora

in North America, spirituality and religion permeate all aspects of life. Such faith provides a framework for making sense of the world (Mitchem & Townes, 2008; Musgrave et al., 2002) and facilitating daily living (Collins, 1998). What one believes about God, oneself, and the world, affects how one understands and operates in the world and in life as a whole (Coleman, 2008; Mitchem & Townes, 2008). As the African religious studies scholar John Mbiti stated: "for Africans, the whole of existence is a religious phenomenon" (1990, p.15). While this assertion does not apply to all Africans, for many members of the African diaspora spirituality and religion affect virtually every aspect of life (Mattis, 2000; Williams & Wiggins, 2010).

Stephanie Mitchem's (1998) doctoral research on health, healing, and spirituality among African American women, found that spirituality was intimately connected to the women's daily lives. It served as a model for living that they embodied. They demonstrated this connection in the way they wove together their understanding of spirituality, health, and healing. In other words, they saw themselves not as fragmented beings with a body separate and distinct from the spirit, but rather as an integrated whole.

Wane's (2011) study of the role of spirituality in African diaspora women's lives in Canada, found that it was "interwoven into all aspects of the self which allows one to connect to others, nature and their environment" (p. 168). I would add that spirituality can enable one to connect to God or another form of Higher Power, as is commonly suggested in contemporary conceptualizations of spirituality. Wane's participants, while all of African ancestry, came from various regions including the Caribbean, continental Africa, and as seventh generation Canadians. Her study examined the significance of spirituality, ranging from Christian to African indigenous ones, in the lives of Black women who identified themselves as anti-racist, feminist activist and how it informed who they were. She found the women's anti-racist feminist activism

was manifested in a number of different ways that began in their home as a family or community affair to ensure their survival and self-determination. Wane's (2011) study holds great relevance for my research in that it confirms the centrality of spirituality in the lives of many African diasporic women within the Canadian context; it demonstrates the home or family unit as a significant starting point for engaging in activist work that supports their self-determination and survival; and it draws attention to the deep-seated connection between spirituality and Black women's self-determination.

Bobb-Smith (2007) also provided insight into the role of spirituality among Black women within the Canadian context. While her focus was on oppression, resistance, spirituality, and identity among Caribbean Canadian women, like Wane (2011) she found that spirituality informed the women's agency both to renounce disparaging imposed identities that did not speak to their realities and to adopt empowering identities reflecting their beliefs and experiences. For many African diasporic individuals, spirituality and religion are not merely belief systems based on dogma or doctrines to which one ascribes, rather, they serve as a way of life (Amenga-Etego, 2012; Beattie, 2005; Mattis, 1995; Mitchem, 1998; Townes, 1993; Wane, 2011) that can also inform the meaning and experience of wellness.

As a significant part of their lives spirituality and religion help many African diasporic people make meaning of the circumstances and issues they face on a daily basis (Boyd Franklin, 2010; Mattis, 2002; Hamilton-Mason et al., 2012). These practices help them understand their status and identity, teach them how to thrive in society, and fundamentally shape the moral, social, political, and even economic facets of their lives (Amenga-Etego, 2012). Moreover, Musgrave et al. (2002) argued that Christian spirituality in particular is not an abstract phenomenon, but rather is rooted in relationships (i.e. with God, people, and oneself) and

community. Wane and Neegan (2007) concurred with this understanding of spirituality as expressed through relationship building and community, although they reference an indigenous African spirituality rather than a Christian one.

Spiritual and religious beliefs have influenced many African Americans' responses to various forms of hardship including racism, sexism, and poverty (Este & Bernard, 2006; Gayle, 2011; Harris-Robinson, 2006; Hubert, 2010; Shannon, 2006; Williams & Wiggins, 2010). Indeed, Harris-Robinson (2006) found that working-class, African American women who experienced racism, sexism, and poverty primarily tended to manage these stressors using spiritually focused coping strategies, which encompassed faith and the belief in a Higher Power as a source of strength. Spiritual and religious beliefs have also been found to impact on: understandings and experiences of mental and physical health, illness, and wellbeing (Astedt-kurki, 1995; Carter, 2002; Daaleman, Cobb, & Frey, 2001; Holt & Mcclure, 2006; Holt et al., 2009; King, Burgess, Counts-Spriggs, & Parker, 2005; Lewis, Hankin, Reynolds, Ogedegbe, 2007; Meadows, Thurston, & Melton, 2001; Rew & Wong, 2006; Taylor & Chatters, 2010; William, Anderson & Elford, 2008), parenting (Brodsky, 2000), marital satisfaction and stability among couples (Cutrona, Russell, Burzette, Wesner, & Bryant, 2011; Fincham, Ajayi, & Beach, 2011), academic pathways, career choices, and professional development (Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006; Dancy, 2010), and identity formation (Dancy, 2010; Watt, 2003). Dancy's (2010) research examining African American male college students' career path choice is illustrative of the integral role that faith plays for many African American's sense-making of their lived experiences:

> There are so many things I would like to do after college, honestly I'm just putting it in God's hand; I'm a big religious person, so when it comes down to it, whatever God got for me [that] is what he got for me. I'm putting it in his hands. Maybe teaching, maybe entrepreneurship, maybe going out and helping with

> family businesses. . . I've always been that kind of man, whatever God got for me, he got for me… (p. 423)

Furthermore, spirituality and religion have also been found to play a significant role as a coping resource for many African diasporic women. This literature identifies spirituality and religion as a consistent and significant resource for coping with daily challenges and various adverse circumstances that would otherwise compromise one's sense of wellness (Hubert, 2010). For instance, after hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005, spirituality helped African American women garner hope and resilience in the midst of this crisis (Hamilton-Mason et al., 2012). Spirituality and religion have also been a source of hope and resilience among Caribbean Canadian caregivers in difficult and stressful periods (Gayle, 2005 cited in Gayle, 2011). Similarly, both Watt (2003) and Prendergast (2011) found that African American and Black Canadian students used spirituality as an empowering means to negotiate, challenge, and resist negative images, marginalization, and injustices they encountered within the academy. These and other studies (Beagana, Etowab, & Bernard, 2012; Este & Bernard, 2006; Gayle, 2011; Harris-Robinson, 2006; Hubert, 2010; Shannon, 2006; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Utsey et al., 2007; Watt, 2003) point to the significant role spirituality and religion play as coping resources for many Black women in the African diaspora.

Based on the reviewed literature, it is evident that to understand African diasporic women's sense of wellness, it is necessary to address their spiritual and religious beliefs and practices. This is particularly pertinent given that spiritual faith has been found by some to be a primary unifying force, stronger than both ethnicity and nation (Spickard & Adogame, 2010) and superseding other important identity markers such as gender and Africaness as illustrated in the following quote by a research participant in Hill's (2003, p. 167) study: "I'm a spiritual being, above all else. Above womanhood, African, above all that, I'm a spiritual being. And it is about

my relationship with the Creator no matter what my setting". As Bongmba (2007, p. 106) has aptly identified, "Many Africans in the diaspora identify themselves first as Christians, then as Africans". The pre-eminence that faith plays among many members of this community calls for deeper insight and analyses of this area of their lives to better understand its significance. Continued research in this important area will enhance understanding of the varied and rich experiences of this diverse group as they establish their presence in the spiritual and social landscape of Canadian society (Olupona & Gemignani, 2007). In seeking to understand Christian women of the of the African diaspora in Canada's lived experiences and meaning making processes as it pertains to their faith and wellness, it is my estimation that the best way to engage in such inquiry is through an emphasis placed on their voices as they navigate and make sense of their life worlds. The way which to go about this endeavor is the subject of the next chapter.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Statement of Purpose

To answer my research question—*How do Christian African diasporic women in Canada make sense of and experience the interweaving of spirituality and wellness in their daily lives?*—I employ a qualitative research approach. Qualitative methods are well suited for exploratory studies that aim to "understand the social reality of individuals, groups and cultures, and explore the behaviours, perspectives and experiences of people in their daily lives" (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 14). Qualitative studies, thus, focus on understanding how people interpret and make meaning out of their experiences in the world in which they live (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). My qualitative project follows Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln's (2011a) five phases defining the qualitative research process: (a) the researcher's position within the study, (b) theoretical paradigms and perspectives of the study, (c) research strategies, (d) methods of collection and analysis, and (e) the art, practices, and politics of interpretation and evaluation of the final research product. I now use these five phases to outline my methodological approach starting with an overview of the paradigmatic perspective I have taken.

4.2 Phase 2: Theoretical Paradigms and Perspectives

> *"All theories, concepts, and findings are grounded in values and perspectives; all knowledge is contextual and partial; and other conceptual schemes and perspectives are always possible."*
>
> *(Altheide & Johnson, 2011, pp. 581-582)*

Thomas Kuhn, a renowned scholar in the history and philosophy of science during the latter half of the 20th century, brought the notion of paradigms to the forefront within research communities. He explained that paradigms are all encompassing views and perspectives about the entire research process shared by any given scientific community (Kuhn, 1970). While the

concept of paradigms was popularized by Kuhn, many others have since come to elaborate upon its meaning and significance within the realm of scholarly research. Paradigms have generally come to be understood as socially constructed, yet fundamental beliefs that guide scholastic inquiry and "deal with first principles or ultimates" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011b p. 91). Markula and Silk (2011, p. 25) have defined a research paradigm as follows:

> an overarching set of beliefs that provides the parameters – how researchers understand reality and the nature of truth, how they understand what is knowledge, how they act and the role they undertake, how they understand participants and how they disseminate knowledge – of a given research project.

In other words, the parameters or philosophical underpinnings which guide each paradigm include epistemology, ontology, and methodology (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011b). Cohen and Crabtree (2006) as well as Denzin and Lincoln (2011b) explained the three main features of any given paradigmatic approach. Epistemology refers to knowledge and the assumptions and beliefs we have about the nature of knowledge and how the world is known: the relationship between the inquirer and the known or how we know what we know. Ontology concerns the nature of truth, reality, and existence. It speaks to the assumptions and beliefs we hold about the position of the human being in the world. Methodology deals with the researcher's approach to understanding the world: how we can gain knowledge about the world. It entails three main features: the materials that serve as data, the approach taken to collect or produce the data, and the means of analysis and interpretation of the data. Denzin and Lincoln (2011b) also added ethics as one of the features in the construction of paradigms. Ethics deal with how one is a moral person in the world. This issue is discussed in detail under its own sub-heading at the end of this chapter. In summary, paradigms help the researcher to determine the worldview guiding the research process by offering a set of philosophical underpinnings and

parameters as to how to see the world and make judgements about knowledge and its attainment (Markula & Silk, 2011; Weaver & Olson, 2006).

The main paradigms in social science inquiry — positivism, post-positivism, critical, and interpretivism, — each encompass the aforementioned characteristics (e.g., Denzin and Lincoln, 2011b; Markula & Silk, 2011). Because of the significant impact that paradigms have on the research process, it is important that investigators thoughtfully and critically locate their study within a particular paradigmatic logic that best fits with their aims and objectives (Markula & Silk, 2011). However, while paradigms provide a guiding set of principles informing inquiry, they all have limitations. To use an analogy, a stage with several spotlights can reveal different aspects of a phenomenon. However, each individual spotlight, which represents a particular paradigm, can only illuminate a specific area of the stage or phenomenon leaving other relevant aspects of it in obscurity. In other words, different paradigms reveal different aspects of the same phenomenon. Thus, Altheide and Johnson (2011), in the opening quote, have captured the nature of research knowledge as always contextual and partial. To echo these scholars, all paradigms and perspectives tell something, but not everything, about the phenomena in question.

This study is situated within an interpretivist paradigmatic logic. To help explain why this line of inquiry is best suited for my investigation, I first provide a cursory overview of positivist, post-positivist, and critical paradigms as a necessary backdrop for my critically informed decision to choose interpretivism as a suitable paradigm for the aims of my study. Following this, I present a more thorough examination of the interpretivist paradigm and the contribution that it makes to this study along with some of its limitations and common criticisms.

The main goal of positivism is explanation and understanding that enables the prediction and control of a phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Thus, positivist researchers seek

"objectivity, measurability, predictability, controllability, patterning, the construction of laws and rules of behaviour, and the ascription of causality" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 31). Within this frame, ontologically, a "naive" realism is adopted whereby an apprehensible reality and truth, which can be generalized beyond time and context, are thought to exist. In this manner, hypotheses are assumed to be verifiable and established as facts or laws (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Epistemologically, positivism seeks objective, value-free findings (Weaver & Olson, 2006). From a methodological viewpoint, positivism uses experimentation that is typically quantitative to verify hypotheses. Confounding variables are, therefore, controlled (manipulated) in order to avoid their improper influence on the outcomes (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Similar to positivism, post-positivism aims for prediction and control of phenomena and therefore, emphasizes "well-defined concepts and variables, controlled conditions, precise instrumentation and empirical testing" (Weaver & Olson, 2006). However, unlike positivism, post-positivism emerged in response to the belief that reality can never be completely known (Weaver & Olson, 2006). It, therefore, employs a critical realism whereby reality is deemed to be only imperfectly apprehensible due to human limitations (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Epistemologically, post-positivism assumes a modified objectivist stance wherein objectivity remains a "regulatory ideal" that becomes more attainable through consistency with pre-existing knowledge and/or acceptance among the scholastic community. Within this tradition replication of findings is thought to be a good indicator of objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

While both positivist and post-positivist traditions provide the backdrop against which other paradigms operate (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), they have been greatly critiqued to the point of an anti-positivist movement whereby many alternative paradigms have emerged. Critical

theory and interpretivism are two of the leading anti-positivists paradigms within the social sciences. These perspectives hold as their main point of contestation the epistemological stance of objectivity assumed by positivism and post-positivism. The claim of objective knowledge production is deemed problematic due to its own impossibility (Markula & Silk, 2011). For example, Guba and Lincoln (1994) explained that observable "facts" as perceived within conventional approaches to research are highly theory-laden as the theory determines the lens or window in which the "facts" are viewed. Further to this, different theories might be equally supported with the same set of facts. Guba and Lincoln (1994) referred to this as the undetermination of theory or the problem of induction. In other words, this speaks to the impossibility of arriving at a single ineluctable theory with any given set of coherent "facts"; other theories are always possible.

Another anti-positivist critique of objectivity concerns the idea of value-free or value-neutral research. These critics argue that theories are in and of themselves value statements, thus, "facts" are not only perceived through a "theory window" but also through a "value window" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). The ideal of objectivity is also dismissed when one considers the inescapable impact of interactions in human communication: the researcher can influence the participants and the participants influence the researcher. Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 107) explained the problem of objectivity succinctly:

> Indeed, the notion that findings are created through the interaction of inquirer and phenomenon (which, in social sciences, is usually people), is often a more plausible description of the inquiry process than is the notion that findings are discovered through objective observation 'as they *really* are, and as they *really* work'.

While both critical and interpretive paradigms reject the notion of objectivity and instead adopt the idea of a transactional/subjectivist epistemology whereby the investigator and the investigated are interactively connected (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), these two anti-positivist

paradigms also differ from one another at significant junctures. Researchers in critical paradigm assume an ontological historical realism. This logic contends that reality is apprehensible but through social, cultural, political, gender, ethnic and economic forces it has been refashioned and reified throughout history and has now come to be taken-for-granted as natural and immutable, that is, as "real" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Weaver & Olson, 2006). The critical researcher's aim, therefore, is to critique and conscientize social actors about historically mediated structures that constrain, oppress, and exploit certain groups of people and privilege others and ultimately bring about transformation and emancipation. Methodologically, a dialectical dialogue between investigator and investigated is ensued "to transform ignorance and misapprehensions" about historically mediated structures as fixed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). In this manner, the critical paradigm is highly and unapologetically normative and prescriptive dictating what social behaviour should entail (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). A society based on equality and liberty for all holds as its ideals.

The interpretive paradigm, which informs this study, adopts the view that it is impossible to completely separate ourselves from our pre-existing knowledge. The inquirer and the inquired are inextricably linked in such a way that "who we are and how we understand the world is a central part of how we understand ourselves, others and the world" (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, no page number). Thus, within the interpretive paradigm, epistemologically, knowledge is fundamentally subjective, and therefore the process of conducting research is also viewed as a subjective one (Markula & Friend, 2005; Markula & Silk, 2011; Scotland, 2012). Because of the mutual influence that the participant and the investigator have on one another, research is not considered only to be subjective but also interactive: findings are created mutually and unfold as the investigation proceeds through an intersubjectivist transactional meaning-making process

(Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Markula & Silk, 2011). Given this purview, interpretive researchers acknowledge that value-free knowledge is not possible. Investigators assert their ideals when they select a particular phenomenon to study, in the way they choose to study it, and how they interpret their data (Scotland, 2012).

The ontological assumption embedded within the interpretivist paradigm assumes an apprehensible reality and truth. However, individuals' perceptions and experiences of it vary (Lauriala, 2013). These differing perspectives of what is real speaks to what interpretivist researchers refer to as a relativist ontology whereby social actors construct and fashion meaning out of their lived experiences within particular places at particular times through complex social processes of social interaction (Schwandt, 1994). The situated meanings of everyday lived experiences must be interpreted by both the social actors (i.e. the subjects of one's inquiry) and the inquirer. However, emphasis is placed on studying the phenomenon from the participants' viewpoints and not the observer. Schwandt (1994, p. 118) explained:

> The inquirer must elucidate the process of meaning construction and clarify what and how meanings are embodied in the language and actions of social actors. To prepare an interpretation is itself to construct a reading of these meanings; it is to offer the inquirer's construction of the constructions of the actors one studies.

Thus, from this perspective, significant value is placed upon the voices of research participants. Instead of privileging external knowledge ascribed onto social actors assumed by the researchers in critical paradigm, interpretivists accept, respect, and honour the experienced knowledge of those whom they study (Lauriala, 2013). Such participants' constructions of social reality are not deemed to be more or less "true", but rather more or less partial, never complete, and continuously in-the-making (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Methodologically, interpretivism assumes a hermeneutical approach to understanding the world and lived experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Markula & Silk, 2011). As interpretive

inquirers seek to establish a certain understanding or interpretation of the meaning of the social phenomenon under investigation, they understand that it can only be warranted by other interpretations (Schwandt, 1994). The investigator also acknowledges the significance of the existing world, the meaning that it holds, and the researcher's inextricable positionality (socially situated status and perspectives based on identifiers such as gender, class, race, ethnicity, religiosity, and other constructs) within it (Crist & Tanner, 2003, Mullings, 1999). This interaction creates a mutually constructed research product (Manning, 1997).

Given that the intent is to search for meanings as perceived by those experiencing the phenomenon, the interpretive research design should foster dialogue with the specified social actors. It is through dialogue that deeper, richer, and more sophisticated and informed understanding of the social world can be created (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). In this view, participants' subjective meaning-making forms the basis of the data collected. The approach taken to collect or produce the data is typically through naturalistic methods such as interviews and observations. Interpretation and analysis of data should point toward the perceptions and experiences of the participants (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). In essence, the main objectives or goals of this type of inquiry are to look for, describe, and understand people's lived experiences and their subjective meaning-making processes from within their inner world from their own point of view (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011); in other words, to "ma[k]e visible the invisibility of everyday life" (Lauriala, 2013, p. 575). As my aim in this research is to make visible the African diasporic women's experiences of wellness, I employ a narrative methodological approach that privileges the perceptions and voices of the women as they reflect upon their lived experiences and falls within the parameters of interpretive paradigm.

While an interpretive logic is well suited for the goals and objectives of this research project, this paradigmatic viewpoint is not without its limitations. For example, the critical perspective points to the absence of structural and ideological construction of lived experiences in interpretive research. This issue has been identified as one of "descriptivism, of the lack of critical purchase, and of privileging the views of actors" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 130). Structural analyses such as the role of power dynamics in research participants' lives are not generally aspects of interpretivist research, unless raised by the participants' themselves. As noted earlier, critical paradigm, tends to privilege the perspectives of the researcher rather than the research participants unlike interpretive research that aims to understand people's lived experiences and meaning-making processes through the participants' own eyes (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Those holding the critical perspective commonly believe that participants may not be aware of the ideologies that influence their thoughts and actions and therefore need to be conscientized about the repressive forces impeding upon their lives. As an interpretive researcher I believe that when given the opportunity to engage in in-depth discussion about their lived experiences, many people are quite capable, competent, insightful, and reflective thinkers about their lives. Thus, the issue at hand is in not necessarily a lack of critical purchase, but rather a value that interpretivist inquirers place on research participants' ability to think critically about themselves for themselves.

4.2.1 Narrative Research within the Interpretive Paradigm

Proponents of interpretive paradigm concede that any attempt to represent experiences as they are actually lived is an unachievable task as such representations are always partial, never complete, and written from the scholar's positionality (Parry & Johnson, 2007). The lived experiences that are to be represented in the study are in effect created through the written text

by the researcher (Richardson, 2000). This speaks to the dual crisis of representation and legitimation within the social sciences whereby the inability of scholars to capture and represent an authentic and legitimate account of research participants' lives fostered a call for more evocative, vivid and detailed writing that was polyvocal in style and engaged both researcher and participants' voices (Markula & Silk, 2011; Parry & Johnson, 2007). Narrative inquiry as an interpretive research methodology answers this call through what is known as the "narrative turn".

> The narrative turn moves from a singular, monolithic conception of social science toward a pluralism that promotes multiple forms of representation and research; away from facts and towards meanings; away from master narratives and toward local stories; away from idolizing categorical thought and abstracted theory and toward embracing the values of irony, emotionality, and activism; away from assuming the stance of disinterested spectator and toward assuming the posture of a feeling, embodied, and vulnerable observer; away from writing essays and toward telling stories. (Bochner, 2001, pp. 134-135).

Indeed, many interpretive researchers (e.g. Holstein & Gubrium, 2005) understand research as narrative through which participants make meaning of their experiences and share them with the investigator (Markula & Silk, 2011). When I ask how Christian African diasporic women in Canada make sense and experience the interweaving of spirituality and wellness in their daily lives, my intent is to understand the relationship between their faith and wellness based on these women's subjective lived experiences and how they make meaning of those experiences. As an interpretive researcher, I wish to re-present their experiences from their perspectives, and thereby make visible participants' ways of life, thoughts, and actions through their own voices. Glover (2003, p. 145) noted that "[s]torytelling, ... is a genuinely human way of making meaning out of our experiences". He further explained that such stories provide a valuable way for researchers to generate knowledge that deepens and expands our understanding of people's lives.

From a narrative perspective, our stories form an organizing principle for our lives (Sarbin, 1986). They are formulated based on the present circumstances we find ourselves in whether reflecting on past or future experiences and are based on conscious and unconscious selections from an assortment of alternatives in our lives. Thus, no narrative can ever be complete or tell everything (Rosenthal, 2004). They are rooted within the interpersonal relationships in which they are produced, the social contexts in which they evolved, and the cultural meta-narratives that give are stories meaning (Zilber, Tuval-Mashiach, & Lieblich, 2008). Based on the wide range of influence on the stories that we tell it is evident that sole authorship does not belong to research participants nor to researchers but rather such stories are co-created.

Narrative inquiry thus refers to "research that openly celebrates both the researchers' and the participants' voices…." (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 136). It is concerned with life stories. While narrative research carries multiple meanings, I have chosen to follow Spector-Mersel's (2010) characterization of narrative, that aligns with the interpretive approach, to my research on Christian African diasporic women's experiences.

Specter-Mersel's (2010) narrative perspective focused on the storied nature of human life and emphasized "that social reality is primarily a narrative reality" (p. 211). Through narrative we gain a sense of continuity and identity (Alasuutari, 1997; McAdams, 1993), develop relationships with others (Gergen & Gergen, 1988), learn about our culture (Kenyon & Randall, 1997), and modify our behaviours accordingly (Spector-Mersel, 2010). From this perspective, our lives are deeply organized around narratives. As Smith and Sparkes (2009, p. 3) further explained: "They serve as an essential source of psycho-socio-cultural learning and shape who we are and might become". The narrative perspective further maintains that we understand

ourselves through subjective interpretive processes that are culturally rooted (Spector-Mersel, 2010). The stories we produce form an organizing principle for our lives (Sarbin, 1986). They are formulated based on the circumstances we presently find ourselves. We reflect on past or future experiences against the present and thus, our narratives are based on conscious and unconscious selections from an assortment of alternatives in our lives. Thus, no narrative can ever be complete or tell everything (Rosenthal, 2004; Spector-Mersel, 2010). They are rooted within the interpersonal relationships in which they are produced, the social contexts in which they evolved, and the cultural meta-narratives that give are stories meaning (Zilber, Tuval-Mashiach, & Lieblich, 2008). Spector-Mersel (2010, p. 212) explained:

> We have a large degree of freedom in "writing" our stories, but this freedom is limited by the contexts in which we tell them, by the "honorable" stories prevailing in our society at a given time and by components of social structure such as age, gender, ethnicity, class, health, marital status and economic situation.

Because interpretive work as represented through narrative is ultimately a co-construction among inquirer and the inquired, it is essential that investigators reflexively evaluate how intersubjectivity shape research outcomes (Finlay, 2002). I now turn to the researcher's role in interpretive, narrative research.

4.3 The Researcher and the Role of Reflexivity

As I explained earlier, interpretive researchers assume an openly subjective epistemology. Such an acknowledgement of subjectivity does not mean, however, a loss of analytical interpretation of the research findings. Neither does it necessarily warrant a focus on the researcher's self, but rather a focus on the intersubjective nature of the qualitative research process. Intersubjectivity from an interpretivist perspective refers to the co-constituted nature of research (Finlay, 2002a) based on the interaction of individual subjectivities: the ways in which the researcher affects the participants and the participants impact the researcher (Markula & Silk,

2011). A good interpretive study entails continuous assessment of subjective and intersubjective dynamics and responses to these during the research process. An integral part of such an assessment is reflexivity. In interpretive narrative research, reflexivity helps relate how the stories are shaped by both the researcher and the participants. This underlines a shift from objective, detached data collection and analysis to an understanding of research knowledge as actively co-constructed between the researcher and her participants (Finlay, 2002b). Reflexivity, thus, provides one useful tool to examine how intersubjective elements have influenced the data collection and analysis process (Finlay, 2002b) of my study.

Researchers' personal lives invariably influence their research interests and the type of research they conduct. As the investigator, I determine my research topic which then governs the paradigmatic framework within which I locate my analysis and understanding of social actors' lived experiences. My personal past and present experiences as well as positionality shape the lens in which I see and interpret the world. The data collected and the meanings ascribed to it are negotiated between me and the research participants as they decide what to share, what to omit, how much to share, and in what way. I inevitably influence the participants and the participants inevitably influence me. Our actions are predisposed by our personal experiences, perspectives, knowledge, and emotions which ultimately shape the research process including the outcomes and interpretations. From an interpretive perspective, the stories presented are, thus, not an exact, value-free replica of reality, but a re-presentation of the participants' interpretation of reality from the vantage point in which I, the researcher, see the world (Andrews, 2008; Welikala, 2007).

Denzin and Lincoln (2011a) have provided valuable insight as to the importance of reflecting on researchers' subjectivities as parts of the research process from the beginning stages

of topic selection to the latter stages of interpretation and re-presentation. According to them, it is essential that qualitative researchers use a brief autobiographical sketch to acknowledge their own positions as multicultural, socially situated subjects. Fine and Weis (1996) further explained that qualitative researchers "have a responsibility to talk about our own identities...." (p. 264). Such introspection should not be mistaken for "an opportunity to wallow in subjectivity nor permission to engage in legitimised emoting" (Finlay, 1998, p. 455). Rather, self-reflection ought to facilitate researchers' ability to interrogate the research process and writing as they re-present narratives of lived experiences. Reflexivity enables investigators to unpack their choice of interpretation over other possible ways (Welikala, 2007) and to take a step back from prevailing familiar assumptions and preconceptions to look at the research process, including the findings, with a fresh perspective. In this sense, inquirers can become more explicit about the connections they see between their personal experiences, those of the inquired, the social context, and resultant knowledge claims (Finlay, 2002a). Thus, openly including the researcher's self in a reflexive manner is an integral aspect of interpretive qualitative research.

My interest in Christian African diasporic women's wellness stems largely from two personal life domains. The first is from a prior research study I carried out while doing my Master's degree. I conducted a qualitative study using in-depth one-on-one interviews to explore the meaning of health among Caribbean Canadian women. While my intent was to focus on lay perceptions of health, the women opted to speak about wellness, and while I did not intend nor expect spirituality to be a dominant feature in their conceptualizations, it indeed dominated their understanding of what wellness meant. The women in this former study were all Christian women whom I incidentally came across through referrals, word of mouth, and snowball sampling. The dominant narrative that emerged related to how their Christian faith equated to

their sense of health and wellness. Additionally, coming from a kinesiology and health sciences background, hearing health being discussed in terms of wellness and conceived in such all encompassing spiritual terms, was a novel and fascinating finding for me. It was also one that I could readily understand and appreciate due to my discontentment with the traditional biomedical conceptualization of health that dominated the health sciences and which I felt was too limited. Wellness seemed to me like a more apt term in discussing lay understandings and experiences of health from a holistic perspective. I was intrigued with how my findings, though unexpected, offered a wealth of insight about the role of faith in personal wellness.

The second major life domain that inspired this research is my own personal faith as a Christian woman. At the time of conducting my Master's research I was very new to the Christian faith. Years later since completing my Master's degree I continue to abide in the faith and be inspired by how it is woven into the various facets of wellness among many believers. I have experienced and witnessed the ways in which this faith has been fundamental in contributing significantly to my personal sense of wellness and the lives of many others. The literature reviewed also supports the notion that spiritual faith has been an essential tool for many people when it comes to fostering health and wellness and dealing with issues that could otherwise impede well-being. As a second generation African Canadian woman, I also have intimate insider knowledge as to how important the Christian faith is to many sub-Saharan African diasporic women and men as well.

Thus, my personal life history locates me in this research project as a "passionate participant" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 112) in the co-construction and re-presentation of participants' life worlds. I am genuinely interested, intrigued, and even inspired by the research participants' narratives of faith and wellness. In light of this, I am conscious not to dislocate my

individual subjectivity from intersubjective research relations (Finlay, 2002a). Because of my sincere and authentic enthusiasm for this topic and the lives being shared during the discussion in this research, it is my belief that participants have been more open to sharing their lived experiences with me than with a more distant, "neutral", and dispassionate researcher. I am aware that my insider status as an African diasporic (albeit second generation African Canadian which makes me only a partial insider) Christian woman has also facilitated greater openness by participants. Previous research has indicated that there is great reservation for people of various backgrounds to openly discuss their spiritual beliefs and experiences due to fears of being perceived as irrational (e.g. Baskin, 2007; Mattis, 1995). For example, Mattis (1995, p. 127) explained:

> [T]here are few spaces in which black women can openly articulate their experience(s) of spirituality and religion. Spirituality and religion have been deemed inappropriate fodder for public or intellectual discourse. The silence surrounding these topics is further punctuated with black women's concerns that they will be labelled "crazy" if they language their experiences of spirituality/religiosity. Some of these women assert that the intensely private set of beliefs they use in their day-to-day efforts to understand and navigate their worlds would mark them as insane if they made those beliefs public.

In this regard, being a member of the group under investigation has fostered greater openness by participants and "enhance[d] the depth and breadth of understanding a population that may not be accessible to a non-native scientist" (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 57) in my research process.

My group membership among research participants points to the insider-outsider debate within qualitative social science research and speaks further to the need for self-reflexivity. Insider research refers to studies conducted by researchers who belong to the same community, identity group, or population that they are studying (Kanuha, 2000). Outsider research, in contrast, refers to researchers who are non-members of the group under investigation (Mullings, 1999) and thus, do not share in the main commonalities of the group (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

They can be defined as a "professional stranger" (Serrant-Green, 2002). While this dual representation of insider versus outsider research is highly problematic due to the overly simplistic dichotomy, it points to underlining assumptions about objectivity versus subjectivity in the research process. Outsider researchers argue that their non-membership in a group under study makes them more neutral, more likely to have a higher degree of objectivity and therefore, less likely to distort the meanings of their observations (Mullings, 1999; Serrant-Green, 2002). Insider researchers on the other hand, like all interpretive researchers, do not strive for objectivity or believe that it is even possible to achieve. One's positionality as well as location in time and space affects how one views and interprets the world (Mullings, 1999). The "challenge is not to eliminate 'bias' to be more neutral, but to use it as a focus for more intense insight" (Frank, 1997, p. 89).

Thus, insider researchers assume their insider status is advantageous because it facilitates more intimate insights into their research participants' experiences (Mullings, 1999). There is a different level of understanding that comes from hearing about or witnessing a particular experience or event versus actually living through it firsthand, with the latter providing deeper and richer insight and understanding. The insider researchers' shared experiences with participants (Asselin, 2003) can foster more rapid and greater rapport within the research relationship due to mutual shared understanding of the topic and culture. As I noted earlier, participants are generally more open with investigators who can then provide greater depth and breadth of the data collected (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

In this research, I am socially situated as a second generation African Canadian middle class Christian woman. The women I have interviewed are first generation African Canadian Christian women, mostly of the middle class, who have spent their formative years living within

continental Africa. Though I have visited the continent, unlike the women I interviewed, I have never lived there, nor have I experienced firsthand what it is like to immigrate to a country that is vastly different from the one I was born and raised in. I have spent all my life living in the western world, whereas the women in this study have spent much of their formative years living in what is referred to as the "Third World". To them, I am considered an "oyibo", a Nigerian term used to describe a White or westernized person. The participants and I share the same faith, gender identity, and to some degree racialization and social class. As an insider in this regard we also share much of the same biblical beliefs, Christian jargon, and African cultural understandings. Through my own experiences as an African diasporic Christian woman, I can gain deeper understanding of their world in a shorter time frame than an outsider researcher. I echo Finlay (1998, p. 454) who reflected upon her experience as an occupational therapist interviewing other occupational therapist: "[m]y previous knowledge gives me insights that outsiders may not appreciate".

However, it is imperative to realize that no population is completely homogenous and therefore, differences and diversity should be respected. Neither are groups ever completely heterogeneous from one another, there are always some commonalities. As Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 60) so aptly stated "[h]olding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference". Thus, the notion of insider-outsider researcher can be problematic in the sense that it presents a false dichotomy: you are either in or you are out (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). In reality, similarities and differences are far more complex than the binary of insider-outsider gives credence. Our socially situated identities and experiences can be fluid and often multilayered (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). In this regard, the concept of dwelling at the hyphen of the insider-

outsider dictum—the space between—troubles this misleading binary and bridges the polarities together (Aoki, 1996). Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 54) explained that the space between "allows researchers to occupy the position of both insider and outsider rather than insider or outsider".

As an insider-outsider researcher dwelling at the hyphen (Aoki, 1996), I am aware of the need to guard against over-familiarity with the field of study. Such familiarity can be detrimental if it can prevent participants from fully explaining their personal experiences or the researcher probing for deeper meaning and insight. For example, one of my participants asked if I had ever been to an African church before. When I replied yes, she then assumed no need to explain any further. However, I coupled my response with a request for elaboration as I desired to hear her perspective. Had I not probed further for deeper meaning I would have missed valuable insight and understanding about her lived experience as an African diasporic Christian woman and how this phenomenon impacts her wellness. By responding to assumptions of shared experiences in this way, individualized expressions and viewpoints can be fostered without downplaying social connections and similarities. As an interpretive researcher, it was important that my preconceived perceptions and past experiences did not cloud diverse or nuanced understandings and practices. This meant adopting a certain distance from my own beliefs.

Humphrey (2012) explained that it is essential for researchers who share significant similarities with their participants to engage in a level of "estrangement". This means that the researcher needs to move beyond the taken-for-granted understanding of the life world in which they are members and adopt an attitude of reflexivity and curiosity about the group being studied. I was able to do this by probing for deeper meaning and understanding to avoid missing important pieces of information as well as making a conscious effort to set aside presuppositions in order to gather the data from a fresh perspective (Asselin, 2003; Finlay, 1998). While I made

an effort to bracket my previous assumptions (i.e., to identify my initial thoughts and beliefs about the research topic and set them aside) (Asselin, 2003), I was also aware of the impossibility of breaking free completely from my subjective responses. I understood that because I am unable to remove myself from the research process, I would inevitably influence it in some ways. Reflexivity has helped me to identify these dynamic and complexities (Finlay, 1998).

Strategies I used to foster reflexivity included keeping a reflexive journal and posing a number of reflexive questions to myself to help me think critically about the intersubjective nature of my work. The journal has provided me with a tool to track important decisions I have made throughout the research process, the impact of those decisions, and my ongoing thoughts and feelings about observations, interviewees, and statements made during the interviews. Wells (2011, p. 121) provided a number of questions that I adopted to facilitate reflexive thinking:

- What position have I adopted vis-à-vis the interviewee and with what consequences for the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data?
- How did the interviewee and I respond emotionally to each other and with what consequences for the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data?
- To what extent and how were research participants empowered by participation in the research project and with what consequences for the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data?
- How might my assumptions and methodological strategies have affected the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data?
- What alternative interpretations to the ones I have drawn are possible in relation to the data obtained?

As Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 59) explained, and as I have done in the course of conducting this study, engaging in "detailed reflection on the subjective research process, with a close awareness of one's own personal biases and perspectives, might well reduce the potential concerns associated with insider [or outsider] membership". Thus, rather than aiming for value-free knowledge, the interpretive inquirer's goal should be that of openness, a sincere curiosity, and a genuine deep interest in the lives of the inquired, coupled with a dedication to re-presenting their experiences as honestly, authentically, and accurately as possible.

4.4 Phase 3: Research Strategy

There is no unified definition or overall rule of how a narrative methodological research approach ought to be conducted (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008; Bold, 2012; Chase, 2011; Markula & Silk, 2011; Riessman, 2008; Smith & Sparkes, 2009). The various narrative research forms differ based on the topic of inquiry, paradigmatic framework, and disciplinary background (Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2008). All narrative research strands assume, however, that the research methodology must suit the research question (Bold, 2012). Two common approaches to narrative include structural and experience-centered narrative research.

A structural narrative approach emphasizes the way a story is told or how it is composed by focusing on language structures (Bold, 2012). In this manner, language is treated seriously as an object of intense scrutiny in order to understand the linguistic devices that make it persuasive. Thus, this approach to narrative research analyzes not so much what is told, but instead, how it is told. The focus is not on understanding the content or interpreting the meaning of the stories, but rather on systematically examining linguistic structures by concentrating on narrative form and how the content is organized (Bold, 2012). This structural approach to narrative was developed by sociolinguist William Labove and Joshua Waletzky (1997 (originally published in 1967)) in

efforts to examine and compare narrative structures across different communities and cultures. While it is highly decontextualized, a structural narrative approach can offer insight beyond what is simply stated and into the structure and function of clauses and their communicative effects.

In contrasts to the linguistically focused structural approach to narrative research, an experienced-centred approach, as its name suggests, focuses on the study of lived experience (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). It highlights the "internal representations of phenomena, thoughts, and feelings to which narrative gives external expression" (Bold, 2012, p.22). As such, narratives of experience emphasize human sense making: they offer a re-presentation of how individuals make sense of themselves and the world (Squire, 2008). Thus, in this style of narrative, the content (including the reason for certain actions), justification for particular choices, and meanings behind the story, are paramount aspects of inquiry (Bold, 2012). Because I aim to explore how Christian African diasporic women's lived experiences of faith and wellness intersects with one another, the experience-centred approach to narrative research is most applicable to my study.

Chase (2011) offered a viable working definition of this type of narrative inquiry. She defined narrative as "a distinct form of discourse: as meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experience, a way of understanding one's own or other's actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time" (p. 421). The narrator's experience and the resultant meaning making are its key elements. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) noted that life experience is the defining feature of this type of narrative inquiry and thus, its subject matter (Welikala, 2007). Narratives, however, are not just about past experiences. More importantly, narratives pertain to how individuals understand those experiences or make meaning out of them (Riessman, 1993).

The stories we tell ourselves about such experiences help shape meanings and make sense of our world (Squire, 2008; Wells, 2011).

According to Holstein and Gubrium (2012, p. 6) narrative inquiry seeks to develop an understanding of the narrator's "emotions, attitudes, beliefs, and interpretations." As Atkinson (2007, pp. 231-232) asserted: "If we want to know the unique perspective of an individual, there is no better way to see this… than in their voice in their life story." I find this focus on personal narratives about individual thinking and feeling (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008) particularly interesting for a number of reasons.

First, understanding how everyday people think and feel about particular experiences or issues can provide an avenue for learning about various lived experiences and different ways of interpreting and dealing with such experiences. In other words, personal narratives can produce local knowledge and add to our understanding of the world. As Andrews (2007) asserted, through others' personal narratives, the researcher is "able to imagine a world other than the one we know" (p. 489).

Second, creating a space that values individuals' subjective experiences and perspectives, particularly of those who have traditionally been marginalized, fosters the narrators' rights as capable and competent subjects who are able to explain their own reality. This is significant given that traditionally Black women have been treated as objects and have had their realities, identities, and histories defined for them (Browdy, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2011b) explained that in creating a public space for marginalized group members to tell their stories and have their voices heard requires hearing both what might be readily accepted and that which may not want to be heard. Atkinson (2007) called for more narratives from groups underrepresented in research such as traditionally marginalized groups and women.

Third, closely related to the issue of defining one's own reality, expressing individual thoughts and feelings about personal experiences can help build personal identity (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008; Riessman, 2008; Sparkes, Pérez-Samaniego, & Smith, 2012). This study embodies these elements: it is an expression of Canadian Christian African diasporic women's ways of being in the world that values our right to speak "from within our lived experiences, confronting and challenging the silences which have kept us chained and bound to definitions not of our own making" (Hayes, 1995, p. 30). Thus, to name one's own experience, whatever it may be, is deemed not only as a right, but as reasonable and responsible (Hayes, 1995). Cannon (2006), speaking from a womanist perspective with regards to African diasporic religious women's experiences, asserted that "it is important that we bring the specificities of our autobiographical context into play. Using concise, but lively, uncompromising language we must tell our stories" (p. 25). While this study does not employ a womanist perspective, it is fair to say that the same assertion applies to traditionally underrepresented Christian African diasporic women in Canada. Narrative research provides an ideal medium to tell our stories.

Mankowski and Rappaport (2000) elaborated that narratives are particularly well suited for describing and analyzing personal experiences within spiritually based communities. First, narratives about spiritual life have significant influence over macro, meso, and micro levels of spiritual and religious practices which inevitably impact other areas of living due to the central role that spirituality plays as a way of life (Amenga-Etego, 2012; Beattie, 2005; Mattis, 1995; Mitchem, 1998; Townes, 1993; Wane, 2011). While my interest, for the purpose of this dissertation, is to focus on the micro level of analysis, it is important to note that such narratives "have shaped worldwide religious institutions, local religious congregations, and the personal lives of individual members" (Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000, p. 480). Second, Mankowski and

Rappaport (2000) emphasized the importance of spirituality and religion in fostering quality community life. Spiritual and religious narratives are often told repeatedly within such communities. When believed, internalized, and acted upon, they can have immense ability to effect personal and communal change (Rappaport & Simkins, 1991). Third, spiritually based communities often hold religious texts, such as the Bible for Christians, as guides to their lives. These texts are filled with narratives. Similarly, community members' practices and discourses also frequently include narrative forms such as testimonials, conversion narratives, communion, and confession. Thus, narrative is a methodological framework that is highly commensurate with the study of spiritually based communities (Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000).

4.5 Phase 4: Methods of Collection and Analysis

4.5.1 Semi-Structured Narrative Interviews

I used semi-structured narrative interviews to attain research participants' local in-depth knowledge of spirituality and wellness. The semi-structured interview is the most common approach to collecting narrative data (Chase, 2011; Riessman, 2008; Squire, 2008). This method is useful in facilitating a deep, rich, and complex understanding of the specific phenomena at work. Chase (2011) outlined the specific characteristics of semi-structured narrative interviews. First, its objective is to communicate the narrator's story from his or her own perspective and to organize the narrative into a meaningful whole. This involves accounting for the emotions, thoughts, and interpretations of the narrator's experience. Second, the interviewer aims to understand the participant's perspective of "how, where and in what way" (p. 138) the experience in question took place. Third, individual narratives are embedded within a larger social context: the narrative researcher engages in the interaction cognisant of the social and political factors affecting the interview (Squire, 2008).

Semi-structured narrative interviews also share many similarities with more traditional qualitative semi-structured interviews. For instance, there is typically a set of broad questions about the topic of inquiry used to guide the interview. Riessman (2008) suggested five to seven broad questions for the narrative interview. The interviewer may then supplement these with a number of probe questions if the interviewee has difficulty responding to the initial question (Riessman, 2008). Narrative interview questions should be clear, open-ended, void of academic language, and contain a single idea. The narrative interview should foster detailed accounts and descriptions of participants' experiences as opposed to brief answers or general statements (Riessman, 2008; Wells, 2011). While the interviewer guide structures the interview, it does not dictate the direction the interview takes (Bold, 2012). The semi-structured interview, whether narrative or the more traditional version, should allow for significant flexibility. For instance, follow-up questions can help clarify points made by respondents or follow an unanticipated path (Kvale, 2007).

Overall, the narrative interview should stimulate informants to tell a rich, detailed, and descriptive story about a significant experience or event in their life from their perspective (Riessman, 2008). This is in contrast to traditional qualitative interviews, which typically operate around question and answer exchanges or other forms of discourse. For example, the purpose of a conceptual interview is to clarify a concept and the informal conversational interview asks questions in a manner similar to a naturally occurring conversation (Kvale, 2007; Riessman, 1993; Wells, 2011). In the narrative interview the interviewer and interviewee interaction transforms the situation into that of listener and storyteller and invites participants to tell their specific stories in their fullness (Chase, 2011).

4.5.2 Sampling

Qualitative sampling strategies differ based on the purpose and goals of the research project (Wells, 2011). However, qualitative researchers commonly use purposeful sampling to attain in-depth information with which to achieve the study's objectives (Patton, 2002). For this reason, I have used purposeful criterion based (Patton, 2002) sampling in this study. The sample criterion required participants to be women of African heritage residing in Canada and be 18 years of age and older. They must also be of the Christian faith and belong to a local church they attend regularly. Such criteria are consistent with my research question. I have defined women as the age of majority or the beginning of adulthood in Alberta, which is 18 (Province of Alberta, 2002). I have included the criterion of regular attendance at a local church to obtain participants who are active in their Christian faith given that although two-thirds of Canadians are affiliated with the Christian faith (Statistics Canada, 2011b) participation in the faith is on a decline (Statistics Canada, 2008b). I used snowball sampling to garner additional participants as needed. This sampling strategy involves recruiting participants for a study and then afterwards asking for referrals to other potential respondents (Lucas, 2014). Data saturation determined the sample size: when few or no new themes (or story types) emerged from the interviews, data saturation was met (Morse, 1995; Morse, 2000). I achieved saturation with 17 participant interviews.

4.5.3 Thematic Narrative Analysis

There are several established ways to analyze semi-structured narrative interviews (Smith & Sparkes, 2009; Wells, 2011; Wertz, Charmaz & McMullen, 2011). For instance, the focus of analysis may be on a number of different aspects of the stories such as the content ("what a narrative says"), the structure ("how a narrative is put together to convey meaning"), the performance (interactional engagement or co-construction between narrator and listener), or the

context (social and cultural contextual influences) (Wells, 2011). In my interview analysis, I have used thematic narrative analysis (Bold, 2012; Riesmann, 2008) that is consistent with my interpretive research stance.

Bold (2012) explained that "a thematic analysis focuses on the content of the narratives, the events that occur, the experiences that people have and the meanings that emerge through finding a set of themes within the data" (p. 141). Additionally, thematic narrative analysis also includes a focus on the sequencing of the story, the progression of themes, and the transformation and resolution made within the narrative. In other words, in thematic narrative analysis, the narrative nature or storied form of the text is kept intact (Riessman, 2008; Squire, 2008). Narrative thematic analysis relies on extended accounts preserving long sequences of text and the wealth of detail. The researcher keeps the story, or the specifically narrative aspects of the text and its meaning, at the foreground (Squire, 2008). This contrasts with more traditional forms of thematic interview analysis whereby researchers take apart segments of data, pulling them out of the surrounding text, as they identify themes and analyze them (Riessman, 2008).

I have adopted Wells' (2011) five-step guide for conducting thematic narratives analysis. First, I repeatedly read the transcribed material until I was able to identify a noticeable pattern within each specific story. Wells (2011) noted that the global pattern found within each individual story typically represents the focus of the entire life story as told by the participant. Second, I wrote my initial impressions of each semi-structured narrative interview. This also included my overall thoughts regarding the core pattern as well as observed contradictions, unfinished descriptions, silences or the unspoken, emotions witnessed, and issues the narrator considers disturbing. Third, I identified specific themes within each broader sub-question. The focus here went beyond identifying the detailed content of the narrative as I also sought to

identify omissions and brief descriptions made by the narrator that could potentially provide critical insight into understanding a life pattern. Patterns can be distinguished from themes in that they are much broader than themes and are intended to capture an overall global impression of an individual's life (Wells, 2011).

These first three steps of the analysis rely on what the narrator has explicitly said. Therefore, during this aspect of the analysis, I relied exclusively on the transcripts of each narrative. In the fourth and fifth steps of the analysis, I incorporated the research literature in the areas of wellness and diasporas. Specifically, I focused on Roscoe's (2009) multiple dimensions of wellness and Faist's (2010) three-part model of diasporas. In the fourth step, I reread the narratives for each theme I identified, marking each one with a different coloured marker to distinguish them. I then reread each theme separately and repeatedly. In the fifth step, I drew conclusions about my examination of each theme and global pattern in relation to the wellness and African diaspora literature and my central research question.

4.6 Phase 5: The Art, Practices, and Politics of Interpretation, Re-presentation, and Evaluation

In this section, I highlight the form of re-presentation I have used in offering my interpretation and analysis of the data. Data from narrative research can be represented in multiple ways from realist tales to more literary texts. In my study, I have chosen two different ways to represent my findings: research stories and realist writing. I explain my choice in more detail below. Intertwined with the representation of narrative data is the issue of evaluation that I explain further in this section. I then conclude this chapter by discussing the ethical procedures I followed to ensure minimal harm and the promotion of benefits to all involved throughout the research process (Bold, 2012).

4.6.1 The Art of Re-presentation: Research Stories

In re-presenting the narrative data, it is important to acknowledge that all research is storied in nature and all researchers are essentially storytellers (Markula & Denison, 2005). Narrative researchers embrace this storied aspect of research. In re-presenting their data, some choose to write about people's lived experiences in a storied fashion that is evocative, interesting, and thought-provoking (Markula & Denison, 2005). Such an approach can reach a larger audience as it is more engaging than the traditional research report. To this end, I have adopted a storied approach in re-presenting the lived experiences of the women I interviewed.

Various names have been used to describe a storied approach including representative construction (Bold, 2012), creative non-fiction (Tedlock, 2011), and research stories (Markula & Denison, 2005). The storied approach takes the analyzed data collected from research participants through interviews, and other means of data collection, and constructs representative narratives based on them. The researcher constructs stories from the participants' words, other empirical data collected, and the researcher's own reflections. The researcher weaves them together in a polyphonic style (Tedlock, 2011). The research stories I have written emerged from the lived experiences of Christian African diasporic women in Canada and the ways in which their faith is interconnected with their wellness. Specifically, I have used essayistic storied writing in re-presenting my data. This form of storied writing aims to present the experiences of research participants as "truthfully" as they "really happened" (Markula & Denison, 2005). Markula and Denison (2005, p. 177) explained that essayistic storied writing depicts participants' experiences "in a precise and honest way, and mirroring the language of the everyday with the simple goal of describing and revealing the world as experienced by subjects in both said and unsaid ways". Because the research participants in my study shared very similar experiences, I

amalgamated their individual stories and created a composite character that is a reflection of the dominant narrative typology found in the data. I used the participants' own words taken from the transcripts in order to construct the narratives. This approach has been valuable in giving the narratives a level of verisimilitude, that is, "the appearance of truth or reality" (Sparkes, 2002, p. 206). I expand on this concept in my later discussion on evaluation. My use of thematic narrative analysis has enabled me to determine the type of essayistic stories to be written, their content, whom they are about, and what they are about. In addition to research stories, I have chosen to provide additional realist representation for my findings.

4.6.2 The Art of Re-presentation: Realist Research Representation

In addition to my use of research stories to re-present the data, in-text verbatim quotations were also heavily relied upon throughout my analysis in order to further expand and deepen my examination as well as the readers' understanding of the women's lived experiences of spirituality and wellness. This type of research writing is generally characterized as realist writing. Realist writing refers to the form of academic text that is rich in participants' quotations but is generally void of the author's voice (Sparkes, 2002). Such extensive use of participant quotations serves the purpose of conveying to the reader the authenticity of the views expressed as representative of the participants' lives (Sparkes, 2002; Van Maanen, 1988). However, as Sparkes (2002) pointed out, not only do such writings tend to be "author-evacuated", they present the illusion that the participants' point of view is being represented unadulterated if there is no discussion of the researchers' own authorship. This refers to the lack of authorial insight with regards to how quotations were selected and organized, what contextual framings were used and the purpose they served, and how the author's positionality has impacted the collection, interpretation, and presentation of the data, among other conventions employed in realist texts.

As an interpretive researcher, understanding my research process, including the research re-presentation as interactions between me and the participants is, nevertheless, important. Therefore, to avoid 'author-evacuation' and thus, acknowledging my impact on the findings, I employed several techniques to construct my realist writing segments. I systematically selected key issues and extracts from dozens of hours of interviews from 17 participants. Events, activities, and behaviours were taken out of sequence and re-presented through verbatim quotes for my own analytical purposes as I re-constructed the interviewees' lives to present them in an orderly, intelligible, and coherent fashion to the reader. In this sense, I acknowledge my research results as a re-presentation of the women's lives that I have interpreted and co-constructed (Sparkes, 2002).

Using quotations as I have done in my realist writing was a conscious strategy to present to the reader a strong sense of the participants' voices. According to Sparkes (2002, p. 54), "By focusing on realist tales [much like research stories].... [t]he participants' voices are foregrounded in these tales, and the reader is able to gain important insights into the participants' perceptions...". While interpretive researchers acknowledge that such voices are not univocal but are based upon intersubjectivist exchange, significant value is placed on the participants' viewpoints and experiences and their voices are privileged (Lauriala, 2013; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Indeed, the primary objective of interpretivist research is to re-present the perspectives of the inquired as they describe, understand, and make meaning of their lived experiences (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

I have offered a modified realist account by including myself as the author within certain aspects of my text. I have written my interpretation and analyses, as with the other chapters of this dissertation, in the first person to present my own voice in this polyvocal enterprise. I have

also indicated my own social positioning as an insider-outsider in relation to the interviewees to highlight the ways in which the social categories to which I belong may be implicated in the research process. Below, I offer additional explanation for the use of quotes in realist accounts and the functions that they serve.

This is particularly pertinent given that the narratives presented in the findings and analysis chapters are an amalgamation of the participants' voices created to represent a prototypical character based on the women interviewed. While the research stories provide a re-presentation of the women's experiences organized into a meaningful whole, my realist writing, which utilizes verbatim quotations, represents the specifics of each women's experiences that can thus be unpacked further. Accordingly, I have included verbatim quotations as an additional means of re-presenting my data in order to provide further evidence, enhance explanation, make illustrations, and improve readability to foster greater understanding of the women's lives.

Corden and Sainsbury (2005; 2006) provided useful insight into the various usages of verbatim quotations in qualitative social science research which I draw upon to demonstrate how the two forms of re-presentation – research stories and realist writing – can work together in a complimentary fashion. They pointed out that using verbatim quotations can help provide additional evidence for research interpretation by showing the readers in specificity how the research findings emerged and enabling them to judge the fairness and accuracy of the analysis (Corden & Sainsbury, 2005; 2006). While the presentation of verbatim quotations in and of itself is not sufficient as qualitative evidence, it does add to the evidence pool by helping the reader understand how and why specific areas of interpretation, analysis, and conclusions were drawn.

Verbatim quotations can also be used to enhance explanation around participants' lived experiences. While my research stories provided a detailed overview of the prototypical

participant in this study, quotations can aid in explaining the nuances of experiences between participants and the complex processes involved by which they made sense of their lives (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). For example, seeing how the different women positioned themselves within various circumstances, and some of their underlying beliefs, emotions, and responses can be useful in fostering deeper understanding of their experiences. Presenting quotations can also highlight specific themes and details that can easily be brushed over when reading a full story. Readability is also enhanced when the participants' spoken words are present within the analysis.

While the use of verbatim quotations through realist accounts can highlight the specificities of lived experiences, they also have a tendency to decontextualize participants' stories and experiences by removing them from the context of their lives. On the other hand, research stories as a form of data re-presentation are beneficial to social science research as they tend to present a fuller more holistic picture of the participants' life worlds by organizing their experiences into a meaningful whole. However, such an approach also has the propensity to overlook specific details, particularities, and nuances within and between participants' lives. Thus, the research stories and realist writing should not be seen as contradictory methods, but rather complimentary in efforts to broaden and deepen understanding of the lived experiences of wellness by the African diaspora women in my study.

4.6.3 The Art of Evaluation

Most interpretivist researchers endeavour to evaluate their work with the use of some form of procedural guidelines or support. They practise reflexivity by acknowledging their impact on the research process. Furthermore, they aim to re-present the research participants' life worlds in as legitimate fashion as possible despite their subjective influence (Markula & Silk, 2011). According to, Greene (1994, p. 537), "interpretivist evaluators seek to authenticate their

interpretations as empirically based representations of... experiences and meanings, rather than as biased inquirer opinion". Thus, various procedures such as reflexivity (discussed earlier in this chapter), member checking (Greene, 1994), and verisimilitude (Sparkes, 2002) are used by interpretivist researchers to strengthen the credibility of their inferences and re-presentations.

Because my study is located within an interpretivist qualitative narrative framework, it is important that the appropriate criteria are used to judge my research. Different research objectives, paradigmatic persuasions, and methodological approaches require different types of evaluation. For example, it would make little sense to use positivist quality criteria of validity, reliability, replicability, and objectivity on interpretive narrative research. These criteria have traditionally been based in quantitative research and expressed in coefficients of correlations and other similar measures (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). To insist on such criteria for narrative interpretivist research would render such studies as unacceptable, improper, and not worthy of attention (Sparkes, 2002). This is because, as Lieblich et al. (1998, p. 171) aptly asserted, the traditional criteria for the evaluation of research

> contradicts the very nature of the narrative approach, which, starting from an interpretive viewpoint, asserts that narrative materials—like reality itself—can be read, understood, and analyzed in extremely diverse ways, and that reaching alternative narrative accounts is by no means an indication of inadequate scholarship but a manifestation of the wealth of such material and the range of sensitivities of different readers....

Narrative research studies, as Sparkes (2002, p. 204) explained "are better judged by aesthetic standards, by their emotive force, by their capacity to engage readers emotionally, by their verisimilitude, and their authenticity or integrity". However, because I have engaged with both research stories and realist writings I offer two streams of evaluation criteria to assess the credibility of both aspects of my study. The first was offered by Lieblich et al. (1998); while they did not distinguish between realist accounts and research stories, in my estimation, their

evaluation approach to narrative research is best suited for realist tales due to their emphasis placed on quotations, analysis, and concepts, all of which are clearly depicted through my realist writings. The second narrative evaluation approach was offered by Sparkes (2002) for the evaluation of alternative forms of writing such as my research stories.

Table 1: Evaluation of Realist Narrative Accounts

(1) Width: The Comprehensiveness of Evidence. This dimension refers to the quality of the interview or the observations as well as to the proposed interpretation or analysis. Numerous quotations in reporting narrative studies, as well as suggestions of alternative explanations, should be provided for the reader's judgment of the evidence and its interpretation. *(2) Coherence: The Way Different Parts of the Interpretation Create a Complete and Meaningful Picture*. Coherence can be evaluated both internally, in terms of how the parts fit together, and externally, namely, against existing theories and previous research. *(3) Insightfulness: The Sense of Innovation or Originality in the Presentation of the Story and Its Analysis*. Close to this criterion is the question of whether reading the analysis of the life story of an "other" has resulted in greater comprehension and insight regarding the reader's own life. *(4) Parsimony: The Ability to Provide an Analysis Based on a Small Number of Concepts, and Elegance or Aesthetic Appeal* Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 173

My realist accounts correspond with Lieblich et al.'s (1998) guide to the evaluation of narrative research. Width was achieved through quality interviews that fostered in-depth detailed accounts of participants' experiences and through careful record keeping of the processes used in the collection and interpretation of data (Riessman, 2008). As part of this documentation, I audio recorded and transcribed the interview transcripts verbatim. I also kept a reflexive journal to keep track of some of the intersubjective processes involved in the development of this study as noted previously. I relied on these forms of documentation heavily in constructing my interpretation as well as used Wells (2011) five-step guide for conducting narrative analysis.

The richness of the interviews conducted is evident through the women's verbatim quotations and in their description of lived experiences found in Appendix F. Further, my presentation of numerous quotations by various participants, as opposed to a select few, also supports the comprehensiveness of evidence for my analysis and interpretation of the findings. I have also included outlier cases – experiences that did not reflect the majority of participants' responses in my realist representations in order to include diverse experiences in my analysis (Bold, 2012). My suggestion of alternative explanations of the women's lived experiences, such as the role of varying socioeconomic backgrounds and immigration categories (for instance, economic immigrants versus refugees), were also offered to help deepen understanding.

Coherence, the second evaluation criteria presented by Lieblich et al. (1998) that can be used for realist narrative accounts was actively pursued in my study. The different elements of my realist representations such as Faist's (2010) three-part model of diaspora and Roscoe's (2009) seven dimensions of wellness were all thoroughly engaged with in my realist accounts and corresponds with the existing literature as presented in the literature review chapters, though nuances and distinctions are also recognized. Internally, my realist accounts flow together to produce a meaningful picture of an important aspect of the participants' lives – the role of their faith in their experiences of wellness. A picture has also been painted of their lives as African diasporic women that has emphasized the three important features of diaspora as identified by Faist (2010): reasons for migration, transnational activities, and settlement. This has helped to locate their social context and positionality and thus provide a fuller picture of their lives.

By attending to the width and coherence of my realist accounts I have been able to offer important insight that demonstrate originality and innovation in the re-presentation of African diasporic women in Canada's life worlds. As a group, such women have traditionally been

overlooked and marginalized within academic literature. However, I have placed their lived experiences at the forefront in my study in order to illuminate their journeys of faith and wellness in the diaspora and to garner insight from their ways of life. By shining light on these issues, readers, immigrant agencies and the people they serve, those interested in wellness, and academic communities in the field of African diaspora and wellness studies may develop a deeper understanding of certain groups of people's experiences of settling well and establishing home in a foreign country as well as approaches to living a life of wellness.

The final evaluation criterion of narrative research by Lieblich et al. (1998) is parsimony. This was achieved through my emphasis on a small number of concepts: diaspora and wellness. This narrow focus enabled me to provide a richer more in-depth analysis of the women's lived experiences as oppose to focusing on several concepts which would likely lead to a more superficial examination. By attending to these criteria for quality narrative research, specifically as they apply to realist accounts, it is my belief that this research provides a fair and credible empirically based interpretation and re-presentation of research participants' life worlds.

Table 2: *Evaluation of Research Stories*

(1) Authenticity: The degree to which the storyline is faithful to the teller and its ability to create within the reader a vicarious experience of the life or lives being described. If the reader is open to such experience, greater insight and sensitivity can be gained about the lives depicted through the stories with a taste of the events, circumstances, perspectives, and behaviours which circumscribe the participants' life worlds.

(2) Believability: The extent to which the text is accurate in a holistic, evocative, and emotionally engaging sense. The character(s) portrayed in the narrative must be believable to the reader and the life or lives being depicted should be rendered as a portrayal of "true life".

(3) Fidelity: The ability to express the participants' meaning of the experience. Further exploration can connect the text to the readers' lives and examine how it may apply and what lessons may be learned.

(4) Verisimilitude: The appearance of truth or reality. This criterion also includes notions of plausibility, internal coherence, and how it may correspond to the readers' own experiences.

(5) Literary Aesthetics: The artistic forms that can help enhance the expression in the story.

Sparkes, 2002

Sparkes (2002) criteria for the evaluation of narrative research that uses alternative forms of writing such as research stories has also been useful in ensuring the quality of my narrative study. The notions of authenticity and verisimilitude are highly interrelated in the assessment of such research in that these concepts both speak to the idea of a genuine representation of the participants' lives. This was achieved in my research stories by relying upon the participants' own words derived from interview transcripts and placed in the appropriate contexts in which they were discussed to construct the narratives.

Just as authenticity and verisimilitude are closely related, in a similar fashion, the concepts of believability and fidelity are also interconnected. They both relate to being true to the participants' personal meaning and understanding they have arrived at based on their experiences. Member checking was a valuable tool I used to help confirm the believability and

fidelity of my research stories. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 314) have defined the member check "whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data was originally collected, [it] is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility". They explained that if investigators are to be able to claim that his or her interpretations are identifiable to research participants as acceptable representations of their realities, it is imperative that such participants be given the opportunity to view and respond to them.

I therefore contacted the research participants to request if they could review the narratives I constructed based on the composite character. One respondent moved out of the province and another out of the country and I did not have their new contact information to request their additional participation. Seven participants replied to the message I left for them via telephone; they all agreed to read the narratives and respond to the four questions that I posed adapted from McCormack's (2000, p. 299) approach to member checking. These include:

- Does what I have written resonate with you?
- How does this account compare with your experience in general?
- Have any important aspects of your experience been omitted? Please include these wherever you feel it is appropriate.
- Please feel free to make any other comments.

The seven participants who read the narratives all responded positively to these questions and affirmed that the research stories rightly represented their views and experiences.

In addition to having the original research participants provide feedback about the research findings concerning its accuracy and credibility, I conducted third party member checking among a similarly situated sample of three women that were recruited specifically for

this aspect of my study. They were also given the same set of questions adapted from McCormack (2000) and concurred that the interpretation re-presented in the research stories corresponded with their experiences. Third party member checking has helped determine a level of transferability of my research findings. Because the findings were recognizable among a similarly situated group, they are likely to be applicable among a larger similarly situated population sample and thus transferable.

The final criterion in Sparkes (2002) evaluation of narrative research stories, literary aesthetics, is not typically engaged with to a great extent in essayistic research stories such as the ones I have co-constructed. However, I have employed the idea of a composite character based on an amalgamation of the women's experiences as a literary device to enhance the expression of my stories. Based on the measures taken, my research stories can be seen as meeting the necessary requirements according to Sparkes (2002) to ensure quality narratives.

The above approaches to evaluation offer a useful guide for the assessment of narrative research. These guidelines essentially speak to the process through which one makes claims about their work. This process requires evaluating whether the evidence sufficiently supports the claims made (Chase, 2011). In other words, does the research provide a fair representation of the traditionally marginalized voices of the African diasporic women in this study? While the voices re-presented do not speak for all African diasporic women in Canada, I intend them to represent a collective voice from a community of believers while still acknowledging the heterogeneity that exists between experiences. Caution must be taken however in that those coming from a very different lifestyle, worldview, cultural background, or other significant factors that help shape our experiences may find it difficult to relate to stories that are diametrically distinct from their own. Such lived experiences may not even be recognizable among such readers. With that

word of caution, readers should maintain an open mind to exploring life worlds that may be new to them in order to expand knowledge and understanding of various ways of living. Indeed, as Riessman (2008, p. 186) pointed out, stories that "diverge from established 'truth' can sometimes be the most interesting, indicating silenced voices and subjugated knowledge". She added that narrative research can reveal experiences and meanings that other forms of research have not traditionally exposed.

4.7 Principles of Research Ethics

Within the context of academic research, the concept of ethics refers to moral codes and principles used to guide one's research. While these moral codes and principles are not universal and vary across research projects, locations, and specific paradigms or perspectives, we can summarize the varieties of ethical procedures with two key tenets: the reduction of harm and the promotion of benefits. Specifically, within Canada, the research Tri-Council agencies, which represent the major federal sources of funding for research and scholarship within Canadian academic institutions, place respect for dignity as the most essential aspect of research ethics (Markula & Silk, 2011). In fulfilling this mandate, I have adhered to the following principles and procedures for free and informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, and justice and inclusiveness (Markula & Silk, 2011).

Respect for dignity forms the basis on which all other principles of research ethics rest. Markula and Silk (2011) define respect from a westernized perspective as the right to individual autonomy. They explain that the researchers studying westernized cultures respect this right of the research participant. The University of Alberta ethics guidelines with which I have complied also adhere to this research ethics principle.

Informed consent dictates that research participants have a right to be informed about the nature of a research study and its consequences (Christians, 2011). It also states that participation in any given research study must be completely voluntary and done under full disclosure without coercion. To demonstrate this ethical principal has been properly followed, research ethic boards typically require a description of how the initial contact was made with research participants and an information letter given to the prospective participants outlining the purpose of the research and participant requirements. Additionally, researchers must specify how the researcher will adhere to ethical guidelines such as confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the participants' right to withdraw from the study without penalty (Markula & Silk, 2011). The researcher should clarify at what point prospective research participants will receive this information and how their consent will be noted. It is necessary to provide evidence of this consent.

In adhering to these guidelines of free and informed consent, I have taken the following steps:

- I made initial contact primarily through informal verbal communication outlining the nature of my research study. Some initial informal verbal communication came through informants in the process of snowball sampling.
- I gave an information letter (Appendix A) to prospective research participants at our initial meeting. I read this information letter aloud to the prospective participants at this point. The letter outlined the purpose of the study, the requirements of participants such as an interview lasting approximately one to two hours, how I will adhere to ethical guidelines such as maintaining confidentiality and privacy by the use of pseudonyms and keeping data in a secure locked place. Additionally, the information letter also contained information regarding the voluntary nature of their participation, permission to audio-

record the interview, the right of participants to withdraw from the study and the timeline for this, as well as contact information for me, my doctoral supervisor, and the University of Alberta research ethics office.

- I gave a consent form (Appendix B) to research participants to confirm that the information provided in the information letter was clearly explained and understood. Women who consented to taking part in my study signed two copies of the consent form, one for them and one for my documentation.

Participants also received the opportunity to ask questions or voice any concerns they had throughout the interview session. I informed them that they could stop at any point during the interview to voice their questions or concerns.

Another component of research ethics pertains to vulnerable persons. The researcher should be particularly mindful of vulnerable persons who are at greater risk of being taken advantage of or of being treated unethically. Vulnerable persons include those who have a reduced capacity to make decisions including children, the elderly, or people with certain disabilities (Markula & Silk, 2011). While my research study does not include vulnerable populations, it is still important to ensure prospective participants understand the research purpose and what is required of them.

This principal of privacy and confidentiality in research ethics speaks to the importance of ensuring research participants along with any identifying information will remain confidential and anonymous. The most common way to ensure anonymity in qualitative research is using pseudonyms to replace participants' real names and all other identifying information such as names of family members or place of employment. Privacy should also be ensured by clearly stating where the empirical research data will be kept, who will have access to this information,

and how it will be used. I outlined all this in detail in the information letter provided to the participants. These details stipulated that:

- I will not use research participants' real names but rather replaced them with pseudonyms. I will not use any other personal identifying information.
- I will keep empirical research data such as interview audio recordings in a locked filing cabinet in my home office to which only I will have access.

Only those contributing to the analysis of this data will have access to the empirical data and then only under the shield of anonymity.

Another principle of research ethics includes justice and inclusiveness. This ethical principal refers to the ways in which research participants may benefit from being a part of a specific study. The promotion of benefits as an ethical principle asks the question of how the participants involved and the larger social, cultural, or political environment benefit from the study (Bold, 2012). In the case of this study, one benefit that emerges is the creation of a space whereby traditionally marginalized voices may speak out from their lived experiences. This benefits not only the research participants and the communities they represent, but also the larger social science community. This research offers a greater understanding of African diaspora women in Canada and the role faith plays in their experiences of wellness. Additionally, speaking authoritatively about one's lived experiences may be deemed as empowering by some research participants as such voices have traditionally been marginalized, bypassed, and silenced.

In this chapter I have demonstrated why narrative inquiry is a well suited methodological approach for this study. It is consistent with the research question that I have posed with regards to how spirituality is interwoven with Christian African diasporic womens's sense of wellness in that narrative approaches give way to understand how people make sense and meaning out of

their experiences. It also provides a platform where traditionally marginalized or unheard voices such as African diasporic women in Canada can share their stories and validate them as legitimate epistemologies. I now turn to a re-presentation of such stories followed by my analysis.

5.0 Prologue to Narratives

Markula's (2011) *Dancing the data: (Im)mobile bodies*, which uses a narrative approach informed by the empirical data of her study, has provided a model for the construction of my research stories. Markula (2011) explained that given the similarity in her participants' stories, she created a narrative using their words to represent the main experiences found in her sample. Likewise, the participants in my study shared similar stories. Based on these collective experiences, I have provided a representation of the main experiences of the Christian African diasporic women interviewed in this study. I emphasize that the following research stories do not come from any individual participant's exact experiences: They are an amalgamation of all the participants' voices constructed from their own words extracted from the transcripts. The narratives do not presume universality but emanate from a point of authenticity regarding the everyday lived experiences of the women who have shared their personal stories with me.

I have constructed two narratives. The first highlights the participants' immigration experiences and situates them as Christian African diasporic women in Canada and thus provides meaningful contextual background to their daily lives. The second focuses on the interplay between their Christian faith and their experiences of wellness. Following each narrative I offer an analysis of the main findings. I do so interweaving verbatim quotations with analysis of the narratives in a complementary style in order to enhance understanding and deepen insight of the participants' experiences. I have used Faist's (2010) three-fold characterization of diasporas: reasons for migration, transnationalism, and settlement to analyze the participants' immigration experiences as members of the new African diaspora in Canada in the first analysis chapter. My objective here is to provide some important context to the women's lives and socially situate their experiences as Christian African diasporic women. I do not specifically address wellness in

this chapter. My research question emphasizes understanding wellness in the context of the women's faith and not as members of the African diaspora per se. However, throughout the analysis of my interviews, the experiences of diaspora became to frame my participants' intertwined experiences of wellness and spirituality. I have, thus, included a separate chapter of this context to provide deeper analysis of the experiences of wellness. The following chapter takes up the interplay of wellness and spirituality directly utilizing Roscoe's (2009) seven dimensions of wellness as an analytical tool to unpack how spirituality is woven into their wellness experiences. While separating the analysis in this way may somewhat "distort" my participants' experiences in which immigration, wellness, and spirituality were deeply interconnected, for the purposes of my dissertation I felt that this was one way that I could clearly highlight and discuss the richness of these facets of their lives. The following table provides a brief demographical sketch of each participant to help highlight how I have arrived at the prototypical character which I have named Modupe and based the research stories upon.

Table 3: Brief Demographical Sketches

Name	Age	Marital Status	Number of Children	Country of Origin	Countries Lived in Prior to Settlement in Canada	Immigration Category	Number of Years in Canada	Occupation
Abiola	36-40	Married	Two	Nigeria	Norway, England, India	Economic Immigrant	Four	Registered Nurse
Amarachi	30-35	Married	Two	Nigeria	Not Applicable	Family Class Immigrant	Five	Pharmacist
Anna	50-55	Married	Three	Nigeria	The United States	Economic Immigrant		Business Owner
Cynthia	36-40	Married	Three	Nigeria	Not Applicable	Economic Immigrant	Nine	Social Work Student
Edith	40-45	Married	Three	Rwanda	Congo, South Africa, the United States	Refugee	Eighteen	Missionary
Elizabeth	46-50	Married	Two	Kenya	Russia	Family Class Immigrant	Eleven	Physician
Esosa	30-35	Married	Three	Nigeria	Not Applicable	Family Class Immigrant	Seven	Banking
Esther		Married	Four	Cote d'Ivoire	Belgium, Burkina Faso	Economic Immigrant	One	Homemaker
Florence	40-45	Married	Three	Ghana	England	Economic Immigrant	Five	Pharmacist
Gloriose	40-45	Married	Three	Zimbabwe	The United States	Economic Immigrant	Ten	Social Service Manager
Hassanatou	26-30	Single	One	Sierra Leone	Ghana	Refugee	Twelve	Licensed Practical Nurse
Julia	35-40	Married	Three	Nigeria	England	Economic Immigrant		Teacher Assistant and Social Work Student
Linda	40-45	Married	Two	Uganda	South Africa, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, England	Economic Immigrant	Nine	Psychologist

Sade	40-45	Married	Three	Nigeria	The United States	Economic Immigrant	Three	Psychiatric Aide and Hair Stylist
Shiloh	20-25	Single	None	Ethiopia	Not Applicable	Student/ Economic Immigrant	Five	Accountant
Tola	35-40	Married	Two	Nigeria	Not Applicable	Economic Immigrant	Fourteen	Credit Analyst and Accounting Student
Yvonne	40-45	Married	Three	Ghana	Not Applicable	Family Class Immigrant	Twelve	Child Care Day Home Provider

6.0 Modupe's Story: Christian African Canadian Women and their Experiences of Life in the Diaspora

My name is Modupe. I am 43 years old and am married with three children who are 15, 11, and seven years of age. My husband and I are both originally from Nigeria. We left Nigeria 14 years ago to move to Denmark for my husband's employment. We also lived in the UK before finally moving to Canada. My husband works in the oil and gas field and was transferred around for his work so that's why we lived in those different countries. It was his job that led us to move, but when you think of your children, I have three, I know moving to Canada was the best decision we made. We've been in Canada now for six years and this is home. Canada is home.

I've settled really well in Canada and I don't know if it's because we traveled a lot before we came or if it's just that Canada has been a good place but I think it's a combination of the two. I've had eight years to process the whole immigration experience prior to coming here, so I think it's a combination of both. However, my first immigration experience when we moved from Nigeria to Denmark was quite different from my experience of moving to the UK and Canada. Denmark was my toughest one out of all my moves, plus, I was fresh out of Nigeria. In Nigeria you speak English, so moving to the UK and to Canada was easier in that sense compared to Denmark where there's a different language. When we moved from Nigeria to Denmark, obviously there's the whole language thing; Danish is the official language there. But then again we moved under the umbrella of a company moving us. It kind of makes it better in terms of infrastructure, right? You don't have to worry about getting your own accommodation. They do all that for you, but in terms of the social and the weather, it was quite a shock. Obviously, Nigeria is warm all the time and Denmark is not. There's that, and of course, being a young mom because I just had my oldest daughter then; obviously you cannot think, "Oh mom

will be there to help me" which would have been the case had I been back in Nigeria. Now, you're on your own raising a child. No support. Not having that support you develop a strong relationship with God because that's somebody you can always turn to. Mom isn't here. I tried to phone her I can't get a hold of her so who else is there? Other than my husband, I would say God because even to make friends it's not the same. Then your husband goes off to work and tag you're it.

I think, for a woman, essentially ... yes financially, the man brings the money in, settling the family in, and integrating the family into any society is on your shoulders and you have to put on a brave face because if you show that you can't hack it, then your kids will realize that okay, there's a difficulty here. Your husband can't concentrate at work. You know what I mean? Tag you're it. You have to embrace the culture and the society really quickly, understand the brushes too. You have to figure out what you guys can eat because obviously the food in Nigeria is significantly different from the food in Denmark. Even here, it is different. You have to find a way of adapting the food. In Canada, for example, Canadian food, how do you adapt it to what you guys would have back home? I was able to manage to do that, but the first months are rough. Here, everything is in English, right, but in Denmark, you go to the store and you're like "What the heck is this?" You'll have to ask. I think I quickly learned that you never go wrong by asking questions, which in Nigeria you are taught not to ask because when you ask one can lead you astray. You know what I mean? You don't just walk up to a random person in Nigeria and start to ask a person what is this. It's that sense of someone is going to take advantage of you and you need to protect yourself. You must not appear vulnerable. But I quickly learned that in a new society in order for you to survive ... I have no idea what this thing is, you need to ask. "What is

this in English?" "This is what I'm looking for," and I found out that people aren't exactly just waiting to jump you or take advantage of you, so that's a lesson I learned quickly.

I believe that every circumstance that I find myself in exists because God has permitted it to be so. I believe that God would never put me in a situation if it would break me. It might seem hard. I might bend, but will it destroy me? Would He allow me to be destroyed? Absolutely not. Anytime I move, I'm in a new place where it's like "Oh my goodness, it's so challenging, it's hard," I always believe that because God doesn't want me to be destroyed and he loves me beyond, I always believe that he will send a helper and to be honest, I have always found that to be true time and time and time again. He always sends someone. It doesn't have to be someone I know. It can be a stranger, but it would be someone that is like, "Oh this is how you should go." Even with my daughter, I've never raised a child before and my siblings and I are so close in age. We're pretty much age mates. I've never seen a child being raised.

Here, we are leaving Nigeria and our family behind, our support system behind. When we got to Denmark with our child I was running around and I had no idea what to do. I had no one to talk to. It was funny I went to the Health Station with my daughter and she was throwing a tantrum and was rolling herself on the floor, I was like "Don't do that," and the nurse there, she looked at me and said, "What are you doing? Leave that child." She pulled me into her office and shut the door, and I was like "She'll hurt herself," and she said "No. She's old enough to know what pain is. She won't hurt herself, when she is tired of doing that she will come in" and that was the last time my child did that. The nurse told me "She's doing it because she gets rewarded. When she does it, you run, you cuddle her, you pet her. If I was the one, I'll continue too. There's a reward, so ignore her. If she's totally ignored while she's doing that, she won't continue." And that fixed that problem for me. It was such a huge point for me because I was

always… you go out and she would just have a tantrum and start rolling on the ground. Sometimes I wouldn't even want to go anywhere when I would think of the potential drama. That nurse was God sent, and I found that in my moving around, even though I didn't have my mom or anyone, God always brought that person that would say, "Oh this is how you should do it." God has always been very, very, very faithful.

When we arrived in Denmark in 2000, we went to a smaller village. Not a village but a smaller town, and then they were just opening up to having more foreigners. It was a smaller town and they didn't have so many black people there. We were almost like a novelty. The older ones obviously didn't speak English or even if they understood, they were scared to speak because they felt that they couldn't speak it properly. I found out quickly that to integrate, I had to learn the language. My husband didn't have to because he was working with his company and they spoke English at work. I was the one that had to learn the language and stuff. But I must say, I have to give the Danes props because we did not experience anything that looked like or smelled like or felt like racism. I have to say that. But you also have to come with an open mind because initially, they weren't negative towards us. They weren't positive towards us either. They just were. It took us awhile to realize they're shy people. When you look at them, you smile and you say in their language, how are you, oh my goodness they light up. They would like to interact with you but 'A', they don't know how to because they're scared their English isn't up to par. 'B', a lot of them didn't realize that Africans spoke English. They thought we would break out in some funny language. I found that by actually taking the step to approach them was all it took.

When it comes to my experience of living in the UK and in Canada, I've actually enjoyed living in Canada far more than I've enjoyed living in the UK. In the UK people are cold. There's

no other way to put it. They are cold. Canadians are warmer. In the UK, you and someone can meet, you meet every single day, you see each other all the time ... they have very fake smiles that doesn't touch the heart. That's my perception. Unlike here in Canada, the person says hi to you or does not say hi to you, you kind of quickly know where you stand.

I remember arriving at the airport in Canada and thinking, "Why is this woman so friendly to me?" The woman at the counter, the immigration lady, she was so friendly. She's going, "Oh hi, how are you? I like your pants." I had a very unique pair of jeans on. She says, "I like your outfit." I'm thinking, 'where I come from, we don't compliment. We don't have pleasant talk for no reason.' She says, "Welcome to Canada, I hope you enjoy your stay" I'm thinking in my head, 'Okay, this is strange. What does she want from me?' because I've never seen people so generally kind. Canada is an exceptional country; you have no idea. Believe me. There's something about Canada. We have a lot of etiquette. We are very sensitive. I think because a lot of us, different people, we've learned to live together and respect each other. That was my first encounter at the airport in Canada. I think she must have wondered, 'what's wrong with this person?', because I was not responding to her with excitement. I was flat. I'm thinking 'this is highly suspicious.' I checked out and I remember stepping out of the airport, I'm thinking, 'wow this is different, everybody is asking to help,' "Do you need help?" You know what I mean? I remember thinking, this is really, really different. I've never seen people who are so kind in my entire life. What water do they drink?

Where I come from if I am asking for a glass of water, I would not say, "Will you kindly bring me a glass of water? I would say, "Bring me water!" and I'm done. That's it. It's a commanding voice but it's really not meant out of disrespect or anything, it's just how we communicate. It's expected that kindness is part of the communication. If I say, "Will you kindly

bring me water?" They'd think like, "Did you think I would not bring you water without saying the word kind?" It's expected that I would serve you water. Already that word "kind", "thank you", whatever, it's taken care of, but I had to learn. I remember that was the biggest issue when I started working here. I did not have a lot of those "thank you" and "pleases please." I actually had to make an effort to put it first and last in my language when I spoke or did anything because you come across as rude. It's true. You come across as rude. Now that I'm embedded in Canadian society and I'm sitting in looking out, that's how I see what they used to see, but in my head, I was like I know that I am a kind person, how could they think that I'm rude, you know what I mean; but you learn the culture here.

However, one pet peeve that I do have that I have found in Canada is when people think of Nigeria or Africa as so primitive. I know that yes, in a global sense, Nigeria is a developing country, but honestly Nigeria is so diverse. Everyone's background is different. I remember, I was in a playground with my little girl and one of the ladies asked me, "Oh it must be so different for you being here," I'm like, "Oh yeah, it is different because it's always warm in Nigeria and it's cold here." She said "No, no, no, in terms of having bridges and cars. They say you guys live in trees, is that true? They say you guys don't speak English." The first question I asked, I said, "What have I been speaking to you all this while? Is it Japanese?" and she goes like, "No, I'm just curious." I said, "That your curiosity is so silly." I said it in a very polite way. I said, "You asked me if we speak English. If we live in the trees. Do I look like someone who lives in a tree?" I was actually laughing and she said, "No, I didn't mean to offend you." I said, "Oh you just did." I said, "But anyway I'm not angry, it's ignorance. You don't know. You want to know? You have Google, go and Google it. This is where I'm from. Go and check if we speak

English or if we live with the animals in the bush. Go and find out." She said, "Oh I'm sorry." I said, "Oh that's okay you know."

I was actually pretty irritated and I was thinking "What the heck?" There's nothing you have here that we don't have in Nigeria. Truth be told, right? I know that yes some people are poor and struggle to get by, but Nigeria is so diverse. Yes, some people live in villages and don't have some basic necessities, but that's not the case for everybody. There's really nothing here that we don't have there. Someone once said to me, "Then why are you here?" There's also the security, that's the one thing. Yes, in Nigeria you might have your nice house, nice car, big fans, and blah, blah. It's the whole security issue. That is what they have here that we don't have in Nigeria. Crime and all that is not as much here as it is in Nigeria. I can sleep here without being afraid of somebody coming at night to break in the house.

Also, we don't have a good government in Nigeria which makes the country unstable. Sometimes some people want to hide it, they don't want to admit it that there's something wrong with their own country. I'm not that type, because I want something to be done about it. Nigeria is a very wealthy nation but our leaders just keep treating us like we're nobody, just sitting down there eating all the money with so much corruption and all that. Canada will fight for their own citizens wherever they are. They will take care of their citizens. There are so many resources in Canada where people can go and get assistance. We don't have that back there. That's why I love Canada. It's a place of opportunity. They give room for everyone irrespective of why you have come here or where you have come from.

In Nigeria, there's so many people that are willing to go to school but there's nobody to support them financially. There's no… because of financial constraints, but here it's not like that. Even if you don't have the money, the government is there to help you with that. Whether you're

rich or poor, you have the opportunity to go to school and further your education. You can always get a loan from the government and pay it back. Whereas in Nigeria, you don't have that opportunity. Who's going to give you a loan for school? Nobody. Even if you are able to go to school, there's no job.

Canada is much better in terms of job opportunities and going to school and getting a career for yourself. You're not worried, "oh, even if I study this profession who is going to give me a job?" You know that peace, you're just rest assured that things are going to work the way you've already planned, orchestrated it. Unlike in Nigeria, we have so many graduates over there but there's no job for them so they end up robbing, joining bad gangs, and become something else. But here everything is kind of planned so you have opportunities. It's up to you to make use of it. Do you get what I mean? There are a lot more opportunities here. I don't know if it's necessarily the culture but that's why a lot of people move to Canada because there are a lot more opportunities to grow and self-growth is everything.

That would be my advice to new immigrants coming here from Africa. I'd tell them, welcome to Canada. Very pleasant country, a country full of opportunity, but you have to make use of it. Open your eyes wide, you'll be able to see a lot of things. But you have to have a focus. You have to have a focus. I see young Africans here, they have the opportunity to go to school to better themselves. Instead, they choose to be in the street, doing drugs, being in a gang. That makes me mad. If somebody moves here from Africa and asks me for my advice about living in Canada, I would just tell them they should have a focus and then the most important thing they should do is to upgrade their schooling. One thing I realized is that coming from Africa with your certificate when you get here they look down on it as if you don't even … maybe you went to school on a tree. Once you get here just plug yourself in and make sure you get an education

from here because it will go a long way to help you getting a job. It will go a very long way because then they are sure that okay this certificate is from us and we are sure of its authenticity and things like that. Go to school to empower yourself because once you're able to empower yourself you can do anything and become who you want to become. You'll be able to get a good job, be able to earn good money, be able to take care of yourself and your family. Some people don't make use of the opportunities.

To get to where you want to get to, you have to be prepared, you have to work extremely hard. Initially you might struggle, but you'll get to where you want to get to. That's the beauty. There's that opportunity compared to Africa, you might never get that good job that you desired or you're qualified to have. Canada gives you the opportunity. Come in with an open mind. Humble yourself. Do not think that washing a house or being a cleaner, because I did cleaning for a few months, is beneath you. Because a lot of people come with that attitude or mentality, that I can't clean or vacuum or do a cashier job, or maid or whatever. No, no, no. You got to start small to grow big. Those little life experiences are there for a reason. Had I not had those experiences I wouldn't have been properly prepared to do my pharmacy program or work in my profession here as a pharmacist. You know why? My communication skills were different. My style of handling people was a little bit different and had I got into the program a little bit sooner, I would have offended somebody, I would have been kicked out. Don't get me wrong, like I said, it's very challenging. I remember when I came to Canada knowing that I had to do all these exams to be able to be re-certified. That was a very tough time for me. There'd be times initially when I would cry on my own. "Oh I have to do this again. I've studied so much." What got me through is just praying. I think through my time with God I reinforced it to myself that my steps are ordered by the Lord. I'm here because it's God's will. If I'm here because it is God's will and

I have to do this, then God will give me the ability to be able to do it. He will endow me with the strength that I need to be able to go through those exams.

And that's another thing that I would tell people coming here from Africa, to hold fast to what they believed before they left because here it is like a cooler when you come. Everything will just die down if you're not careful. Just hold fast to the God that they knew before they left Nigeria. I've seen lots of devout Christians move from Nigeria to Canada. When they come, because of the search or the chase for materialistic things, they tend to lose their spirituality. First of all it may start with "oh I have to work on Sundays because of my job, I have to work". Before you know it, they've moved so far and backslidden.

I guess sometimes when you have a lot, and the Bible even tells us about this, you mustn't forget who the giver is. Too much of material things can actually cause you to lose focus of what is important because you're so busy chasing those things and forget who the ultimate giver is. At the end of the day we must give glory back to God. I guess we all stand the risk of that but I think when you come from a relatively economically-challenged background into what appears to be affluence, there's more of a risk that way, in my humble opinion.

Also, once they're here they should never lose who they are as Nigerians, or whatever country they're coming from. I mean, they should hold on to the good aspects of their culture. Like for me, I keep whatever is beneficial for me and my family and I've let go of what is not good for my life or my family. There are some aspects of the Nigerian culture that I think are really good that I still hold on to, like the concept of being respectful, we hold onto that very well. Greeting people or how you address elders. In our culture you don't call someone older than you by their name, by their first name. Like everyone is an aunty or an uncle and things like that, so we let our children know that especially if they are associating with people from our

culture. They know that they can't just call them by their first name. If they are going to associate with people from here they have to call them by their first name because people here won't understand our culture and it might sound strange to them; they'd be like "why are you calling me aunty? I'm not related to you." Things like that.

I also insist that my children say good morning, they know courtesy and all that. When you see me in the morning, you say good morning mommy. If you don't say it, I'll ask you, "did I spray the invisibility spray?" I insist on those things and I hope that they would insist on that in their children. I find that even when I go to work in the morning, I see my boss and I say good morning. It's an icebreaker as opposed to, see your boss, you walk pass your boss. I think that's good and I insist on it.

However, I think because we've kind of moved around and we've seen different cultures, one of the things I've learned also is to each their own. I don't like to micromanage other people. I pick up my kids and their friends from school. I'm bringing them home. My kids come to the car, "Oh hi mommy," and I'm like, "Hi." This little child in my car, my daughter's friend, who I'm going to drive to my house and feed and blah, blah, blah, says nothing to me and then, I say "Oh, blah, blah, how are you?" and she's like "I'm good," and I'm like "Okay." I don't say "Well, you didn't greet me." It is what it is and I don't feel offended. The first time I found it shocking because having said that, in the UK, a child will see you and will say "Good afternoon Mrs. blah, blah, blah, blah," and even in Denmark, the child will greet you. It's here, the kids don't greet you and you're like "Okay, uh-huh, that's what it is, I'm moving on." It's their culture. That's what I say to myself, it's their culture, that's what it is. I just saw my children and I noticed that sometimes I have to prompt "Did you not see this person standing here?" and then, they greet. I can imagine that when I'm not there, sometimes they greet, sometimes they don't,

but having said that, I know that my older daughter and son, people say "Oh they're so respectful."

I'm not really into the whole the child has to curtsy or kneel down. I have friends that I see their children do it. I couldn't be bothered. My children don't do it. They don't do it at all. It's not a requirement for them. I think it's really unnecessary. I find that when my friends' children have to greet me publicly like that, you can see the child is embarrassed to do it. I'm like "Why are you forcing them?" To each his own. But just give respect. Yeah.

And of course our food. That is something else that I hold on to; that's a big one. Although it's more of a hybrid version of what everyone else would eat here except that our food is spicy. It must be spicy. You know what I mean? I try to teach my kids also to eat it, "Oh mommy it's so spicy," and I say, "Yeah it's spicy but it makes you strong. That's why mommy is strong." They say, "No, I will be strong even if I don't eat that." I say, "No, you won't be strong." The food is one thing. I still have the culture, everything in me. It has not gone because I came here mature, but I just hold on to the beneficial aspects and leave the rest.

One aspect that I really do love about my native land though that you don't see here is that you literally have the concept of a village raising a child. Having those supports or knowing that my kids, someone else, even if I'm not physically there, there's always an adult that is going to direct my kids properly, that's also going to look at the welfare of my kids. Knowing that even if I'm having my own personal troubles at home, there's always somebody who is around to be able to say, "You don't seem to be okay. What's going on with you? Maybe let's pray about it. Let's talk about it. Maybe this is what you need to do." Just that environment and the sense of unity. That communal environment is pretty pervasive throughout Africa; in South Africa they call it Ubuntu which means humanity towards others. It speaks to the philosophy of "I am"

because of who “we both are”. I can’t exist in isolation. I hold on to those principles and I try to teach my kids those principles because I find over here it’s too individualistic. People only care for themselves not really connecting with other people generally speaking.

Canadian culture is very much about people just doing their own thing. That’s different for me. It’s more of just that individualistic approach of people managing their own ways. You have to work a little bit harder to create that sense of community. It doesn’t come … it’s not as natural. You have to work a little bit harder because I can’t necessarily trust that my neighbor is … if they see my kids in the street doing something wrong, that they’re going to be able to direct them properly.

For example, back home every child is your child, not just your own, and that to me is very beneficial. Here it is as if everyone is walking on egg shells and you cannot tell this person what you are doing is wrong, you understand? In Nigeria it is a community, someone can tell my child “hey stop doing that” and I wouldn’t be offended, but here you cannot do that. I can be at the bus stop okay, a child is doing something wrong and I can tell that child “you need to stop, what you are doing is wrong.” Here I cannot do that because first of all the child is going to tell me, “who are you, you are not my mom, I don’t know you” things like that. In Nigeria as they say, it takes a village to raise a child, that is the culture, but here it’s not like that. You can even see some children acting up on the train or on the bus and all you can do is just look at them. That discipline is not there where an adult can say “oh no you need to stop, this is not right okay,” so it’s a different culture. We are living here so we have to live with that. If my child is acting up on the bus or train and somebody says “oh you need to stop that” I’m never going to be angry with that, never. But here another parent can say you are not supposed to talk to my child like that. Even though you meant good you are still not given that authority to do that, so...

When you have a new born child back home there's always aunt so and so. Someone is there to pick up the kid and feed them. Someone is … You just literally get the baby to nurse the baby. Someone is there to ensure that the diapers are cleaned. Someone is attending to those things. Someone is there to just sit with you and laugh with you. Here, you are on your own, so that's a big part that I actually miss about back home. I don't know, I still miss that part right now. I've adjusted to the system but I still wish I had family members around to help me once in a while with the kids.

I think that is partly why depression is such a big problem in this part of the world. Before I left Nigeria I did not know that depression existed to be honest. I read it in books. Really, I read it in books literally, and then when I came to Canada, majority of the people are either going through depression or going through a difficult time and I'm thinking, 'how could that happen?' They have food on the table. They have everything they need. They have this and that. What else could be depressing? If you're in Africa, you may not even know how you'll get from 'A' to 'B'. You have a sick relative who cannot be seen at the hospital because they don't have money. They have an illness that you know you need money to pay for them to get the surgery or not and you're struggling to come up with that money. You have every reason to be really, really depressed. But because there are those support systems, there's always someone there, so your depression doesn't … it's not pronounced, it's not staring at you in your face. You don't have time to really sink into a deep depression.

Because of the profession that I'm in, I see a lot of people with depression and I say to them, "who do you have? Who can you talk to? Do you have a sister? Do you have a brother?" "No, I'm by myself. It's me and my two children and that's it." "Do you have a community you can go to? Do you go to church?" You don't want to, again, rub your church onto them. It has to

be a choice. I always encourage them. I say, it's important to belong to a community. It's important for your neighbors to know who you are. It's important to let people into your life. Your family does not have to be a blood related relative, it could be that next door neighbor who cares for you, you know what I mean? I find that that really carries people a long way as opposed to, I can do it on my own. No. You need the community to help you through the process. Yeah, you truly do.

I find that lacks a lot in the society here. For example, on my street, I know there's a lady who is by herself. She doesn't drive because I see a taxi come and take her to wherever she's going and brings her back. I told one of my friends who is a physician. "This woman, I feel like she's not doing very well. I'm told that the spouse died a few years ago. She wants to be alone." My friend said, "You should visit her. Make a point of going to introduce yourself. She should know you're there." One day, I took it upon myself, me and the kids walked down the street and ding dong, I knew she was home because I had seen the cab bring her. Ding dong, ding dong. I knocked and knocked and knocked. She did not open the door. We went back home. I have to say I should make a second attempt. All I wanted to say is my name is Modupe. I live down the street. If you ever need anything for any reason, you need somebody to go get groceries for you or whatever, just know that I'm here. You don't have to rely on a taxi all the time. We're here. I just want you to know we are here.

You need to know that you have those people who can support you and you can count on and that's what we lack here. I feel like if a lot more Canadians were more receptive of each other, the place would be a much nicer place. We have everything we need. We have food. We have the water. We have relative security. You can have everything you need. You can have the biggest house with the white picket fence with the Mercedes on the driveway and you live by

yourself, there is no joy. Yeah. The reason why I say that... I'll give you an example. You'll meet children in Africa who have nothing. They walk in bare feet but they will smile at you and they will laugh with you and you say to them, "Are you okay?" "Yes, I'm okay." because they feel love in their community. Somebody is looking after them no matter what, no matter how little they have and that's what I feel like we sometimes lack here.

I've now understood why community is so important in Africa. They know that if something has gone wrong with someone… they will come and see you. They all come. You wonder, 'Why do they do this? Why are they all here, all these people?' But it's a lesson that they have learned generation after generation, that a community succeeds better overall than a person as an individual. They might not have the wealth but they have the wellness. That's what I think.

6.1 Analysis of Immigration and Diasporic Experiences

The preceding narrative highlighted the research participants' immigration experiences as African diasporic women living in Canada. What follows is an expansion of these findings and the corresponding analysis. I employ Faist's (2010) three dimensional characterization of diasporas to analyze the research participants' experiences of migrating to a new country, negotiating multiple cultures and cross border ties, and establishing themselves and their families in a new homeland. I use verbatim quotations throughout my analysis to serve as examples, illustrate points I make along the way, provide evidence for my interpretations, and improve readability, all in an effort to enhance the readers' understanding (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). The use of both narrative and verbatim quotations complement one another to provide rich and informative insight into the lives of African diasporic women in Canada.

6.1.1 Reasons for Migration: "A Land of Opportunities"

The first feature of Faist's (2010) three-part characterization of diasporas relates to the causes of migration. As demonstrated in Modupe's narrative, the search for greater socioeconomic "opportunities" and a "better life" were the primary factors in their move. As is common among African diasporas, such pursuit did not follow a singular or linear journey (Lie, 1995), but rather led to multiple migrations. Modupe's story illustrated this through the various countries where she had lived. The majority of the women interviewed (11 out of 17) also lived in other countries aside from their place of birth prior to migrating to Canada. Such nations include Belgium, England, India, Norway, Russia, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, and the United States, in addition to a host of other African nations. Similar to Modupe's migration, their various moves were more often than not initiated by their husbands and were driven by one or more of the following three factors: more opportunities occupationally and/or educationally for both spouses, attaining permanent residency abroad, or to join their spouse. A number of the women expressed that it was easier to attain permanent residency in Canada as opposed to some of the other countries where they have lived such as the United States and England. Although it was often their spouses who initiated the migration process, given that African men are typically better positioned in terms of cultural capital to launch such a process (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2009), my interviewees said they supported the move. Moving overseas, particularly to the Western world, is commonly perceived by Africans as a golden opportunity to attain a better life. Okeke-Ihejirika (2009, p. 155) noted:

> In a continent plagued by economic and political crises, where the flight to the west is increasingly perceived as the end to one's problems, it would be difficult to separate the few who are not tempted by the better life beyond and the masses, especially the sea of faces in the refugee camps, eager to leave any day.

While most participants were never refugees (only two were), they fall among the masses eager for a better life with more opportunities abroad. Julia, originally from Nigeria, depicts this well. Prior to coming to Canada where they were able to attain permanent residency status to avoid having to return to Nigeria, she moved to England to join her husband, who was completing a Master's degree there. She explained:

> Personally for me I think if you, as a Nigerian, have an opportunity to migrate to somewhere else, I don't think you would want to go back. The reason is because economically, things are not stable in Nigeria. People are suffering over there. We don't have a good government. My husband, before he went to England, he had a Master's in banking and finance. He has his Master's. He was looking for a job, looking from one place to the other. He got something but just to put food on our table. I don't know if you understand what I mean.
>
> So after that, when he had the opportunity to travel abroad, he also grabbed it and he went there. He studied public relations in England and not quite long he got a job, a very good job. If not that they didn't want to give us the permanent residence to stay over there, we would have stayed over there. Economically things are really really bad in Nigeria. I'm talking to you right now, if you have an opportunity to leave Nigeria, you wouldn't want to go back there. Things are not working the way they should be. So that's why we decided it's good for us to move out as God has given us the opportunity. We will also be able to help those at home and do what we can.
>
> Most of them over there are living from hand to mouth and suffering every day. It's not because the country is not wealthy but because we have a very bad government. That is the main reason. Going back to Nigeria would have been like jumping from the frying pan to the fire. That's what I call it, so there was no point going back there. That was why we decided to stay.

The above narrative not only depicts the women's eagerness to leave the continent due to its economic and political instability, but also demonstrates some of the gender dynamics involved in initiating migration. This is reflective of the patriarchal system embedded in many African countries whereby the husband is considered the head and breadwinner of the household. However, as postcolonial and transnational feminist Chandra Mohanty (1988) has argued, simply because there is a gender division, be it of labour, domestic roles, or other dimensions, does not necessarily equate to men's subordination of women. In other words, different roles should not translate automatically to inequitable roles. Mohanty (1988) contended that concepts such as

marriage, household, and the family, must be understood in light of their place in local cultural, social, historical—and I would add, religious—contexts. She went on to explain that while some feminists assume men universally oppress women, caution should be taken against constituting women as a coherent group across varying cultural contexts. Such assumption, she continued, structures the world in "binary, dichotomous terms, where women are always seen in opposition to men, patriarchy is always necessarily male dominance, and the religious, legal, economic and familial systems are implicitly assumed to be constructed by men" (p. 78).

Regina Gemignani (2007) who examined gender dynamics, identity, and power among African diasporic Christian women in the United States also corroborated this view. She explained: "Difference, however, does not automatically imply hierarchy, and one must be careful not to automatically equate 'tradition' or 'ethnicity' with women's subordination" (p. 144). Thus while many of the women acknowledged their spouses as the head of the household in line with their cultural traditions and biblical teachings, mainstream understandings of headship as a matter of hierarchy ought not to be conflated with the women's subjective understandings. In this regards, any mechanistic assumptions or conclusions about their presumed subordination within the family unit that fails to examine the meanings and lived experiences associated with such titles would be erroneous. Abiola's comment about her household structure and the gender dynamics within it provides some insight into the complexity of this matter:

> My husband is boss, that's how I was raised. But then again, I still ... my Bible, once again, for me [inaudible] because my Bible says that the husband is the head of the household, right? Fortunately, for me, my parents had told me that you have to marry someone that shares the same faith. My husband is a Christian as well. We share the same faith. We believe the same thing. The same thing that says "Oh the husband is the head of the home and the wife should submit to the husband," also tells him that he should love me as Christ loved the church, right? It's such a huge thing to ask someone to do that.

> Yes, my husband is the boss, but he's not bossy. I don't know how to put it. Bringing that in, it's such a smooth transition. He doesn't need to ask for it. I know that if we are at a loggerhead as to what to do, then I happily defer to his decision and I will follow him. I consider him to be my leader, so, I follow him and I pray that God will give my leader wisdom to lead. You know what I mean?
>
> I know that you say it's an antifeminist point of view and I think that comes from a Nigerian upbringing that my husband is the head of the home and as such he should be given that respect...We afford him that respect. I think, he deserves it and yeah. I think doing all that also makes a man to require of himself to be the best leader that he can be and a good leader isn't someone that bosses or lords over. I think doing that also pushes that out of him and that's what I do.

As indicated in the above extract cultural traditions and religious beliefs can greatly influence the gender dynamics within the home allotting different functions and positions to husband and wife. As an interpretive researcher, it is important to analyse such experiences from an in-depth understanding as to how the women have come to make sense of their lives in such a way and the meaning that it holds for them. This contrast with other paradigmatic viewpoints such as, for example, a critical feminist perspective that would attempt to identify and ascribe preconceived signs of false consciousness and unequal power relations based on hegemonic ideological frames onto the women (Eagleton, 1991; Scotland, 2012). However, because interpretive researchers are interested in portraying the viewpoint of the actors directly involved as opposed to the viewpoint of the observer (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011), in order to more fully understand the women's lives, it is necessary here to examine the specific biblical text informing their beliefs and practices, not as a theological enterprise, but as an effort to deepen understanding by looking through the same lens in which the participants view, make sense, and come to understand the world.

Therefore, just as Abiola referenced Ephesians chapter five from the Bible which speaks of Christian guided relationships for husbands and wives, my presentation of this particular biblical text below is not to offer a textual analysis of the Scriptures nor a theological

examination, but rather to offer greater insight in to the participants' life worlds by taking a glimpse through their worldview.

> 21And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
> 22For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. 24As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything.
> 25For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her 26to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. 27He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. 28In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. 29No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church. 30And we are members of his body.
> 31As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one." 32This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. 33So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. (Ephisians 5:21- 33 New Living Translation)

As illustrated through Abiloa's reference and understanding of the above Scripture, the idea of a husband's headship as understood in terms of oppressing and subordinating his wife is misguided. The women's understanding of marital relationships as guided by their faith was about mutual submission (verse 21) which translates to, according to their biblical teaching and understanding, love and respect. For this reason, as Abiola expressed, the role of the husband as the head of the household did not imply that he acted in a "bossy" manner or that he "lord[ed]" his leadership role over his wife. Contrarily, it was believed by the women that they should respect their husbands and their husbands ought to "love [their wives] as Christ loved the church", which as Abiola pointed out, is a "huge" undertaking. Implicated within such biblical statement is to actually place the wife's needs before one's own, even to the point of death.

Similarly, Gemignani (2007) also found that discussions of wifely submission were often tempered with a simultaneous reference to the mutual submission of husband and wife as taught

in the Bible and/or the parallel injunction of a husband's "love". Brusco (1993, p. 148) also pointed out that "the husband may still occupy the position of head, but his relative aspirations have changed to coincide more closely with those of his wife". Thus, in order to foster understanding of this aspect of the women's lives, the notion of submission and headship within the institute of marriage as oppressive or subordinating toward women must move beyond superficial presuppositions and be supplanted with a more complex and deeper understanding that examines their experiences through the lens in which they view the world (in this particular situation that would be their Christian faith and biblical texts) and what it means to them. For my interviewees, marital relations were a matter of love and respect rather than hierarchy and dominance.

While the idea of male headship within the family unit may still foster notions among some of the women holding an inferior status in the home, their activities being restricted to household work and child care, or their lack of influence or power in decision making within the family unit, this was not the case among the participants. Abiola went on further to express the importance of wives to be able to influence their spouses and children in a positive way by being able to offer wise "counsel" to them. Further, she explained that women's activities should not be limited to the household but in a spirit of "women's empowerment" they should be fearless and embrace their desires to be all that they desire to be:

> With women we're so privileged, in this day and age it is our time. This is the era of women. The world is so consumed with women's empowerment that I actually think that men are now being disenfranchised, but that's okay, I've got daughters; but this is our time so I think any woman that can tell herself, "I'm not afraid. I'm going to go out there and get it." You can get it. It's out there. I have the sense of it … That there could never have been a better time to be a woman. This is the best time to be a woman, it will only get better... I just think people should stop being afraid. Don't be afraid, go out and get what you want to get. I just think … We need to tell women, "Don't be afraid."
>
> Your husband won't love you less because you've gone out to discover who you are, right and if he will, then that means he was trying to lord it over you, but I think in

> my observation, you have more respect from your spouse when he sees you as a woman that understands who she is because you are able to give him better counsel. A woman that is locked away in the kitchen has no idea what's going on in the world. You will give both your children and your husband rubbish counsel.

The manner in which the traditional gender roles of "head of the home" for the husbands and "heartbeat of [the] home" (i.e. ensuring wellness was established and maintained within the household) for the wives were played out and experienced by the women points to additional complexity in their meanings. As will be discussed further on under the heading *Integration of Migrants into Country of Settlement*, the women's roles as skilled professionals and major wage earners within their households contributed to what they as well as other researchers who have studied gender dynamics within African diasporas (e.g. Gemignani, 2007; Olupona & Gemignani, 2007; Makoni, 2013; Manuh, 1998, 2003; Olupona & Gemignani, 2009; Wong, 2000) have observed as a blurring of certain gender roles and ideals whereby husbands are much more active in participating in child care and household duties such as cleaning and cooking in comparison to their native land. As stated, this specific issue will be taken up in detail further on below. However, what is important to note here is that any assumption of African women's universal oppression or subordination, particularly within the family unit or in the context of their Christian faith, ought to be considered a fallacy. To avoid such sweeping generalizations, the researcher must consider African diasporic women's lived realit*ies* as a heterogeneous group. Further to this, efforts should be made to understand how they make sense of the world in which they live by attending to the meaning and explanation they themselves ascribe to their daily experiences in order to foster insight, knowledge, and understanding. After this, it is possible to provide local, contextual, and qualitative analyses that are more responsive to these women's complex experiences.

While the Modupe narrative re-presents the dominant experiences amongst the women, outliers do exist. Two of my interviewees came to Canada as refugees. Both were single at the time. Hassanatou, one of these women, is originally from Sierra Leone and moved to Canada with her employers, a family also from Sierra Leone who hired her as a house helper after she was orphaned during the civil war and included her in their application to come to Canada. However, after she immigrated she was removed from their care because of their abuse:

> Actually, for me, our country was in a war, civil war. I lost my mom and I didn't know who my dad was, so it was just my mom. When my mom passed away after a while I ended up living with my grandmother and my aunt and sisters and my cousins. I came from a very poor family. A family member saw me and wanted to adopt me. My grandmother didn't want to argue with the idea of me leaving and going with them to Ghana, and then later to Canada. She just had to agree when my ... I listened to my aunt. She said, "Go, go, go," so I left. I went to this family. I was living in Ghana. The reason I went there was because they said they just wanted me to help them to take care of their children and then they'll put me through school to learn something. Unfortunately, that didn't happen. The good part, the good thing was that when they were applying to come to Canada, they included me in the process. So I came here. I've had the opportunity to go to school here and to learn new things and be independent.

Like Hassanatou, Edith, also came to Canada as a refugee. She had previously lived in several different African countries as well as the United States. She came to Canada to attend her sister's wedding and the Canadian government invited her to stay because of the genocide in her native land Rwanda.

While these two participants present a distinct representation of entrance into the diaspora than that presented in the Modupe narrative and representative of the other women interviewed, they too were happy for the opportunity to settle abroad. However, Hassanatou's journey was particularly distinct: she was the only participant who had no prior formal education and was completely illiterate, unable to spell even her name on her arrival in Canada. Also, unlike the other women in this study (with the exception of one), she did not speak English when she came to Canada. All but one of the other women had family with them during the initial stages of

migration, but Hassanatou knew only her employers in Canada. Finally, she is the only single mother of the group. These various factors make Hassanatou an outlier in many respects whose experience posed unique challenges to her journey and settlement abroad. Lack of language skills and illiteracy are likely to impact on successful settlement in terms of integration, employment, social capital, social economic status, and ultimately wellness. Hassanatou described her experience of illiteracy:

> It's a disease being illiterate, I would say, because how would you live in this world? You can't read, you can't write, you can't do anything. You just live a life. I don't know. I can't even describe it. It's just horrible. I would say in my perspective, it's horrible because I was living a life, just living, going with the flow. You don't know anything. You don't know what is happening. That's horrible.

Since arriving to Canada 12 years ago, Hassanatou has overcome the "disease" of illiteracy and is now fluent in English through the help of government social service programs. She has also upgraded her education and has received a diploma as a licensed practical nurse. Being the only participant who came from a predominately Muslim country and who described herself as being "new to Christianity," she attributed her ability to overcome the various challenges that she has faced to the grace of God in her life:

> Like I'm saying, if not for God, if not God, I don't know, like today, who I would have been or where I would have been. Especially when you've been in a very abusive… you have come from an abusive life. Sometimes it takes only the grace of God for you to be normal again…. Like I said before, if not for God, I don't know how my life would have turned out. Maybe I would have been a prostitute, or an alcoholic, or a drug addict, whatever. Because of God, God is amazing. To think I'm in this country, I never knew any ... even how to spell my name, I just knew my name was Hassantou, I didn't even know how my name was spelled. Because of the grace of God, yeah, it's only God. I can't even start to tell you all of this stuff I have. It's only God's grace that makes me to be who I am today.

The following chapter provides a more in-depth examination of the role spirituality played in the women's lives, and more specifically, how it contributed to their wellness. However, suffice it to

say, despite Hassantou's distinct circumstances she, like the other women in this study, credited her deep faith with becoming who she is today.

While the Modupe narrative painted a picture of the women as migrants in search for a better life with greater prospects, the two participants who came to Canada as refugees, though distinct in their means of dispersal, also sought greater opportunities abroad. This theme is consistent throughout contemporary African diasporas as they seek to improve their and their families sense of wellness via greater socioeconomic opportunities and personal security. It also contrasts significantly with older African diaspora groups in North America such as the African American population who mostly migrated under force as victims of the transatlantic slave trade. While this latter group's history in the diaspora spans approximately 400 years (Duncan, 2006) and by virtue of time has lost tangible connections to the native land, the new African diaspora in Canada is a relatively recent phenomenon that has existed in large numbers for only approximately 40 years (Daiva & Bakan, 2005; Okeke et al., 2000) with most of its members being first generation Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2007a) and thereby possessing intricate connections to the native land. This issue of cross-border links speaks to Faist's (2010) second characteristic of diasporas – transnational practices and activities – I now turn to these practices.

6.1.2 Transnational Tensions, Practices, and Activities

While some of the women continued to refer to their native land or the other places where they have lived as "back home," many of them also spoke of Canada as home and the place where they intended to settle. This duality highlights the existing tension transnational communities often face. As a foreigner, making Canada home and being able to settle well is not without its challenges. All of the women discussed how the process of migration meant leaving established social networks such as family, friends, and church communities behind. As

Modupe's story highlights, during this phase of 'uprootedness' and dislocation, participants confronted emotional challenges. For example, loneliness was one hindrance to their sense of wellness that was particularly salient when their husbands went off to work and they had not yet obtained a profession. Florence explained:

> I wasn't working because I wanted to work in my chosen profession. Being in Canada meant that I needed to be re-certified. I couldn't go straight to work so I was home. As much as I appreciated the opportunity to settle my husband in his new job because that's why we came in the first place, and also to settle the children in school, it was hard being at home. I didn't know anyone ... I didn't know many people, whereas in England, I had friends nearby, my neighbors. I always had work. So you had adult interaction all the time. It wasn't the same here. I was basically home … I'm here. I went through it. It was tough initially.

The absence of social support often compounded by the feelings of loneliness, both common during the initial transitioning period, fuelled strong transnational ties to former homelands. Participants often spoke about the engagement between their new homeland, the many countries where they had lived, and their African native land. This entailed frequent phone calls overseas, international travel, remittances, and cross-cultural comparisons among other transnational practices.

While the links to their country of origin is important (Wong, 2000), transnational women often struggle to negotiate if, when, and to what extent, they should loosen their grip on their former homelands and focus on planting roots in their new location. The degree to which diasporic communities integrate into their host society and engage in transnational practices is mediated by the context of departure in the country of origin and the method of incorporation in their place of settlement (Itzigsohn & Saucedo, 2002; Pasura, 2014; Portes & Rumbaut). As illustrated through Modupe's story, the women were willing migrants in search for greater opportunities for a better life which presumably would limit (though not eliminate) their transnational activities and facilitate their integration as they tried to make a good life for

themselves and their families in the new society. However, the lack of social support systems in their new locales made it not only convenient, but also necessary to maintain ties across national and continental borders to help sustain their wellness, particularly emotionally and socially. Advances in telecommunications and travel have compressed spatial and temporal distances between nations, thereby offering those within various diasporas unprecedented opportunities to be transnational and transcultural (Zeleza, 2005). This has required what Richmond (2002) has termed as transilience: Diasporic people's ability to mediate their existence between two or more cultures or countries. However, such negotiation does not necessarily lead to a balanced identification between the various locales where participants have resided. While native homeland ties were especially strong during the initial phase of transition, participants, over time, increasingly emphasized their current place of residence as they became more integrated into the society to establish it as home.

Esosa's narration depicts the practice of constructing transnational connections and maintaining cross-border flows during the initial stages of transition into a new country, but also how determining the right level of them at different points during one's sojourn can be essential to one's ability to settle well in Canada.

> When I got to Canada, I didn't really like it initially, because there was no one to talk to, I was just home and home alone. I came during winter. It was in November. It was really cold. In fact, right from the airport, as soon as I stepped outside, I was like, "What is this?" It's so different; it was really cold. Getting home I was excited to see my husband; then after the first or second day he had to go off to work. I was home alone, and I was like, "What is this." I couldn't talk to anybody, I couldn't go out; because, I mean the African setting is totally different from what we have here.
>
> You just step out of the house and you see people selling stuff outside, you can just walk to your neighbor's house, your friends areoutside. I mean it was just totally different ... I was always calling my mom, my uncles, my aunts, and everybody, my brothers, and my sisters; but they said, "You know what, don't worry, you'll be fine." Then my mom told me, "You know what, I'll come visit you." She promised, and then she did that. She came six months after I came here. It made it a little bit better, but she only spent two weeks, and then she went back. She's busy. She just wanted to be like,

> "Okay, let me just see you and then you'll be fine." In the process, my sister was still in the States. I went to the States for three weeks, just to stay with family. My husband said, "Okay, I think you need to go to be alive again… Of course, I'm here with you, but you still need other family around." I went to see her for some time, for three weeks. I went and came back. I just kind of adjusted.
>
> My mom said to me, "You know what, this is your world. This is you. You need to forget about every other person, because you keep saying you want to stay with family or friends, but they're going to move somewhere else someday too, so just stick to it. Just know this is your home, you're married now and that's it." I just took it upon myself and I started liking it here. I started making friends because I didn't have friends here before. I started making friends and things gradually got better, and then before I knew it, I was pregnant and I had my first child, and I got busy with work and school and everyday life. It's okay now but initially it was really rough, I didn't like it.

Esosa's narrative depicts the ease with which she could maintain cross-national social connections to support systems most familiar to her. Her tight grip on these international social networks was simultaneously beneficial for her emotional and social sense of wellness (i.e. providing her the social interaction for which she longed) and detrimental to her settlement in Canada in that her deep connections abroad provided a pseudo replacement for interpersonal relations and integration in the new land. As she stated in the above excerpt, once she "started making friends" and engaging with everyday life in her place of settlement such as through school, work, and child rearing, "things gradually got better" for her.

This is not to say that transnational linkages such as those practiced by the women in this study are in and of themselves detrimental. Indeed, continuity in socio-cultural identity after moving to a vastly different societal milieu is important as it may cushion the impact of culture shock and help maintain a sense of wellness and belonging, even if such belonging is tied to former homelands. Crentsil (2012) explained that kinship and friendship ties constitute a form of social capital and support and are, thus, important resources for African diaspora members. Accordingly, some scholars have noted that these types of transnational activities can actually facilitate the adaptation to a new land (Portes, 1999; Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2004).

However, beneath the surface of Esosa's transnationality was a dependency that prevented her integration into her new world. Subsequent to her mother's advice ("this is [her] world… stick to it") Esosa explained that participating more fully in her new homeland by making friends, joining the workforce, and keeping herself busy with children and everyday life, relieved her longing for connections abroad and helped her enjoy her new home. Reflecting on her initial transition experience, she explained:

> There was nobody, except my husband, but now I totally like it. I used to tell my husband, "You know what, as soon as I get my papers I want to go back home." Now when he says, "Are you ready?" I tell him, "I'm not going anywhere."

Sometimes maintaining strong ties in both new and old social fields is unsuccessful and in many circumstances, trans-migrants can only hold on to one homeland (Musisi, 1999; Salih, 2001). Participants advised that to better integrate into their place of settlement new African migrants should not hold too tightly to their native community. Such a firm grip on it, my interviewees explained, can be a "big hindrance" or even "poisonous" to settling in a new environment. They did, however, continue to embrace such aspects of their native land as food, certain values when it came to raising children, and African styles of Christian worship, albeit this latter activity was generally practiced within the private sphere of their homes.

The women also acknowledged learning about and adopting Canadian child-rearing practices. Exposing children to certain global issues, teaching them to be charitable from a young age, and having age appropriate open lines of communication were some examples participants admired about the Canadian way of raising children. For example, Florence, a Ghanaian woman with three children – one in junior high, one in elementary school, and one of pre-school age – shared her appreciation for certain Canadian child rearing practices that she felt was lacking in her native culture:

> One thing I see about most Canadian families that I've interacted with, there's respect there but that respect doesn't mean fear. The children are able to discuss things with their families, whatever they're going through, whatever issues they face in the school, whether it is a negative thing or positive thing, whether they're directly involved or not, whatever questions they have, they're able to ask their parents. I don't see their parents being upset with them for asking or acting shocked at some of their questions. They may be shocked but they don't show it.
>
> As Africans, I think, in the same way we express our feelings very easily, when we're shocked about something, we can express it. That can actually be a hindrance for the child being able to open up and talk with a grown up. That part of things, I think, is a good trait, a good thing that I see with Canadian families, just for the children to be able to openly discuss things with their parents.
>
> We have a handful of Canadian family friends. When I'm around them, I'm always watching and thinking, 'Oh my goodness. That's lovely …' They can discuss things with their children and they don't feel like their children are too … Obviously, it has to be age-appropriate. There's just a certain degree of openness within their family. I really admire that. Whereas in my culture, if it's a family, if mom and dad are talking, their child would be told, "You're not allowed to say anything. Who spoke to you? Who told you anything?" I think if the child is not allowed to get involved, then that conversation should be held privately and not in the hearing of a child. The opposite I see in the Canadian families and I really admire that.

The bilateral nature in which transnationality exists is evident through the above discussion with regards to how the women raised their children. A complete break from native land customs, values, and practices was not the case for the participants, nor was a total acceptance of Canadian ideals and ways of doing things. Rather, the women exerted their autonomy in choosing what aspects of their culture best supported them and their households' well-being and thus were worth holding on to, and what elements of Canadian culture were beneficial for their families and therefore adopted as part of their practices. At times such decisions were freely made unobstructed by circumstances, on other occasions the conditions of their diasporic existence greatly mediated this decision making process and therefore the women had to negotiate their level of engagement with native land practices.

While the participants preferred their native food, but, as was noted by Modupe, it was often a hybrid with Canadian cooking styles due to the inaccessibility of certain ethnic groceries.

Some participants also cited language and native attire as things they tried to maintain, albeit with greater difficulty. For example, wearing native clothes often attracted attention from non-Africans and Canada's cold weather provided less opportunity to wear such clothing. Participants placed less emphasis on teaching children their native language, because either their children lacked interest or the spouses had different native languages.

The participants identified one aspect of their culture they had significant difficulty in maintaining yet was deemed as beneficial to their wellness: a communal lifestyle that was commonplace throughout much of Africa, which contrasted with the more "individualistic" Canadian lifestyle. They characterized this communal lifestyle as one in which everyone looked after the welfare of all children whereby "you literally have the concept of a village raising a child". Contrarily, the women saw Canadians as lacking receptivity to other people correcting or directing their children, particularly if the adult is not a relative or is a stranger. The sense of communal lifestyle extended to the larger social environment where everyone looked after each other and provided social support in contrast to Canada. They considered the individualism associated with their host society an impediment to wellness in that such social support was lacking here. Amarachi elaborated on this point as she described the different lifestyles in her native and host lands:

> You know in Africa, we have like this family support, like friends support, like ... here it's not like that ... we're living with our neighbours, you say hi to each other but nobody wants to know what their neighbors are doing you know. Like there's not this instant relationship, which is like ... a kind of ... I see it as a kind of hindrance. That aspect of the culture in Nigeria is really helpful you know.
>
> Everybody is ... you know your neighbours very well, you interact with your neighbours very well and everybody kind of does things together, help each other. Like here, everybody just wants to be by themselves, me and my family, nobody is you know ... even if they don't see you for a month, nobody cares, nobody knocks at your door and sees what's going on. Even if you're travelling, you don't necessarily need to go to your neighbour and tell them, because they don't care anyway.

Shiloh explained some of the ill consequences of such a lifestyle:

> Since you are always looking out for yourself you do things that benefit you. At the same time I think it would make you very selfish. I don't think that's necessarily good, I mean a good thing for you; I don't know if that makes sense?

The participants described the effects of this "individualistic" lifestyle in terms of having "to work a little bit harder to create that sense of community" given that "it's not as natural" in this society.

The women reflected upon the nature of community in the African continent with a sense of loss, longing, and nostalgia. Such social, cultural, and collective remembering is not unique to this particular group of African diasporic women. Ramsden and Ridge (2013), in their study of Somali refugee women in Melbourne Australia, found they shared a narrative of collectivity in Somalia where idyllic social interactions, strong family bonds, and unity were the norm. Like my participants, they contrasted this with what they perceived as an individualistic lifestyle and the loss of collectivity in Australia. Interestingly, while my interviewees spoke longingly about the communal African culture, they also commonly mentioned a lack of security, corrupt government, and the absence of occupational opportunities as pervasive problems in their countries of origin. The Somali narratives of connectedness however, were fashioned in ideal terms despite coming from a country with a long history of on-going civil war with refugees who have often suffered from extreme hardship, displacement, loss, trauma, torture, and poverty (Refugee Council of Australia, 2009).

This juxtaposition begs the question as to what extent cultural memories are imagined. More importantly, what functions do these memories serve in African diasporic women's psyches, wellness, and lives at both the individual and collective levels in relation to settling in a new homeland? Anderson's (2006) concept of "imagined communities" can help make sense of

the women's discussion of community. Anderson (2006) argued that nations are "*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p. 6). Because nations are built on collective imaginings, he warns that communities ought not to be distinguished by their "falsity/genuineness" (p. 6) but rather by the ways in which they are imagined. Consequently, the issue at hand is not the veracity of the participants' nostalgic reflections of community life, but rather the importance of community to their sense of wellness. As Gloriose acknowledged: "At least I'm remembering on the *time* that I was growing up [referring to the communal lifestyle in her native land Zimbabwe]. I don't know if it's still the same, but remembering from when I was growing up, it was an environment that I liked". Gloriose's comment reflects her recognition of the snapshot nature of her native homeland memory may no longer exist.

What is of interest is the meaning the construction and reconstruction of Africa as a collectivist continent has for members of the African diaspora. For African diasporic women, this nostalgic remembering may help them to make sense of their present experiences in an environment lacking the social networks once familiar to them. They can readily understand their feelings of loneliness when looked at in light of the strong social ties and deep sense of community they once knew. It may also help foster a sense of continuity of ideals from the homeland, particularly since community and social support are congruent with their fundamental beliefs as Christians. Additionally, such cultural memory may be a source of ethnic pride. This form of remembering may also simply serve the purpose of a fond memory from one's native land. While nostalgia may hold some beneficial effects, particularly in the area of emotional wellness, it may also present some negative effects in the same area if the women were to just

remain nostalgic without taking any action to address their sentiments by remaining in a continual state of longing. Some of the women pointed out a need to stop comparing different lifestyles and ways of doing things in different countries and come to terms with their new culture. In her narrative, Modupe also accepted Canadian culture. Some of the women also made increased efforts to formulate a greater sense of community which was typically carried out within the context of their faith such as through hosting or attending prayer meetings with other members of the African diaspora.

The transnational practices and activities engaged in by participants highlight their "simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society" (Pasura, 2014, p. 14). While transnationalism is often considered an antithesis of or obstacle to integration in host societies (Snel, Engbersen, & Leerkes, 2006), the following section challenges this view by not only presenting how the two concepts may co-exist, but also examining the means by which the women went about establishing home in a foreign land.

6.1.3 Integration into Country of Settlement and the Establishment of Home

Faist's (2010) third characteristic of diaspora concerns the integration of migrants into the countries of settlement. It is evident from my above discussion that the sojourn from the old country to the new nation does not entail a complete break from one's pre-migration networks and cultures (Lie, 1995). Yet finding the right balance between transnational existence and successful settlement follows no easy formula. These involve complex, diverse, and dynamic processes that transpire differently for different individuals at various points in time. Based on my findings, however, I propose that successful settlement can be fostered, at least in part, by being actually engaged in the process of achieving one's personal goals for life in the new homeland. As mentioned previously, one of the main reasons for migration was to obtain better

opportunities which typically translated to socioeconomic goals and desires that would provide the women's families with a good sense of livelihood. The narrative of Modupe represented this process as experienced by the respondents.

The attainability of such settlement goals, as demonstrated by the women interviewed, implies that diasporic women are not necessarily in a perpetual state of instability or unrest, but rather can realize their ambitions for the new life abroad. Contrary to how some researchers have viewed diaspora as an unending journey or drifting across multiple lands with the potential of never arriving (Carter, 2003; Lie, 1995) my participants settled down in a single locale to establish a home base: "This is home" was a common statement among them. Analyzing diasporic development of home requires attention to the modes and methods they employed to create such settlement.

The research participants advised newcomers from Africa to have a plan, remain focused, work hard, persevere through difficulties, hold on to their faith, and integrate themselves into the society as opposed to isolating or limiting social interaction to only one's ethnic community. As expressed by Modupe, many women went back to school to settle in their new community. More than half of them returned to school despite having completed post-secondary education in their former homelands. Although such advice might place the burden of success on the individual women, participants spoke from their personal experiences of successful settlement and what they perceived as the necessary steps to achieve such goals. Their experiences also reflected that social class was a significant mediating variable in how they experienced settlement. This is logical given their motivation for migration was largely class-based as they sought greater socioeconomic opportunities. While their search for both greater personal opportunities and a better life proved to be successful as they were able to attain their professional aspirations and

come into a reasonable standard of living which supported their settlement and establishment of home, the interviewees experienced the journey toward successful settlement as humbling with feelings of "starting over".

Elizabeth, a physician who is originally from Kenya and has lived in Canada for 11 years, cautioned that such a journey is often necessary, not just to develop the "academic smart[s]", but also to develop what she refers to as "street smart[s]":

> Canada gives you the opportunity. Come in with an open mind. Do not think that washing a house or being a cleaner, because I did cleaning for a few months, is beneath you. Because a lot of people come with that attitude or mentality, that I can't clean or I can't vacuum or I can't do a cashier job, or maid or whatever. No, no, no. You got to start small to grow big. Those little life experiences are there for a reason. I always say, "There's a reason why it took me about four years to get into my program." I was not prepared. You know why? My communication skills were different. As you say, the style of handling people was a little bit different and had I got into the program a little bit sooner, I would have offended somebody, I would have been kicked out.
>
> Secondly, it's not only about being academic smart. You have to be street smart too. You have to learn how the system works, and you have to learn how to help other people. These little jobs you have on the way, they teach you quite a bit. I always say, do not look down upon these little jobs. I always give the example of President Clinton. He used to work, I think, as a bartender or in a restaurant before he got into politics. Everybody starts small before they can grow big. You know what? Do not lose your ambition. Secondly, have a plan B. If plan A doesn't work, B will certainly work.

Abiola, a registered nurse, who has lived in Canada for four years attributed her successful settlement in part to good planning and research into prospective career paths. She confirmed Elizabeth's warnings:

> Yeah, so I think if you're coming here, have an open mind, humble yourself. It doesn't matter whether you were the president of your country, if you've chosen to come here, understand that you will not come to a new place and become the boss of the people that were there before you right away, so humble yourself.

Participants also praised Canada as having "a good social system that supports low-income families [and] struggling families" (Tola) to help facilitate their settlement. For example, some interviewees mentioned obtaining financial aid for school and services to assist in learning

English. Strong social security systems were unavailable in their native lands that were found commonly politically corrupt and lacking in social services. Tola, a Nigerian woman who has been in Canada for 14 years and was nearing the completion of attaining a Certified Management Accounting designation, explained:

> There are no shortcuts. Don't try to do that. It works. The system works, like you pay your dues, the system works. You don't need to bribe anybody or you don't need to know people in high places to get along. Your kids will get to university. If they do well, they will get good jobs without you having to chase down a HR person or call your uncle.

While social support systems are integral to the successful settlement of many African diasporic women in Canada, further analysis on the distinct yet related concept of 'home' provides additional insight into migrant experiences. I have suggested the concept of successful settlement pertains to attaining one's personal goals for life within the host society. However, the distinct yet interrelated notion of home goes beyond the implicit materiality embedded in the concept of settlement (e.g., returning to school, finding a 'good' job, attaining home ownership, securing financial stability). The idea of home lends itself more to the experiential psychosocial aspects of life within the diaspora that are not always quantifiable. Gloriose, a manager at a multi-function social service agency and originally from Zimbabwe, described this distinction:

> We have services, but they're not meeting the needs of the African communities…. Yeah, it's helpful for me to know how to ride around on the bus and make those connections. It's helpful for me to know how someone helps me with my resume. It's helpful for me to have those supports in knowing where the resources are. The services attend to more of the physical basic needs. They don't attend to the emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing of individuals immigrating here…. Here you will find that most of the people that are immigrating here, especially among the African people, we're having an increasing number of people with diagnosis of mental health. That is because we're not attending to that mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of individuals here. Just because you've met my needs of housing, just because you've told me how to ride the bus, how to fix my resume, and how to get social services money, just because you've given me that, it doesn't mean that I'm completely well. The lack of services that attend to just that mental wellness is what makes immigrating to here harder for you to be well. You're isolated…. They know where to go to get the bus. They know what number to call for access to city information, programs, and services, but they're needing that

> humanness connection of saying, "How are you doing?" They're needing that support that takes them away from that isolation and assimilates them into this environment.

For both Gloriose and other women interviewed, having meaningful interpersonal interactions and connections was important to their sense of wellness which goes back to the "individualistic" lifestyle they observed in Canada. To meet the "mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing" of African diasporic women, she advocated that local churches should reach out to newcomers by providing a human connection, touch the inner person, or what some may describe as the "soul". As she explained:

> The churches could be involved more than they are. They're not as involved as they should be. They could be involved and connect with social services to ensure that when we have new immigrants that are coming they're there. But where are the churches? Where are the churches when we have immigration officers, the Mennonite Centre, do we have any churches that are around offering their support, and not offering their support to say, "Come and join and be a member of our church," but just, "We are here because we want to ensure about your wellbeing, your soul. How are you doing?" but you don't find them. That goes to that individualistic concept.

Local churches, then, could have a significant emotional, social, and spiritual impact on newcomers' sense of wellness and feelings of home in a new environment. This is particularly relevant given that Africa is a highly spiritual continent (Spickard & Adogame, 2010; Mbiti, 1990) and thus, resonates with the spiritual needs of the African diaspora women.

Conceptualizing home as representing one's inner state as opposed to outward material achievements parallels previous definitions of home in the context of transnationalism. For example, in a provincial-wide survey examining the experiences of African diasporic women living in Alberta, Okeke-Ihejirika (2009) found the majority of the 873 women surveyed conceptualized home as a place to live in peace. While additional descriptions of home arose such as a place of birth, safety from danger, and a place to trace roots, the dominance of an intangible concept such as peace highlights the significance of the less quantifiable markers of

existence. Others have also conceptualized home as a "place or situation which one identifies and where one feels unconditionally accepted" (Etoroma, 2006, p. 103), and as feeling a sense of belonging (Kumsa, 2005). Rapport and Dawson (1998, p. 9-10) described home in the African diaspora as

> where one best knows oneself – where best means most even not always happiest…. One is at home when one inhabits a cognitive environment in which one can undertake the routines of daily life and through which one finds one's identity best mediated – and homeless when such a cognitive environment is eschewed.

These conceptualizations extend the notion of home beyond a geo-physical space and capture the psychosocial nature of establishing home and wellness. When participants spoke of Canada as home, they were not simply speaking to the physical location where they reside. They reflected a much deeper experiential reality where they have been able to live in peace and safety, be self-determining, self-actualizing, and accepted for whom they are.

Yvonne's experience, however, differed from the other participants' experiences and thus the representation presented in the Modupe narrative. Originally from Ghana, Yvonne has lived in Canada for 12 years with her husband who completed his PhD in engineering while in Canada and is working in his chosen profession commensurate with his training. They have a sizable household income, have attained home ownership, and live in a prestigious neighbourhood. In spite of their material success, Yvonne indicated that, for her, Canada is not home where she felt entirely settled. She preferred to live back in Ghana where she had friends and a better sense of community unlike in Canada where she continued to feel lonely. However, as she explained, her "husband likes the money" here. Contrary to the other participants, she advised potential African immigrants not to come or to just complete their education in Canada and then go back to Ghana where one can get a good job with more opportunities for advancement. This contrast with what the other women said about the lack of opportunities in their native land and the vast amount in

Canada. It also contrasts with several other research findings which have shown that many people move outside of continental Africa in search of greater opportunities overseas (e.g. Konadu-Agyeman & Takyi, 2006). Yvonne's pessimism about being able to continue in her profession and secure employment as a teacher in Canada due to being a Black woman, coupled with her overall discontentment of life in Canada can be understood as fostering more idealistic images of her native land in terms of economic conditions than the other interviewees who have found fulfillment in their new homeland. She wanted to go back to school and "do other things" instead of her current profession as a child care provider, but was uncertain that it would happen. All these observations suggest her settlement and homing process have been unsatisfactory.

Several researchers have pointed to the difficulties African transnationals have when settling in Canada. For example, Tettey and Puplampu (2005) asserted that many African-Canadians, irrespective of how long they have lived in Canada, hold stronger ties to their native culture than to the mainstream Canadian culture. They explained this is in part due to their marginality within Canadian society as "second-class citizens" due to racialization processes. Similarly, Pasura (2014) corroborated this view through his reference to classical diaspora theorists who have explained that hostile conditions in the host land such as prejudice, racism, and discrimination can heighten migrants' attachment to their country of origin while also insulating them from the host land. Yvonne's perception that she would not be able to attain her desired job as a teacher within the city because she is a Black woman suggests she too felt treated as a second class citizen in Canada and thus helps to understand her heightened attachment for her country of origin and simultaneous disconnect from Canada. Abusharaf (2002) found that many of his Sudanese participants were well-qualified professionals but ended

up in low-end jobs incommensurate with their skills. Tettey and Puplampu (2005, p. 153) further explained:

> engineers have become taxi-drivers, and teachers and lawyers have had to survive as gas station attendants. Consequently, many struggle to maintain a sense of self-worth based on the status and respect they enjoyed in their countries of origin, and they long for the benefits derived there from.

Etoroma (2006, p. 108) also painted a grim picture of life in Canada for the African diaspora.

> Canada was not and has not become a home for Blacks. Canada is, at best, a hotel or motel for Blacks: a place where Blacks are welcome provided they appear willing to eventually leave and/or are willing to stay out of the privileged places.

These claims are not unique in studies exploring the experiences of African diaspora populations (Tettey & Puplampu, 2005; Yesufu, 2005). However, what the aforementioned studies failed to reveal is whether or not the professionals in their study pursued the required professional designations and licences in their host lands as the women in my study did. It is this particular feature that most distinguishes Yvonne from the other women in that the women in this study pursued or were in the process of pursuing their career of choice whether as a stay-at-home-parent or as a physician. Consequently, in terms of settling well, of my 17 participants, Yvonne was the only one who had not settled successfully or made Canada home.

Yvonne's disillusionment with Canada may go back to her early immigration years and her decision to stay at home with her children full time rather than pursue a career. Although she did not want to send her children to daycare, she did not like staying at home either because she "wanted to go out and work" and she "felt like [she] was being left out." Her faith helped her to eventually come to terms with the decision to stay home: "the Word of God helped me to change my thinking about it, that it is okay to stay at home with the kids, it's not a bad idea." While the absence of community left Yvonne feeling lonely, gender roles have also played a role in her disenchantment with the host society. As identified through Modupe's story, settling one's

family into a new society primarily falls on the women's shoulder. Furthermore, mothers are also "expected to be carriers of culture for their children in the new country" (Espin, 1999, p. 149). While women are strong agents in stabilizing the household and rebuilding community, these responsibilities can be barriers for them in achieving their goals outside of the household (e.g., pursuing education or profession) and becoming self-determined. However, the participants did not experience their investment into their family's wellness as a form of gender exploitation, but rather an empowering opportunity to positively shape their children's lives. Florence, a mother of three, expressed this sentiment:

> God forbid, if I couldn't have children or couldn't have a family, I don't know if I'd be, I'd feel as fulfilled as I am.... my role as a mother, as a woman in this family differs from my husband's in the sense that I spend a lot of time with the children. Most issues, they would come straight to me and we'll talk. I just love the opportunity to talk with them, to pray with them, to impact whatever bit of wisdom and whatever you call it, indent to be able to guide them on a daily basis and to know that they think I'm approachable enough for them to come to me. I love being a mother. You can only be a mother if you're a woman.

Indeed, their role as mothers was highly esteemed as their favorite aspect of womanhood: "My favourite aspect [of womanhood] is taking care of my family. I enjoy it, I enjoy being a mom...." (Sade). When it came to other traditional gender roles within the home such as household chores, cooking, taking children to various activities, and decision making these were much more of a shared responsibility and thus "blurred" along gender lines. This was in contrast to their experiences in their native lands where the women generally managed domestic workers to do house tasks. These blurred gender roles were experienced favourably by the women in that it helped to bring couples closer together given the necessity of "work[ing] as a team".

> Here, both husband and wife have to share the responsibility of the home. There is no "I don't change diapers." "I need you to change the diapers because I'm cooking right now." There is not that sense of gender roles. It gets a little blurred because that's the need that's there. It also tightens the relationship of the husband and wife. You have to do work as a team. Being here you're forced to work more as a team than being back home.

> In that sense it's nice and you need each other, whereas back home you could get away without working as a team in the sense of sharing the household responsibilities, but you still have your own connection in a different way. (Gloriose)

With significant opportunities for socioeconomic advancement within Canada and the United States, women have become major wage earners within African immigrant households in North America (Olupona & Gemignani, 2009). This has led to a dislocation of the traditional family unit and a reconfiguration of new forms of interpersonal family dynamics. As illustrated by Gloriose, husbands are faced with the reality that "their participation in childcare and homemaking is necessary for the household to function" (Olupona & Gemignani, 2009, p. 345). Consequently, some marriages within the African diaspora have struggled with the shift in gender roles in such a way where couples have experienced increased conflict as they try to adjust to the new gender division of labour (Gemignani, 2007; Olupona & Gemignani, 2009). However, Olupona and Gemignani (2009) found that religious communities are emerging as a key site for the negotiation of such gender relations. For example, they cited in their study a research participant who identified the context in which such conflicts are more likely to occur: "This is more common with people who are outside the church... Those who don't have a relationship with God, they find it so hard" (p. 345). While in some ways, African Christian communities have historically been viewed as reproducing traditional gender roles, Olupona and Gemignani (2009) (among others e.g. Olupona, 2007; Shibley, 1998) have found that the church has become a major site for the reinterpretation of normative gender roles and relations. Church leaders have played a significant part in the reconstitution of such ideologies and easing the transition of blurring gender roles through facilitating Christian based marriage seminars, small group Bible studies, and marital counselling (Olupona & Gemignani, 2009).

While the Christian church may seem to uphold gender hierarchies on the surface, a closer look at the gender discourses and practices shows a much more complex understanding. Contrary to popular stereotypes, Evangelical Christianity in particular has been a major site for reconstituting gender roles (Shibley, 1998). Olupona (2007) explained that within African immigrant churches there is a wide variance in the type of participation that women engage in ranging from very limited traditional roles, to key leadership positions. In some churches, he noted, women participate more than men and may assume a greater role in leadership.

Given the significance of faith among much of the African diaspora, many identify themselves first as Christians, then as Africans or in terms of womanhood (Bongmba, 2007; Hill, 2003). The primacy placed on faith is also carried into the home whereby biblical teachings and understandings intersect and are negotiated with mainstream gender ideals often challenging prevailing societal notions of women's subordination and passivity (Gemignani, 2007). Gemignani (2007) explained one of the ways gender hierarchies are contested in such religious immigrant communities is through the high value assigned to the family and home. For many within this community, the private sphere is not seen as less valuable than the public sphere as mainstream society may perceive, rather great importance is placed on the household as it is the private realm of home and family that is placed at the centre of both men and women's lives (Olupona & Gemignani, 2009). Further, within this sphere, women are esteemed as "defenders" of the home and are said to "build" and "construct" the family unit and community. Such popular discourse about the family structure runs counter to feminine ideals of women as passive nurturers in the home, or the private realm as less significant than the public domain. Instead, many members of this community have resisted this discourse and have recognized and

celebrated women's place as active agents in the development of society's most valuable institution (Gemignanin, 2007).

While the participants' husbands often were both the progenitors of the move abroad and considered the "head" of the household, with the women placed in the role of the supportive spouse and overseer of the family unit, many traditional gender roles were re-made as the couple emphasized team work and mutual decision making rooted in love and respect for one another when it came to running the home. Thus, while gender constraints may have limited Yvonne's self-determination and career aspirations, most of the participants did successfully fulfill their professional goals.

The results of my study suggest successful settlement and the establishment of home must take into account the heterogeneity among African diasporas. My findings represent a *type* of experience among this diverse group. For instance, Abusharaf's (2002) study on the experiences of Sudanese migrants to North America can be more thoroughly understood in light of their social, political, historical, economic, and religious context. Much of Sudan's history reflects ethnic strife manifesting in ongoing civil wars and genocide that has led to major humanitarian crises (UN News Centre, 2004). Consequently, the majority of Sudanese immigrants to Canada come as asylum seekers or refugees (The Mosaic Institute, 2009) which contrasts with most of my study participants. This holds significant implications as my study participants were more likely to move abroad with a level of social and economic capital beyond that of a refugee thereby facilitating settlement and integration. The various countries which the participants represented (Ethiopia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zimbabwe) have also experienced varying degrees of internal conflict, but not to the same intensity and duration as Sudan. These issues point to significant differences and

plurality within African diasporas that reveal any generalizations about its members must be made with caution.

6.1.4 Experiences of Discrimination within Canada

Many African immigrants experience various forms of discrimination based on their gender, race, social class, immigration status, accent, country of origin, or ethnicity (Etoroma, 2006; Yesufu, 2005). The Modupe narrative provided one such example of the prejudice the women experienced in Canada with regards to a widespread ignorance of African societies. However, they generally felt these were minor issues in Canada compared to what they experienced and witnessed in other countries. For example, Jolene, originally from the Ivory Coast, explained that she and her family moved to Canada from Belgium to escape its incessant racism, particularly as it was hurting their children:

> There I couldn't integrate into the society because racism is a big problem in Belgium. If you are a Black person, you can't really integrate into the society there. Even finding work was challenging for me. I spent 10 years in Belgium without having any job.
> Every time I apply for a job, if they don't see me it's okay, but once they see me it's a problem. They'll just call you back and say… even if they see your CV, your resume has everything they need for the job they would refuse it. I speak Dutch. The country language, I speak French very well. Both languages I speak very well but I couldn't find a job….
>
> That was okay for me because I said I can live with that. But once we started having kids, our first son was going to middle school, it was starting to get challenging for him. Every time they had a problem at school, they would think he was the reason for the problem because he's … In Belgium mixed children are called Black because my husband is a White guy. I'm Black so our kids are Black in Belgium. Even the police would come. If they called the police for a problem and they came over they would just first address my son. He would actually have to show his identity card to prove that his dad is Belgian, he's from Belgium before they would let him go. Like two times or three times he came back home crying about this kind of injustice.
>
> My husband and I, we chose this kind of life. We chose to get married and to live in Belgium; our kids, they didn't choose to live in that kind of situation. I'm a Christian so I can handle that kind of mentality, but my kids, we didn't want them to become racist and start hating people because of what was happening with us. We were praying about that. My husband, we heard about Canada and they said it's a multicultural country and they accept everybody. They're not going to say because you are Black you won't have a job… My husband decided he's going to find a job here. It was an amazing thing that the

> company he was working with had enough of the same company here in Canada and they decided they're going to transfer him…
>
> Yeah, this is the main reason why we decided to move to Canada. Since we came here, I would say it's wonderful. You can see it in people's eyes that they don't care about your skin color. They accept you. In the very beginning when someone addressed me, I would look behind me because I would think they're not talking to me because they're so politely, respectfully talking to me. I would think there was someone behind me they're talking to.

Edith spoke about her and her family's experience of rejection and a lack of acceptance in the different countries they had lived in throughout Africa (e.g., Rwanda, Congo, and South Africa) and the lack of security persisting in her native land:

> My own land rejected my grandparents, my own native land and where I grew up, I was not accepted. Being everywhere, I lived in South Africa for a while, I was not accepted either. I was in the midst of apartheid and racism and issues. Canada was the only place I could call home with pride… I feel secure here, but with you [referring to a Rwandan in the context of that country], anytime, any day, you can wake up in the morning and tell me that we can kill you.

The impending threat due to civil unrest based on ethnic, class, and religious tensions is unfortunately a reality with which many African citizens have become familiar. The participants acknowledged discrimination exists in Canada, however, explained that it is minor compared to elsewhere. For example, Elizabeth, a Kenyan woman who also lived in Russia and witnessed the brutality of its skinheads against Black men, spoke of racism in Canada in such terms: "Not as much [racism in Canada]. It might be there, very subtle, but people know better. People are very, very sensitive to that, because nobody wants to be accused of being a racist. It is there, but very, very subtle. You know what I mean?" While acknowledging the existence of racism in Canada, her language, tone, and context in which she spoke, that is, that it is "[n]ot as much", particularly in the context of being among blatant, systemic, and severe acts of discrimination and violence among people of colour, her notion of "subtle" is not speaking to the insidious nature of racism in Canada, but rather the quantity and severity. For instance, she shared several stories about

violent acts, some which she witnessed and others which she heard about, against Black men while living in Russia which included multiple murders and physical assaults.

Cynthia, a Nigerian woman who has lived in Canada for nine years, also witnessed racism in Canada but, like Elizabeth, pointed out that it was minor compared to her native land:

> I'm not saying there is not a little bit here and there, racists here and there, but it's not so concerning compared to where we came from. Even we ourselves, we don't even love ourselves. We're in a strange land, what do you expect?

Julia, also from Nigeria, elaborated on a blatant form of ethnic based discrimination prevalent in her native land:

> I've not really experienced that myself [racism] but I know there's no way you can totally eradicate racism. There's racism everywhere though what I said to myself is, "just be yourself." Wherever you are, know your rights. Even sometimes in Nigeria, there's racism. Just for example, from Igbo to Yoruba, my dad said nobody's going to marry a Yoruba. What do we call that? It's still racism. But the way… the kind of name tag that they call it today is not what it is called in Nigeria we just say we don't like those people. What is that called? So racism has been from time immemorial. Racism has been and will continue to be, but as a Christian, you don't have to be racist. You have to accept everybody, every culture. That is it. But I know there's racism everywhere but I've not really experienced it.

In contrast, three women spoke of subtle race- and gender-based discrimination in the workplace and how their faith helped them in various ways to deal with these situations. Linda spoke of forgiveness as a way to release the anger and restore peace to herself, while Anna articulated that God's divine direction led her to start up her own business shortly before she was let go from her job due to what she perceived as prejudice. Gloriose described social support and encouragement coming from a community of believers as giving her the strength to do her work well.

> Having my faith, growing up knowing that God is ultimately the one in control of my life and knowing and trusting that no matter how hard it gets, God is going to see me through it is what carried me through when you get here. You are well educated and can't find a job. Then you think God brought me here … God opened up a way for me to make it into Canada. I have to trust that he has a perfect plan for me. Finding that maybe you do get

> the job but you find a little bit of very subtle discrimination, maybe because I'm a woman and not only a woman, I'm an African woman. I have to work harder at proving myself, at proving that I am the person for the job, that I can do the job just as good as any other person. I have to trust God that he will give me the tools that I need to be able to do that. That's why then I find the connection with the church…. When you are in an environment with the church, you meet other people that lift you up, that give you an encouraging word. Christiana [her close friend] is a very strong source of support for me in terms of just being able to say, "I am struggling. Things are just not going well at all."

The participants' Christian faith ameliorated their experiences and perceptions of discrimination. Their faith gave them confidence, hope, and direction in dealing with adverse situations. Such direction was evident in both Linda's decision to choose forgiveness in accordance with what the Bible teaches, and Anna's decision to follow what she perceived as God leading her to start her own business. As a number of scholars have noted, many African diasporic women lean on their faith to deal with adversity (Hamilton-Mason et al., 2012; Harris-Robinson, 2006; Heath, 2006; Hubert, 2010; Prendergast, 2011). My participants also encouraged their children to have that same confidence, hope, and direction rooted in God.

> At times I find myself thinking about our boys. Generally Black boys are discriminated against and that's something I want to be more proactive in and that's why for me it's important for them to know that God created you the way you are. You are perfect the way you are. He chose you to be the way you are and out in the world people might say differently but if you listen to what he has in plan for your life, that's what matters at the end of the day. (Linda)

In addition to their faith operating as a tool of resilience against discriminatory treatment, socioeconomic status played a role in lessening the impact of prejudice. My participants would be identified as middle-class, professional women with all but two having some university education. Many earned graduate degrees or professional designations (see Appendix E for participants' biographical sketches). The two women without a university education were the youngest interviewees in their twenties with college diplomas. One of them aspired to obtain a law degree. The research participants' spouses were also highly educated. While 15 out of the 17

interviewees were married (again, the two youngest women were single) 12 of the 15 husbands held graduate degrees and the other three held Bachelor degrees. This parallels Canadian statistical results showing Africans to be highly educated (Statistics Canada, 2007a). However, contrary to other studies finding low levels of employment commensurate with education (e.g. Yesufu, 2005), all but one of my participants were employed in their chosen profession.

This demonstrates the heterogeneity among African diasporas and the importance of not viewing this vast population as a homogeneous group. One of the possible mediating factors that have contributed to my interviewees overall positive experience of diaspora life in Canada is that they were not recent immigrants. Most have lived in Canada for five years or longer at the time of the interview and therefore have had the needed time it takes to integrate. The two women who have lived in Canada for less than five years resided in other Western countries for several years prior to migrating to Canada. Such previous immigration experience has likely aided with the settlement process. Many of my interviewees also supplemented their education with Canadian designations and academic certificates similar to the African immigrant women in Creese and Wiebe's (2012) research who moved beyond "survival employment" to attain more satisfying jobs. As Yesufu (2005) pointed out, her participants lacked significant levels of social capital in Canada and consequently, did not have sufficient information about employment opportunities and overall life in Canada. My participants emphasized proactively researching about Canada to know what the necessary paths are to pursue one's profession in their new country. Had this group of women not have had the socioeconomic capital, their experience with discrimination in Canada may have also been more adverse.

6.1.5 Concluding Thoughts

This chapter has provided relevant background and insight into the women's lives as Christian African diasporic women in Canada. By providing this context, I have set the stage for deeper understanding of their daily lived experiences of wellness, which is the topic of the following chapter. Modupe's narrative was created as a prototypic exemplar to illustrate how the women in this study understood, experienced, and made meaning of their lives as diasporic Christian women. By representing their stories in the form of a narrative I have been able to provide a fuller, while never complete, picture of their lived experiences and thus organize them into a meaningful whole (Chase, 2011). Further, the use of narrative has added life to the text by providing a vivid, evocative, interesting, and informative account that would be difficult to achieve with the use of verbatim quotes and analysis alone. That said, verbatim quotations have been woven into the analysis to serve as examples, illustrate points I have made, provide evidence for my interpretations, and enhance readability (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). I believe that weaving narrative and verbatim quotations through realist writing together has helped to deepen the readers' understanding of the participants' lived experiences and the ways they made sense of the realities surrounding them. Therefore, this dual representation strategy can demonstrate in greater richness the participants' lives.

My analysis was organized around Faist's (2010) three dimensional characterization of diasporas whereby I outlined my participants' experiences in terms of (a) the causes of their migration, (b) their transnational practices, and (c) their settlement and establishment of home in a new land. My findings and analysis illustrated that these women were not marginalized, disenfranchised, or second-class citizens, contrary to common beliefs about African diasporic immigrant women (Etoroma, 2006; Yesufu, 2005). Rather they came to Canada in search of

greater opportunities for a better life and were self-determined to actualize their strategies to settle in a new country.

My study participants had many variables that helped facilitate their successful settlement and establishment of home: most of them were middle class and came to Canada highly educated and attained additional post-secondary education following their arrival. Their language competency also facilitated their ability to settle well and establish home. However, what they identified as key to successful settlement is having a plan, remaining focused on one's goals, working hard, obtaining further education, and persevering through the challenges. Indeed, their ability to settle well was marked with significant challenges and did not always entail feelings of positive affect, however, it was done with purpose and meaning and enabled them to realize their aspirations and become self-actualizing (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Such experiences hold substantial implications not only for their wellness but other immigrant communities who can learn from them as well. I now turn to a focused examination of how the women have experienced wellness in light of their Christian faith.

7.0 Modupe's Story: Christian African Women in Canada and their Experiences of Spirituality and Wellness

My faith as a Christian is very important to me. I have a very strong faith in God. It's what keeps me grounded, the Word of God. That keeps me grounded and determines everything I do in my relationships with people, my job, my family, in my day to day life. It's every aspect of my life, it's the way I view the world, the way I live my life, it's who I am. Without my faith I don't know if I'd be alive. I probably wouldn't be. There are other issues, things that I faced like personal issues and things that it is my faith that has kept me alive. I don't know. Maybe to other people it may sound really silly. Life is tough. Life can be tough. I have seen a lot of people who've had all the material things in the world and yet they are not happy. People have committed suicide. They get themselves addicted to various things in an attempt to numb some of the pain and issues that they go through in life.

I don't consider myself as a naturally strong person. I'm strong in Christ only. I know I can actually think of a time in my life when I probably ... I don't know. I think I may have ended my life at one point and it wasn't because ... No, but I heard a voice. I heard a voice saying, "I think you should end it." I was feeling down. Maybe it was the beginning of depression, I don't know, but I heard a voice. I know I was going through a hard time. I think it was a little bit soon after my son was born. I don't know if it was post-partum depression that was setting in or something, but I heard a voice and immediately I started to pray. I knew what I had to do straight away. I was in the bathroom. I was crying because I just felt really exhausted, really worn out. I felt almost that time as if nobody cared. Thinking back now, I had so much going for me but why did I feel ... At that time it felt real. I heard an audible voice say, "Why don't you just end it all?" Straightaway I was on my knees praying. I prayed. I don't know how long I prayed for. When I got up, it was almost as if it hadn't happened. That was the end of that, how I was feeling. It was

almost as is if everything was just back to what you might say my normality is. I don't know if I didn't know Christ I would have adhered to that voice.

I hear lots of people, in my profession especially, I hear people say to me, "I heard this." Like schizophrenics, people that go through all sorts of ailments like depression or, "I heard this voice say I should do this," or, "I see this person chasing me" or "I heard this. I saw this." A lot of those people... They don't know who to turn to, what to turn to. Sometimes they turn to medication. Sometimes they turn to cutting themselves. When I was in England, there was this young lady I met on the streets. I just naturally went to her because I could tell she was distressed. When she was talking, I noticed that she'd cut her wrist. I said, "What is this?" She said she does it for relief. She hears voices telling her what to do, what to say. Just the torment of it all causes her to do things like that to herself. There are many people that have gone through things like that. What do they do? How do they cope? At the time, I was a Christian. If I wasn't a Christian to know that that voice was not ... I know that was a demonic voice. It wasn't a godly voice. What might I have done? I don't know.

I don't know how people who do not have a spiritual life, when I say spiritual, they don't have a faith, how they cope in life. I don't know. I don't know how most people do it, but I have seen the link especially in my profession with people who do not have a spiritual walk, a spiritual life, and the consequences of it in terms of their health. I have seen some of the issues they face and some of the spiritually obvious situations that they're going through but yet they're not able to make that link and make that break and how people suffer unnecessarily just because they don't have a faith. I have seen some people also who do not have a faith who appear to have it all together, appear, but I know deep down… because when you talk to them long enough and you

get to find out, you realize there are issues there that have been glossed over or well covered, that if they allow themselves to express, they would realize it is because they need God in their lives.

I know, for example, when my children are going through issues and I mean my oldest is at the age now that there is the opportunity for so many things to … There is school, school work, friends or lack of friends, and other things to affect her. I'm really grateful to God that she does know God because she will say to me, "Mama, I need to pray. I need to go and pray. I'm not feeling right right now. I'm just not feeling very all together happy right now. I need to pray." She knows what she has to do. Then she does. Or she might say to me, "Oh, I'm not sure what to do about this. I'll tell her, "Go and pray." Even as a teenager, there are stresses. Knowing that my daughter can actually make that link and say, "Mama, I need to pray" and then seeing other people's children not know what to do except to be on drugs, it's very, very disheartening to me because, do you know what, I dispense medication, I dispense antidepressants for 10, 8, 9, 12, 13 year olds, 8, 7. I think even as far as 6 years old. Like on Saturday I was dispensing for I think she was 12. Her dad came to pick up. I spoke to the dad on the phone before. Then when the dad came, she came along. I was looking at her, beautiful young girl, she looks like she has it all together, like she's full of life. Then I thought, what is going wrong? Twelve years old and she says that she can't cope. They put her on antidepressants. The same day, I was dispensing an attention deficit medication for two boys who appear … They came with their dad. I think the oldest is 10. I'm thinking, "Okay, I know they've been diagnosed as this. Is this really what is going on?"

I think sometimes a lot of this is spiritual issues that need to be dealt with. And the medication just helps to numb them and calm them down. These things really bother me. In fact, I was praying this morning about it. I know that's another issue. I just don't know how people

cope without God because if I didn't have my faith, I don't know if I would be able to cope, especially for someone like me because like I said before, I don't see myself as a particularly strong person; I used to think, "Why am I so emotional? Why am I…" Then I realized, okay, God made me this way for a reason, but he has provided everything that I need to be able to manage it and manage it for the benefit of not just myself but for others as well.

My faith is very important to me. Like I said, without Christ I don't know if I'd be alive. Some people can call it a crutch, yes, so be it. Christ keeps me alive. Christ keeps me sane. Christ keeps me wanting to do good. Christ keeps me wanting to be the best that I can be in my job. Whenever the thought comes to cut corners. No. Christ keeps me doing my best because the Word says whatever you do, do unto God. Do the best you can even when nobody is watching. In this lifetime, there are so many opportunities to cut corners. My faith in God tells me even when nobody's watching, do the best you can. Do the right thing. I do because of Christ. I am who I am now because of Christ. There.

I didn't always live my life in that way though. I didn't always have that understanding of Christianity. As a child we used to go to church. I grew up in a religious home definition wise. I want to say, in general, yes, it was Christian. But we were very religious, believing in good works, church every Sunday, you know. We did Hail Mary all the time. So we were just pretty much a religious family, but I received Christ when I was in my third year or second year of university and it has changed me completely to have a very personal relationship with God. There's a difference between mere religion and having a personal relationship with God. I remember, a friend of mine invited me to a church program, it was different from the one I grew up in. When I heard the Word, when I heard the message, I knew that is what I needed to do and

I gave my life to Christ and that was the beginning of a wonderful relationship; that I will say. I refer to it as the deepest love story, I am just so excited to be in love.

My faith to me is everything. It's as important to me as the very air that I breathe. If I had to describe it to someone, if I had to explain it to someone that doesn't really understand, I would just tell the person, "You know what? We all ... everything you've seen in life has its sources has its own origins, right?" So if you want your Mercedes car to be repaired, you don't take it to the altar. And if you want your carrot to grow properly, you don't go put it in the sea, you know? And you don't ... if you want your fish to be strong and healthy, you don't go throw it on the land or sand. And if you want a human being to function properly and fulfill his destiny to the full potential, I think you should take him to the Creator because He knows everything about that person and He knows what that person needs and He knows how to give him that. How to help him live out his destiny. So that's how I'd describe it to people. Being connected to the source of origins. That's not all, but that's the base.

I would also say that being connected to God, the one that is all powerful, He is my Savior. He is the beginning and is the end of my life. He is the one that I look to to be able to do what I need to do. He is the one that gives me the strength to do what I need to do. He is the one that imparts wisdom and knowledge to me and enables me to be able to share it with others. He is the one that has given me the gifts that I have, that I can exercise with other people. I would say that my faith is very much about living and breathing the Word of God as it says in the Bible and living my life in a Christ-like manner, always thriving to be more like Jesus Christ. Yes, it's impossible but it's what motivates me to be able to do better. It means living my life in a way that is pleasing to God in a way that God wants me to live my life. It is about serving others, above all loving people and being kind, being patient, without judgment. It's about living my life

without sin as much as I can and knowing that my sins can be forgiven if I do sin. The fact that I can ask Him for forgiveness gives me a good sense of wellbeing. Not that I would go about wanting to sin, but I'm a human being too and if I say I don't sin I lie.

I would say that my faith is about hope; always hoping, always having that hope of things that I haven't seen yet, but hoping and believing that it is, it will be, it's going to be. When I need direction I can pray and God can direct me. I have direction for my life. When I'm down and feeling discouraged and I pick up my Bible and I read, it gives me courage. There is so much instruction in the Bible about everyday living. It helps me to chart my way and guides me in all that I want to do. And it's about looking up to the main goal which is eternity. Knowing that ultimately I want to be able to be with Christ forever and ever. That's how I would describe my faith. It gives me a good sense of wellbeing knowing that God loves me. It gives me a good sense of wellbeing knowing that He cares for me beyond the ... there's no way I can ever comprehend how much He cares for me. Coming from that, I'm so confident in the love that my God has for me. To be honest with you, I stand up and I walk tall, not because I think "Oh yeah, I'm so cool. I'm so fly." No. But because I feel that if God saw us worth sending His only child to come and die for, I must be something. From that premise, I feel really cool with myself. Honestly, it gives me confidence to go out and be myself and do what I have to do. It gives me confidence.

I tell my children "You know what, remember that the Bible says you're the head and not the tail. You're a winner and not a loser. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise." For me, it's such… yeah. Yeah. I can't find the words to express. I see my God as being this really huge, huge, huge God that is so loving, cares about me so much, above all, wants me to be happy, to be successful, to prosper. When the Bible says prosperity, I know prosperity is not all about money.

It's about the whole entirety of the person. It's not important to God that I'm like the richest person in the world but it's important to him that I'm happy and that I'm content. Everything that has to do with life. Just because of my humanity I'm not able to find the right words to express it but I see my God as an amazing God.

I have so many testimonies that I could share about the goodness of God in my life. For example, I remember when I just got married, I knew that I wanted kids. We were married for about two, two and a half years and there was no indication that I was going to have kids. I struggled with that a little bit and I was referred to a doctor … a Nigerian doctor actually … I just loved that doctor. He was an incredible doctor that said to me, "There's nothing indicating that you can't have kids," even though another doctor had said I would never be able to have kids. He just kind of treated me and was just, "Let's just monitor and see how you are."

Finally, there was a time when my church was having a healing service. They recognized that they needed a healing service but it was going to be done by someone else at a different church, so they were inviting people to go to that church. It was a little bit more of a different experience for me, it was very much about everybody is right in there, you are worshiping, you are praying, you're loud. At that service the preacher asked if people are needing … it's a healing service so if you're needing healing in your body just come up front. I remember my first thought was, 'Oh, I'm not going up front. I'm just going to pray right in my seat because if I go up front there, what if… I see all those people who had been going up front, keep falling and doing all kinds of things,' right. I was worried about being proper. 'I'm not doing that. What is that?' Then the other thought was 'What if I don't get the Holy Spirit and nothing happens, I just stand there looking like a fool?' Anyways, so I … We started praying and the preacher actually pulled me out of my seat where I was sitting and he asked me to come up front and he prayed for

… he said, “What do you need prayer for?” I said, “I want a child and I’m told that I will never be able to have a child.” He started praying, he said, “Do you believe?” I said, “I believe.” He said, “You’re going to have a child, not one, but you’re going to have more. God is going to bless you with a child,” and we prayed, and I remember it was such a powerful experience for me. I don’t even remember how I did end up on the floor but I was just crying. I just felt an overwhelming feeling of emotions.

After that event we prayed and a few weeks later I went to see my doctor and he said, “That’s strange. I’ll be right back,” and I thought, ‘Wow. Okay, that’s a weird statement,’ and in my head I’m going, ‘Oh, that’s just typical of these African men, just not completing their sentences. What’s going on?’ Anyway, he came back and said, “Congratulations. I just need to do an ultrasound and just check.” He did and I was six weeks pregnant at that time and I had not had my period at all for years, but I got pregnant.

If that is not a life changing experience, I don’t know what else is. I had a very good pregnancy, I was excited, I had baby showers, everything; the whole works and everything and in January, because the baby was due January 11th, and … no, due around mid-January and I went to the doctor and the baby had died. At 39 weeks the baby died. I went to the doctor and he kept checking his … He asked me, “When was the last time you felt the baby move?” I said, “I don’t know. I’ve been working today so I haven’t paid much attention to it,” and stuff like that, “But I have been feeling my stomach tighten up and … I don’t know.” He’s like, “Because I can’t hear the heartbeat, I need you to go to the hospital.” I went and there was no heartbeat. The baby had been dead for about four days and I didn’t know.

At that time then when I was looking at the time that he gave based on the lab report or whatever, it looked like it was about only Wednesday that the baby died. I specifically remember

on that Wednesday that I had had a dream and in the dream I had been … I was … it's like a voice was saying, "You need to get up and pray because someone very close is dying." I got up the first time, I'm like, "Oh, that's a strange dream," and I went back to sleep. Second time, "You need to get up and pray." I got up again, I didn't pray. Third time, "You need to get up and pray." Finally, I got up, I did just a quick prayer to satisfy that I did. I just said some prayer and went back to sleep and carried on.

That Monday … before that Monday is when I found out that the baby had died, we named her Blessing. That was the name. After that, I knew that the hand of God was in my life. No doubt, and it made it a personal experience for me. It made my faith stronger because it was a powerful experience even when we had to cremate the baby and through the whole process. I remember the ladies from church came and said to me, "Let her go in God's hands. She was never yours in the first place." She said, "As you are giving the doctors back that baby for them to do the cremation or whatever, you make it as if you're letting her go into the hands of God." That was a powerful experience for me and when I went to church a few weeks after that with a prayer group of women, they said, "The fact that you carried that baby to full term when other doctors were telling you you can't conceive in the first place, that alone is worthy to praise him." That was all I needed and my life has never been the same since.

That's just one testimony of how God has worked in my life, but I have so many. So as you can see, my faith is everything to me. It is so important to me that my children also grow up having a strong faith in God. That is why when we move to a new place, like when we moved to Canada, and we were looking for a church to attend together as a family, it was important that we attend a church that my children can relate to, a family-friendly church. The reason why I love my church is because one, it's very multi-generational. My pastor is in his 50's. We have people

that are much older than he is. We have people in their 50's, we have people in their 40's, there are people in their 30's, you know what I mean? There are high school kids that come to the church, we have university kids. You can see it's not just about a bunch of old people getting together every Sunday. To me it makes Christianity more alive because if you can get youth in church on Sunday mornings then get them out for Friday night, they have a program for the youth from grades 7 to 12 on Fridays, like a Christian party for them every Friday night. I'd rather they do that than go out and drink and hang out in a club. So that's one thing. It's very multi-generational. Also, the church we go to is very multi-cultural. We have people from everywhere. There are Nigerians, there are people from the Philippines, there are Caucasians, there are people from Eastern Africa, from all over the world. So it's not … you can't say oh, that's a church for this group of people. It's very multi-cultural as well.

In addition to being family-friendly, another very important aspect of selecting a church for me is the Word. It has to be family-friendly, yes, but the Word of God also has to preached and preached as it says in the Bible. If I'm looking for a new church, obviously I'll go a few times and see what it is that they're preaching because the Word of God over the years I've realized can be distorted and for, sometimes, one's personal gain. If the preacher's preaching everything that I want to hear at all times, then I question. You see, there's a warning in the Bible that in the latter days, people would look for preachers that will tell them what they want to hear. The Word of God, I don't think, is meant to make you comfortable at all times. If it does, then it means that you've reached the level where you're perfect in your faith; but it's a work in progress. I'm looking for the Word of God being preached whether it makes me comfortable or not and to cause a change in me that I hear it and it makes me want to change for the better. If it's a Bible based church and they teach the Word, they teach what it says and they don't add

anything to it and they don't remove anything from it, as long as that's there, I think that's all I need in addition to being family-friendly.

Sure I would love to have some of the elements of the worship style that we have back home here as well, but I understand that I am in a different culture, right. The Word of God is still being preached, it is the same Word here as it is back home, so that's the main thing. But there's a difference between how Africans worship and how Canadians worship. There's a difference. What can I say? I'm very careful about what I'm saying because I don't want to criticize here because maybe it is the way they know to do it. I'm not going to say that Canadians are not really worshiping God, we're still worshipping the same God, it's just different, it's their culture and that's okay.

I feel that within an African style of worship, all guards are down. You are really in your … you are worshiping. It's just you and God. I'm not worried about my neighbour, I'm not worried about looking cute, I'm not worried about breaking down into what would be identified as, "Oh, she had a nervous breakdown right there in church." I'm not worried about someone needing to come and tell me, "Okay, that's enough. We need you to be quiet now and sit down." When you're in an African worship style, for one it's loud which can be … that can be debated. My husband has a problem with the loudness… You're literally … You are in the spirit. You feel the presence of God. You are worshiping, truly humbling yourself before God. People are dancing, they are weeping, they will get up and say "I hear you God. Amen." Yeah. You can sing, clap, and praise freely. Canadian churches, not all of them but some of them, can be a bit more on the properness. It's about being proper. Yes, we can worship here, you can experience God and all that but there's a bit of a properness about it. I would say it's the culture because the culture here is just laid back; sing and not even shake your body, not even dance.

I think that's why sometimes it just feels so cold in church over here, like people don't want to go all the way; like they're just okay with let's come to church on Sunday, please don't waste my time, don't spend more than two hours, that's all I have time for every week for church, you know. In that way, it's kind of like... sometimes it's so cold where like, it doesn't excite you to even go to church because you don't see that passion in people like the way you experience at home, where people want to volunteer, people want to be in God's presence, people want to pray for you. This is something I lack a little bit here in Canada. It seems that people don't want to go deep in their spiritual life, that's with the average person anyway, and outside the church you don't really hear anything much about God.

People here don't necessarily talk about their faith as much as people back home. They don't attribute things to... I mean you could go months and months and the closest you hear about God is bless you when you sneeze. Nobody really says anything about God. I wish talking about God was more common in this part of the world. I don't find it to be so. It's usually a very one off situation where you'll find people talking about God. God doesn't appear to play a major role in the average person's everyday life, in terms of speech. In Nigeria people talk about God more. It's almost normal to say "Praise the Lord" in every conversation and just say, "Oh, God has done this for me." "How are you my sister?" "Oh, I'm fine. By God's grace, I'm good. God is so good to me." It's part of everyday conversation. Whereas here, sometimes you have to be very … not sometimes, you do have to be very careful. Here, not everybody is a Christian, right. Having said that, in Nigeria, not everybody is a Christian but you could be talking to a Muslim and you'd be using Christian terms and they understand that, oh, you are talking this way because you're a Christian whereas it's not the same here. You're more comfortable in

expressing your faith in Nigeria than here. People do not look at you and think, "What's going on with her?" Whereas here, if you spoke like that, people would think you're mad.

The challenge that I will say is that people don't believe in God so much in Canada. It's very challenging because I really want to spread the word of God, tell people who this God is, but people are not that desperate for God. God is more of a good thing. It's kind of a good thing to do and believe in. But He's not a real Savior. He's not a personal friend. He's not somebody that people lean on and cling to. The majority I am talking about anyway, not everybody, but the majority are not interested in the love of God and loving Him back. That could really affect you, if you don't know your God. Having said that, the only way to draw people to Christ here is let your life be a testimony, let people wonder "What is it about you?" Let them come to you and ask and you'll say "Oh well, it's Christ in me. Do you want Him?"

When it comes to my wellness, knowing God, having a relationship with Him, definitely impacts how I am doing. For me, wellness is about your mental health, your emotional health, your spiritual health, and your physical health. It is body, soul, spirit, and mind. It is my state of life, how I'm doing in all aspects of life, family-wise, work-wise, children… When you are well there's a good balance between all those elements. It is everyday living, you have to be comfortable and at peace with where you are. It's not just one compartment but it's my spirit, I need to have that inner joy and peace. I have to be at peace with God and at peace with myself.

Faith and family are major contributing factors to my sense of wellness. When we are home and I see my kids… like my son take his guitar and my daughter go to the piano and we all start to sing. We just worship together. And when we have our family time every night ... like we just finished this series about the Bible on Netflix, a Bible series teaching you about what happened with Josiah or Moses or all these people. Even Son of God, we just watched it. We go

downstairs to the basement and we watch different movies on Netflix. After we finish watching the movie we stop and talk about what we are feeling? What we think about the movie. What was wrong, what do we have to keep and then we pray for every ... Sometimes we have a book that we share. We read the book together, today would be me, the next day would be Samuel, we each take turns and we share what we understand about it. This is what I feel is wellness. When we are worshiping and we have family time. Yesterday we had a barbecue outside and we were singing. We would see our neighbour looking over the fence and he was like "wow, they're singing together, I like it." This is what I need to be happy, to be well. Being in prayer with God and a house full of love, joy, music, worshiping, reading the Bible, reading a book. Being connected with my husband and children, having that sense of connectedness.

My wellness is very much tied to how well my family is doing. If my kids are not doing well, then I'm definitely not doing well. If my kids are struggling, that's going to weigh on me and be an emotional challenge for me; feeling sad, feeling bad, feeling overwhelmed about how can I make it better? What do I need to do? Those kind of things. But when the children are doing okay, they are doing okay in school, they are doing okay in their lives, yeah, that is a good place to be for me.

I just love the opportunity to talk with my children, to pray with them, to impart whatever bit of wisdom or whatever you call it, to be able to guide them on a daily basis and to know that they think I'm approachable enough for them to come to me. If my daughter or my son comes with an issue or something happened at school, it's impossible to talk about it without "So what does the Bible say about it?" We pray together. I bring issues to them. They pray with me and so my kids realize that "Oh, mommy has issues, too," right. As a family, my husband might say or I might say "Oh I'm having these issues now. Let us pray." We'll pray together as a family unit.

When God answers that prayer, “Oh, praise God! God did this.” You know? When I would start a new job I would tell my children “Oh, I started a new job,” or when I would have an interview “Pray with me that my interview will go well.” Then I come home, they’re looking for me, “Mommy, did you get the job?” “I got the job! Praise God!” Or, I might be like, “Oh, work is hard for me, blah, blah, blah. Let us pray.” We’ll pray about it. This is not just a culture, it is life. This is how we do life, governed by our faith. Our faith is in everything that we do.

Even as a mom, which is my favourite aspect of womanhood, being a mother, my faith helps me with that. Using the Word of God as a reference point, it helps me to be a better parent. It calls me to accountability to realize that my kids are not my own, they belong to God and it’s a privilege to have children. The Bible talks about how children are a gift from God, so it’s a privilege. There are people that want children but don’t have and they are no better than I am, so it’s a gift God has given me. It’s a privilege to have them, so don’t abuse that privilege. I’m not perfect, and I don’t pretend to be perfect with my kids. I tell my kids “There is no parenting handbook; I will make mistakes.” Then my older daughter laughs and says, “Yeah, I’m the experiment”. But seriously, sometimes it can be hard. It is a great responsibility because you have to take care of your home; you have to train your children in the way of the Lord. I have to be a good example to my children in all that I do. That can be very daunting because we all make mistakes and sometimes you don’t want the children to see this aspect of you because you don’t want them to do that. On the other hand, that also helps me because I know okay if I don’t want my children to do that I should not be doing that either.

I know my husband could also say what I’ve just said, so it’s not necessarily unique to womanhood, but my role as a mother differs from my husband’s role in the sense that I’m sort of the heartbeat of my home, of my family. By that I mean I’m the one who’s kind of

needing to ensure that things are smooth at home. How is everybody doing emotionally, mentally, spirituality, physically, how is everybody doing? How is my environment in terms of the house, the actual physical environment? How is that? What is the energy that I'm sensing, that I'm feeling in the home or within my relationships that I have? I'm sort of gluing the family together, I'm keeping everybody grounded and in order for me to be able to do that I need to be grounded myself. If I'm not grounded how am I able to keep everything else going well?

To keep myself grounded I typically try to start off my day with prayer or quiet time. If there is a particular issue that I'm facing or I'm feeling distressed about something than I just pick up a passage in the Bible and I read it, it just rejuvenates me, it makes me happy, it makes me happy to know that there's somebody that I've never seen before but He's always been faithful and will remain faithful to me. God is always there to take care of His children. Yeah, the Bible helps me to cope because when you read it you get so much encouragement from God. Yeah, I have a mighty God who is watching over me. You don't pretend to be strong in everything because God is going to always be there with you and for you. Going to church really helps as well. That is where I get my self-care from, my inspiration. That's why I love to go to church. We all go through times when things aren't going well or something is not right. I get to church and my spirit is lifted with the Word that I hear from the pulpit. The pastor talks and hits the nail on the head and I'd be like, "Yeah! That's what I want to hear!" My spirit is lifted up again and I'm praising God and I'm rejoicing, I'm smiling and I'm happy.

When you are in an environment with the church, you meet other people that lift you up, that give you an encouraging word. I have friends who are believers who are a very strong source of support for me in terms of just being able to say, "I am struggling. Things are just not going well at all." Not only do they share words of encouragement, they might just say, "You know

what, we're stopping by for an evening of prayer. Let's just have some prayer time and invite the Holy Spirit to just take charge." That just refreshes your soul. It gives you enough, picks you up enough to carry on another load. It keeps on doing that until you get to a place where you're now solid on your own; on your own with your faith; so my church family is a source of strength for me. It's like you have a plant and you refuse to water the plant. The plant is going to die. But when the plant is being watered every time, it blossoms and it's beautiful. So that's how the Christian faith is like. My coming to Canada, if I had not attached myself to a church family, going to church, hearing the Word of God... The Bible says that iron sharpens iron, you hear the word of God, you listen to the word of God, thereby you're also growing in your faith. You're not just sitting at home. No, you have to keep the relationship because by doing that, you're building your faith. So since I came here, yes, my church family has helped me to build my faith up to the level that I am right now because if I had not joined them, and listened to the Word of God, I wouldn't have been where I am today I'll say. Going there has inspired me in so many ways and the most important thing is it is building my faith spiritually. So that's really helped me. With my life experiences I have been given lots of opportunities to see the hand of God and that's what I draw back upon when troubles come again. I've come to realize with my experience with God that I can't be well if my spiritual life is not well.

7.1 Weaving Spirituality into Wellness

The narrative above provides a vivid illustration of the significance of spirituality in the participants' lives. It reveals how the women's experiences of wellness are inseparable from their Christian faith. It also demonstrates, similar to the literature reviewed (Adams et al., 2000; Keller & Foster, 2008; Miller & Foster, 2010; Roscoe, 2009), that the participants understood wellness as a multidimensional, integrated, and holistic concept. The ensuing analysis highlights these

interconnections using Roscoe's (2009) multi-dimensional construct of wellness: physical, emotional (psychological), social, intellectual, occupational (vocational), and spiritual. Because spirituality dominated my participants' stories of wellness, I combine it with my discussions of each of these facets to demonstrate how it is woven into their overall wellness. I have also employed Ingersoll's (1998) ten dimensional framework of spiritual wellness to provide deeper insight into the ways in which faith fosters wellness. Like the previous chapter on immigration and African diasporic women's experiences, the ensuing analysis not only references Modupe's narrative as the prototypical exemplar of my interviewees' experiences, but it is also coupled with in-text verbatim quotes from the interview transcripts. This is done in order to expand upon the women's conceptualization and experiences of spirituality and wellness as presented in the narrative as well as deepen the reader's understanding of how the women made sense of their world and why they believed and behaved as they did (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006).

7.1.1 A Word on Environmental Wellness: Redundancy or a Distinct Construct?

Among the various dimensions of wellness, environmental wellness seems to be the least discussed in the literature. For instance, in Roscoe's (2009) review of the literature on the different theories of wellness, only one study from her sample included it as part of their theoretical construct. Beyond the traditional understanding of environmental concerns: pollution, conservation, and nature (Renger et al., 2000), which my participants did not discuss, there is a lack of conceptual clarity as to how this domain is distinct from the other facets, namely occupational and social aspects of wellness. In the sole study that did incorporate environmental wellness in Roscoe's (2009) review, Renger et al. (2000) spoke of it in terms of work-life balance and the individual's relationship between nature and community resources. In my view, with the exception of the nature aspect, the conceptualization of environmental wellness is

redundant due to the emphasis placed on work-life balance and community resources. Such features speak to aspects of occupational and social wellness, each of which is discussed below in relation to the women's experiences. Thus, for these reasons, while environmental wellness was a part of Roscoe's framework of wellness, I have not included this dimension in my analysis.

7.1.2 Physical Wellness: Biblical Guidance and Divine Intervention

At first glance it appears that Modupe's narrative was not particularly concerned with physical wellness as of the main activities identified as contributing to it were not mentioned, specifically physical activity and nutrition. Beyond their multidimensional definition of wellness (i.e. consisting of physical, spiritual, emotional/mental elements), only five participants overtly discussed these features of physical wellness and even they only spoke of it in passing without elaborating on its significance. For example, Gloriose stated:

> Although I don't feel like I'm not well physically, I just feel that I could be better. Something I should do really. I should cut on my sodium intake or I should reduce some weight even though I don't have any medical … I don't have high blood pressure or any heart diseases or those kinds of things. It's just about recognizing that I'm not as physically active as I probably should be, but I'm not bothered by it.

Gloriose's comment reveals her awareness of public messages around physical activity and diet that make us health conscious citizens (Ayo, 2012). In spite of healthism's pervasiveness (Crawford, 1980), Gloriose gave the impression she has not deeply internalized it. I drew this conclusion based on her tone, body language, and her expression that it is something she is "not bothered by."

Abiloa also briefly referenced physical activity and weight as areas on which she could improve. Like Gloriose, her demeanour suggested she was indifferent on the issue: "I mean, I could go to the gym more, lose a pound or two more but, yeah." Similarly, Edith and Linda

spoke of "eat[ing] healthy" and "exercise" as things that they could do to improve their wellness, but they offered little elaboration on the relevance of these activities in their lives. In contrast to Modupe's narrative, Shiloh spoke at length to the significance of physical activity and wellness to her and connected this to her faith:

> We have an older woman here in the church, like a mom figure for a lot of us. She goes to the gym she's been going to the gym for six years. She works out, she's very strong. You wouldn't believe she's old but she's stronger than everyone. She runs faster than everyone and she always says being a Christian is not just about talking about it you have to live it. You have to take care of your body, you have to as a result of being a Christian these are the things that you have to do. She was … it was almost like preaching but it was just a comment she made, but she's very passionate about it.
>
> It just makes me realize, you know what, as a Christian this is what God gave us to help take care of our body. What God gave you - everything with your talents, with your knowledge, with everything, you have to take care of it. It shows your respect to what he did. If you are abusing yourself, you are actually disrespecting God, so by the way you show your respect and being responsible is how you treat yourself and how you treat your body. Everything, whether it be physically, spiritually, emotionally. With the physical, just working out and being fit, you don't have to be a professional athlete. You have to make sure that you are not wasting away I guess if that's the right word…. you have to be responsible with what God invested in you in regards to everything.

Shiloh was the only participant who expressed a dedicated commitment to exercising. She was also the youngest of the cohort (in her early twenties), unmarried, and the only participant without children. These factors may play a role in her dedication to working out: she presumably would have more time and less obligations compared to the participants who had young children. The connection she drew between taking care of herself physically and honouring God draws attention to the integration of her faith in her understanding of wellness. For Shiloh, being physically well was a sign of respect for what God has given her.

While most of the women, with the exception of Shiloh, did not extensively discuss the roles of physical activity or nutrition as important contributors to their physical wellness beyond referential mention of it, Roscoe (2009) explained that maintaining a healthy lifestyle through harm-avoidance behaviour and seeking medical care are also important attributes of physical

wellness. In this sense, the women did maintain healthy lifestyles by abstaining from things that could be physically harmful such as excessive alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs. This finding is consistent with what Oman and Thoresen (2002) as well as Seybold and Hill (2001) theorized pertaining to the mechanisms at play in the spirituality and religion – health and wellness connection; that is that health and wellness can be positively influenced by health promoting behaviours influenced by one's religious commitment. Again, the women's faith was shown to be an intricate part of their decision to maintain such lifestyles as revealed by Florence:

> Before I became a Christian, I didn't particularly enjoy the taste of alcohol but I had had alcohol. Some of my friends would drink. Perhaps if I wasn't a Christian, I would have delved into that aspect of things because there was no restraint.

In addition to abstaining from harmful behaviours, the women also sought out medical treatment and advice as needed. This was demonstrated in Modupe's narrative of conception, pregnancy, and the loss of a child. However, also as indicated by Modupe, seeking health care was coupled with seeking divine intervention into their circumstances. While Modupe received prayer at a healing service at a local church to be healed from infertility, other participants also described God's intervention into their physical wellness. For instance, Edith explained how she spent a lot of time in the hospital due to a slew of health problems ranging from asthma to epilepsy. In response to the question 'in what ways has her life changed since she has embraced her faith?' she responded:

> I used to have a bunch of diseases. They are all gone. I used to have asthma, epilepsy, gosh, you name it.... I was always in and out of the hospital 24/7. And it just pssft suddenly, gone. It's like that never even happened all my life.... And God is good.

Esther, who at the time of the interview was experiencing a health problem, explained that since moving to Canada she had been diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder called mixed connective tissue disease which for her was triggered by cold weather.

> I have a challenging time in winter because I've been diagnosed with mixed connective tissue disease, it's an autoimmune disease.... Numb fingers and I can't use my hands because of the cold. If I put them in cold water, my goodness, it's like burning me. All my body will be sore in the morning when it's cold. I have to cover my body during the winter. I can't go outside without gloves, even sometimes going to the church. My husband has to really heat the car before and I will run and get in the car and make sure I have gloves on.

While her physical wellness was impeded by this disease, her faith has also afforded her the support to manage it. Unlike Edith and Modupe, Esther did not experience 'supernatural' healing from her disease, however, she explained that she experienced God's intervention in it through other means. She attributed the move to a relatively warmer part of Canada that her and her family were about to make due to a job transfer as an answer to prayer:

> Like Victoria. It's not cold. Another answer from God, we didn't look for that job, it came to us, we were praying since November. Telling God, I don't know what you are expecting from me. You answered us to come here to Edmonton. You knew it's going to be cold here and I would have this health problem here. I didn't have that in Belgium. Now what do you want us to do? What do you want me to do with this kind of disease that can't support cold? I am freaking cold in Edmonton. We've been praying and I said, maybe God is challenging my faith. I will pray that I will be healed in Jesus name.We've been praying for that. Instead of healing me, he said move. In the beginning I didn't want to do that because it was like ... I was running away. I didn't want to run. I wanted to show God I was strong. I can stay here and handle this and he was telling us every day through praying, through preaching that he wants us to move to Victoria. God is amazing.

Through the above representations, spirituality can be seen as an important determinant of physical wellness for this group of women. Their faith provided them a guide to acceptable behaviour within a Christian framework, such as not drinking alcohol to excess. Such guiding principles reinforce practices that are commonly understood to be part of a healthy lifestyle. Furthermore, while the women embraced traditional health care services in attending to their physical health (i.e. using doctors) they also employed non-mainstream practices in line with their Christian faith to bring about physical healing and thus enhance their wellness as demonstrated by Modupe's use of prayer during a healing service. Whilst such prayers were not

always answered as anticipated and thus did not always result in physical healing, as in the case of Esther, the women's faith can still be seen as affording them the necessary resources and support to manage their health situations. For example, Esther's autoimmune disease was not cured, but by relocating to a warmer environment her disease would be triggered less. In this regard, spirituality can enhance physical wellness by providing a guide to a healthy lifestyle based on moral standards and deep-seated values. In addition to using traditional health care to address personal health issues, God is also seen as a healer and a significant resource in one's ability to manage and cope with physical health challenges.

7.1.3 Social Wellness: Faith, Family, and Friendships

Social wellness entails having quality relationships among family, friends, and the community at large (Miller & Foster, 2010). As Modupe's narrative also revealed, family stood out as a very important aspect of the women's wellness. While friends and community relationships were also important to them, the family unit superseded these other relationships in terms of significance and impact upon their wellness. Their role as mothers, entailed being "the heartbeat of the home" (Gloriose). This also involved playing a major function in ensuring that everyone within the family unit was doing well along the multidimensional facets of wellness.

Again, their faith played an essential role in how they experienced their relationships. It provided them with direction as to how to relate with their husbands, children, friends, and colleagues. As the Modupe narrative illustrated, the women raised their children to have a personal faith in God as they believed it provided their children with both a powerful resource to cope with life's challenges and sound guidance in their decision making. Thus, the women proactively ensured that their children "owned the faith" for themselves. As Abiola explained: "I need them to own it. It's not a culture. It's a personal faith". Accordingly, participants wanted a

family-friendly church where they and their families could grow spiritually and be fed the Word of God (i.e., a Bible based church). Abiola discussed further the importance of a family-friendly environment within her local church:

> The children play together. I like to volunteer in the Sunday school. It's just amazing. It's broken down in a way that the children understand. They have their own services on Tuesdays and Fridays. Tuesdays they have their cell group [small groups that meet for Bible study]. On Fridays, they have their bigger group. I think that's something that's made it that even as a teenager, I didn't feel like I was missing anything because I mean, teenagers want to have parties, right? We had our parties in church, or we danced to our Christian music... rapping, we did ours but all within the context of our faith and they crave that environment. When you go there, when I go and drop by, their music is so loud but it's what they need at this time so they crave that environment but within the safety of their faith....
>
> I mean the Bible talks about, it says, "Young man, enjoy your youth," right, but also joined with it is for the young to be wise and listen to the.… God isn't foolish. He created us. He knows what it's like. Someone saying that "Oh, a teenage boy is … he's interested in girls. Teenage girls interested in boys." What do you expect? It's an expectation that that would happen. Their hormones are raging. They're supposed to feel that way, but give them a safe environment to transition and that's what I see in my church. It creates that safe environment for them to transition.... Don't judge them. Don't try and cage them or … For me that's everything, it's so important that, yeah, so my church meets everyone's needs.

Gayle (2011) similarly found that African Canadian women fostered their children's spirituality as they transferred their faith from one generation to the next. This can be seen as an important aspect of maintaining a 'healthy' family unit as the spiritual resources the women passed down to their children were their way of equipping them for life with all of its challenges and needed direction.

Raising their children in the faith held significant implications for the participants' wellness. Knowing that their children had a personal relationship with God or that they would develop one as they grew older provided the women with a great sense of peace and joy. This is because, as stated above, they believed their faith would offer their children essential resources and guidance for their lives. This was illustrated in Modupe's narrative as she expressed

gratefulness that her teenage child knew she could turn to God to help her cope with issues and seek direction. This was also contrasted in the narrative with the difficulties the women saw some other people face, including children and youth, and not knowing who or what they could turn to that would truly help them. As mothers, their children's sense of wellness greatly impacted upon their own; therefore, knowing that their children had a Christian foundation in which to grow upon afforded them great comfort.

Because Christian spirituality is deeply rooted in personal relationships for many African diasporic women (Musgrav et al., 2002), the social impact of the participants' faith also extended beyond the family structure. The women's social wellness was additionally dependent on fostering meaningful relationships within the local church whereby they could experience fellowship among a community of believers. Sade expressed this when she noted:

> First of all I attend church because that is the way for me to connect with people of the same faith and the Bible also recommends it that we fellowship with fellow Christians because in doing so it helps us to be grounded in our faith and it helps us when we are discouraged, there are other people there to encourage us. It's much more important to fellowship with other Christians and to learn about the Word of God because you can't just sit at home by yourself and think you are going to know it. Even though there are so many things on the internet, yeah but you cannot just be … you cannot survive alone being a Christian. You need other people along with you, in your faith in your walk with God. You need other people to teach you about the Word of God.

As demonstrated through Modupe's narrative, while the women were givers of social support, they were also willing to receive it from fellow Christians. Such support helped them to grow and be strengthened in their faith. This is important in that their faith formed the foundation for their lives. Further to this, an important aspect of social wellness entails reciprocal relationships based on giving and receiving social support (Roscoe, 2009).

The participants' faith also positively influenced their larger social environments, including at work and with friends. Through their faith they supported others through prayer and

counsel, as well as volunteered in their local churches and conducted themselves at a high moral standard in public and private spheres. As Florence explained in regards to her faith:

> I know it helps to keep my marriage together. It helps to keep my home together. It helps me to be disciplined when I'm out of the home. My discipline, I believe others see that and it affords me that respect that is due.
>
> When I'm at work, people do say to me there's something different about you in a positive way. Even about two days ago, this lady … I don't see myself as smiling all the time. I don't smile all the time but I get people saying to me, "You just got something around you. There's an aura around you that attracts people to you." People just want to talk to you....
>
> A lady came there the other time … we spoke for a while because I wasn't too busy. She was able to tell me things. She spoke and she told me things. I find that people at work, in general. In general, people open up and tell me things that … but when they do, I feel the Lord leading me to say something or to encourage them. I don't think it just happens by chance. She just told me things that I don't think she'd shared with other people. Things touch me. I don't know. I think maybe sometimes things touch me more than it does other people. I'm able to empathize and talk.…
>
> I know that this is only because of Christ in me … I know that I'm not the best pharmacist but I know Christ in me helps me to give out and radiate something that helps people. It's because of Christ in me, the patience that I can give to people when I'm not naturally a patient person but Christ does things in me. Being a Christian helps me at home, helps me at work, helps me when I'm meeting new people, helps me in how I behave. Even in the grocery store, helps me how I'd behave when I'm in a lineup, helps me in my thoughts when I'm in a lineup, helps me how to treat your average person that I meet. It's everything.

The women's spiritual faith, thus, is not just a private matter for them and their families, social wellness; (Miller & Foster, 2010) their daily social interactions represented them as Christ's "ambassadors" who demonstrated love by being patient and kind, withholding judgement, and serving others. In this way they embraced what Gilkes (2001) described as Christian ministry: "service to, with, and on behalf of 'the least of these'" (p. 197). Through such ministry they lifted up not only themselves from potential despair, but also others in their social networks and thus demonstrated an ability to foster healthy social relationships.

7.1.4 Emotional Wellness: Peace with Christian Conversion

Modupe's story offers a depiction of how the women's spiritual faith has had a profound positive impact on their emotional sense of wellness. The narrative begins with a reflection of how in the midst of great psychological distress, Modupe was able to turn to her faith to pull her through an emotional crisis. It tells about the strength, confidence, and hope that she possessed as result of her faith. In essence, it is a narrative of the participants' ability to successfully cope with the multifarious challenges that life entails through their Christian faith.

As explained in the narrative, it was the women's conversion into Christianity that precipitated a total transformation in their lives whereby they experienced self-transcendence into a heightened understanding of God and the type of life that he has ordained for them. In other words, their conversion marked a point of departure whereby they began to develop a gradual understanding of what it meant to be a Christian. Florence, for example, recalled:

> I became a Christian at university. Year, I don't know, maybe about 1993-'94. As a child, we used to go to church but I didn't really understand what it meant to be a Christian....When I heard the Word and when I heard the message, I knew that that is what I needed to do and give my life to Christ. At the time, I had a desire to read the Word of God and to get to know more about God.

Included in their conversion experiences was the realization that they could have a personal and intimate relationship with God. This spiritual connection, which reflects the root meaning of the word religion, to bind together (Hill et al., 2000; Schultze, 2010), was manifested through their emotional sense of wellness. Edith highlighted the significance of this human-divine relationship: "So we were just pretty much a religious family [speaking to her pre-conversion experience] but I received Christ when I became 17 years of age and it has changed me completely to have a very personal relationship with my own God." Like Modupe's story demonstrated, all the women's narratives noted this key element of having a personal

relationship with God as the defining feature of being Christians and central to their lives. This aligns with the social science literature that describes Christian spirituality in terms of self-transcendence and having a personal relationship with the divine (Hamilton-Mason et al., 2012; Mattis, 2002; Musgrave et al., 2002). The transcendent life is characterized by "a relationship of the whole person to a personal God and to other people that is imbued with deep moral and ethical implications" (Musgrave et al., 2002, p.57).

The women spoke of "God's amazing transformation" in their lives and shared the various ways they have turned from former ways of living that obstructed their well-being to a life more conducive to their wellness. Florence reflected upon the change in her emotional state as a result of this transformation:

> I know that this (i.e. the transformation in her life) is only because of Christ in me because if I didn't have Christ in me, before, I used to be the most miserable person ever. No, seriously, before I became a Christian, inside, I was very miserable.

Anna also highlighted the transformative nature of her conversion and the impact it has had on her emotional wellness in terms of peace and hope:

> Before I was a Christian, if I get angry I may not even speak to people for a long time, but when I became a Christian I would do… in fact when I was in poly someone offended me, I even went back to her and said I'm sorry. Everyone in the room was saying "why do you have to say sorry?" I said "because I don't want any problems, I just want peace to reign." Since I became a Christian there is a lot things that people will do that I'll just overlook but when I was a non-believer I would fight back, but as a child of God I will just over look it because I know I have Christ in me the hope of glory so I don't need to fight anymore.

These depictions of the participants' lives pre- and post-conversion speaks to what Igboin (2013) described as the transformation that ought to take place in the convert's moral, mental (i.e. emotional/psychological), and spiritual nature involving public displays of high moral character. My participants' faith afforded them peace in place of misery, contention, and discord. This speaks to the positive effect their spirituality has had toward their emotional wellness. The notion

of peace is a consistent theme found within the literature investigating the role of spirituality and religion in the lives of Black women. Numerous studies have identified spirituality as essential to many African diasporic women's psychological and emotional wellbeing (Ellison, 1995; Fry, 2001; Grundmann, 2013; Koenig, 2009, Musick, Koenig, Hays, & Cohen, 1998). Anna's explanation for her decision to resist her natural impulse to fight back when offended is not a reflection of passivity, but can be understood as the self-transcendent heightened understanding she has come to through her faith and the corresponding biblical teachings on such issues.

As noted above, a key element in the women's conversion experiences was an ongoing process of a personal and intimate relationship with God, the rebinding of broken relationships between God, humanity, and themselves (Shultze, 2010). The participants' relationship with the Divine is implicated in the numerous references they made about the character of God throughout the interviews. These included, but are not limited to, a God who directs them, will not give them more than they can handle, is in control of their lives, will see them through difficult times, has a plan and purpose for their lives, is all powerful, is a personal Saviour, is a Helper, is forgiving, and provides strength, wisdom, knowledge, and the confidence to be oneself. Thus, Modupe's depiction as having a positive view of self, life's circumstances, and the future, as well as being able to cope with stresses, remain grounded, and become self-actualizing, are all important facets of emotional wellness (Roscoe, 2009) and stemmed from their characterization and understanding of God. For example, Sade spoke of the direction she receives from God: "when I need direction I can pray and God can direct me; I have direction for my life." Tola spoke of the help that she received from God: "when things are not exactly going the way I want them to, I just remember that you know what, just leave it to God, you know. Cast your burdens upon him and let him do his work." Abiola noted: "I'm confident ... because I

know that God is with me. He is walking with me, front, back, everywhere, so why am I afraid? I don't need to be afraid."

While this study does not employ a womanist theoretical approach, it is useful to note that womanist scholars, who have traditionally studied Christian African American women's experiences, have explained that their relationship with God has often fostered an understanding of Jesus as divine Co-sufferer, Co-labourer, Liberator, and One who empowers the weak (Baker-Fletcher, 1998; Douglas, 1994; Grant, 1993; Terrell, 1998; Williams, 1993). In other words, the divine-human relationship has traditionally been experienced by such women as one in which Jesus Christ is intimately involved in every facet of their lives working alongside them through the challenges of life and through the victories. The participants' daily intimate relationship with God has afforded them an understanding of God that it has deeply impacted their emotional wellness for the better. Womanist scholars such as Delores Williams (1993) have also further explained that Black women's relationship with God is profound because of the assurance that they can experience survival, quality of life, and wholeness in the "wilderness" of life – all of which translates to wellness. The participants, thus, were able to remain focused on their ambitions and hopeful that they would achieve them:

> I think through my time with God I reinforced it to myself that my steps are ordered by the Lord. I'm here because it's God's will. If I'm here because it is God's will and I have to do this, then God will give me the ability to be able to do it. He will endow me with the strength that.... (Florence)

In this light, Modupe's narrative that depicted her daily partnership with God through her devotions and in her day-to-day activities, is emblematic of the women's spiritual practices which greatly fostered their emotional wellness. They displayed their God-inspired confidence as agents of change in their settlement process, workplace, reaching professional goals, and establishing a home for themselves and their families in a new country. It was their relationship

with God that also enabled them to practice what Mitchem (1998) has termed a non-self-absorbed agency. In other words, they perceived their ability to act autonomously not based on their own self-reliance but as dependent upon God:

> He is the one that I look to to be able to do what I need to do. He is the one that gives me the strength to do what I need to do. He is the one that imparts wisdom and knowledge to me that allows me to be able to share with others. He is the one that has given me the gifts that I have, that I can exercise with other people. (Gloriose)

The divine-human partnership has enabled the women to significantly change the conditions of their lives as well as others in both tangible and intangible ways. The belief that "prayer changes things" as noted by Julia, was as a major resource they utilized to effect positive outcomes conducive to wellness. The participants' testimonials clearly illustrated the effects of their divine communion (Appendix F offers five samples of these lived experiences). Modupe's story offered one such example of a lived experience testimonial in the narrative of conception and loss.

The participants' testimonials trace their lived experiences as they journey through life and the challenges that it brings in concert with the Divine. It is through their daily trials and tribulations that many African diasporic women have come to know God as the One who "makes a way out of no way" (Coleman, 2008, p. 33). Coleman (2008) explained that, through God's presentation of unforeseen possibilities in conjunction with human initiative, the believer is able to confront and challenge the circumstances that threaten her wellness and attain the necessary resources for her quality of life.

Similar to Modupe's testimonial of infertility, the five sample testimonies share a number of common themes to illustrate how my interviewees confronted events impeding their emotional wellness. For example, prayer – or communication with God, was a dominant theme woven throughout their experiences. The women were reliant on God to bring about deliverance from

their hardship however were also active participants in their emancipation as they vigorously sought him and/or obeyed what they believed to be his instructions concerning their situation. While the women all experienced emotional hardship through such experiences, because the concept of wellness is dynamic, fluid, multidimensional, and holistic (Adams et al., 2000; Corbin & Pangrazi, 2001; Harari, 2005; Miller & Foster, 2010; Roscoe, 2009), jeopardy in one area could also compromise other areas as well.

When confronted with adversity, the women formed strategic partnerships with the Divine. They employed spiritual tools such as prayer, divine dreams, and visions to help them resist and overcome the deleterious circumstances in which they found themselves. Through their spiritual faith, the women were able to positively change the conditions of their lives. For example, Julia rejected the doctor's report that her unborn child would be deformed and declared "power must change hands!" She called on the community of believers to join her in communal prayer in her struggle to restore wellness for her and her family. Cynthia had a vision of the anger she had toward her father and felt compelled to forgive him for the abuse he inflicted on her mother. Her decision to yield to that feeling, which she perceived came from God, set the stage for her own emotional healing and, "the transformation of [her] life." Esosa was overwhelmed with the thought of having a third child because she believed it would hinder her goals of returning to school and progressing in life. She was comforted by what she interpreted was a divine dream whereby God gave her the assurance that he would help her. These examples demonstrate how the women in this study relied on their spirituality to help them across a diverse set of circumstances in order to restore wellness to themselves and their loved ones. Their decision to rely on their spirituality, whether in crying out to God in prayer, daring to ask him for that which seemed out of reach, trusting him with their emotional pain and overwhelming

circumstances that he would bring forth a favourable outcome, were all active conscious decisions born out of a relationship with the Divine.

Thus, as Williams (1993) points out, African diasporic women's meeting with God has done more than strengthen faith and provide survival resources: it generates a new faith-consciousness and guides into ways of being, interpreting, and acting in the world (Williams, 1993). Their negative life conditions were transformed by believing their relationship with God trumps social conditions (Floyd-Thomas, 2006). In charting their emotional well-being, and indeed their overall wellness, I must note how faith overrides socially acceptable rational thought in the lives of Christian Black women (Floyd-Thomas, 2006). The experiences of African diasporic women can help researchers see how spirituality enables Black women of faith to resist, deal with, and overcome that which would be a hindrance to their wellness and become whole.

7.1.5 Intellectual and Occupational Wellness: "For those things God has given me so much confidence so I excel in the country I was not even born"

Intellectual and occupational wellness are discussed here concurrently due to the interconnected relationship between the two constructs in my participants' lives. Indeed, all dimensions of wellness are highly interrelated (Adams et al., 1997; Dunn, 1977; Kirsten et al., 2009; Roscoe, 2009). However, the participants' unique experiences as immigrant women amplified the connection between intellectual and occupational wellness in that much of their initial intellectual pursuits in Canada were motivated by a desire to attain employment that utilized their skills, talents, and interests, all characteristics of occupational wellness (Roscoe, 2009).

Similar to Modupe's first narrative, many of the participants returned to school upon their arrival in Canada in order to achieve the necessary Canadian credentials to realize their professional goals and thus enhance their personal development. The women frequently cited this process as one of the most challenging aspects of their immigration experience. Yet throughout the interviews it was evident that their faith provided them with significant support to pursue their vocational aspirations. This in turn enabled them to achieve careers of their choosing that were both satisfying and enriching to their lives and thus supported this area of their personal wellness. For example, Cynthia explained how her faith in God gave her the "confidence" to further her education in pursuit of her occupational goals in the midst of opposition. She credits her spirituality for her ability to follow "the right path" and "excel" in a foreign land.

> It [referring to her Christian faith] has really helped me not to be scared, not to run away from challenges or from risks. Just go out there and believe you can. In my dictionary right now I don't have the spirit of 'I can't'. That's just … I don't have it. No matter how difficult that thing is…. Let me use one example. When I was thinking about going back to school and I was telling them, "I'd love to work in the government sector," and one of the ladies was there who … It's not even one or two people that said it to me, "Oh you can't. You can't. You're a Black person. They don't take Black people." I said, "Really?" "No, you'll have to be a citizen. You have to do this." They said all this just to discourage me and I was like, "Hmm, you have just boosted my spirit. Now I'll go and do it."….
>
> My first year… If you want to do your practical for the child and youth services, children services. We were I think 39 of us in a class. They told us specifically that they need only 14 people. Over 20 like 28 people applied to go for child and youth services to do their program. They only picked 14 of us, and I was the only Black person chosen. They said, "You know what, we want you there. We know you can do something." "Okay," and other Black people that are … they didn't take them. They said, "We want you, we want you." I said, "Okay." The God in me like, "Yeah, you can do it," and like, "Oh let's do this, let's do that."….
>
> The Spirit of God in me is the one leading me telling me, "Yeah, you can excel anywhere." I did all the interviews and some of the students were panicking… "Ah, oh, do you think they will take me?" I said, "I don't care if it's me because I've got God in me. If God wants me to go there, I will go there. If he doesn't want me to go then maybe there's one … I don't care. I will go anywhere and I will stand out." Boom! They sent me an email, "Congratulations! You are one us," "Okay, thank you."

> For those things God has given me so much confidence so I excel in the country I was not even born, I didn't have family members here, it's just me, my husband and my kids. I've been blessed and I know that part of the reason why I'm blessed is God. Knowing God, who he is and having faith in him that he will be there for me, he will lead me to the right path of life. It's very huge for me and I'm blessed to know God.

The inspiration the women had to persist through the challenge of attaining their intellectual and occupational goals, which ultimately fostered their wellness in these areas and beyond, was the result of a deeply rooted internalization of their faith. They were able to persevere knowing that God was guiding and helping them along the way. Had they not internalized their faith in such a way, it is possible that the challenge of returning to school and starting their careers all over, particularly as middle-aged adults with children and spouses in a foreign land, may have proved too overwhelming to pursue. However, because the women attributed their success, not only in these domains of wellness but in other areas of life as well, to their spirituality, they expressed a desire to share their faith with others so that they too may experience the "gift" in which their faith has been. One arena in which this expression of gratitude and "passing on the baton" was highly notable was in the women's volunteering.

The contribution that one makes to the community outside of paid work is also an important feature of occupational wellness. Roscoe (2009, p. 221) explained:

> occupational wellness includes the contribution of one's unique skills and talents to the community in rewarding, meaningful ways through paid and unpaid work.... it entails the extent to which one can express individual values and gain personal satisfaction and enrichment from paid and nonpaid work

Thus, one need not be employed in the paid workforce to experience optimum levels of occupational wellness, volunteerism can also foster this. Though all but one of the women did participate in the labour market, many of them were also active in volunteer work that enabled them to express their Christian values and contribute to the community in meaningful and rewarding ways. Such volunteer work was carried out in the context of their faith mostly through

their local churches as Sunday school teachers, leaders of prayer groups, ushers, and other roles. This volunteerism did not only reflect their occupational wellness, but also their intellectual wellness in that they were able to impart valuable lessons to community members in the context of that which was most significant in their lives.

Sharing of knowledge and "wisdom" was also a significant aspect in the women's experience of motherhood that they revered. This was expressed by Modupe who

loved to "impart... wisdom" to her children, however she acknowledged the huge responsibility that it entailed. The participants' source of such knowledge and wisdom, like Modupe's, came from their faith: "it's impossible to talk about it [issues] without 'So, what does the Bible say about it?'" In addition to the Bible being a major source of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, other Christian-based books and audio messages via the internet, radio, and/or television were also important educational tools in the women's lives that they regularly sought. These spiritual educational resources along with their weekly church attendance helped the women to "grow spiritually" and fostered their intellectual wellness. The women's desire for continual spiritual growth by learning more about their faith was met to a large extent within the local church and through various Christian resources such as books, radio, television/online programs. Julia explained the importance of continual learning in the faith:

> ... we all learn each day. Sometimes you feel oh yes, I've gotten to the point that I don't want to learn any more. No. You can't, you can't. Just like I gave you an example of a flower that's not being watered, no matter how strong of a Christian you are, something still has to be filling you, which is the word of God. Either preaching, watching Christian movies, reading Christian books that will lift your faith, so that is a continuous process. We can't think that at this point of my life, I'm fine. I'm strong now I can relax, I don't need all this… No, that is when you are giving room for a disastrous thing to happen in your life. But as long as you keep firing on, keep reading, keep watching, listen to the Word of God, even if you don't have anything to read, get a Bible and read. God speaks to you, God ministers to you through that.

The desire to learn more about God and grow spiritually was a major impetus fueling the women's intellectual wellness. Their spiritual knowledge was used for their own personal development but also shared and used for the betterment of others. When used to help others this manifested in their everyday interactions but also in their volunteer activities whereby they were able to freely share Christian values and precepts in an environment where it was welcomed. As Christians, there is a call to share our faith which the women desired to answer, however, the social milieu which deems such proselytizing as inappropriate, unwelcomed, and an "infringement on another persons' space or right or faith" (Abiloa) can make it difficult to do so despite the longing. Similar to Modupe, the women observed that within Canada "the majority are not interested in the love of God and loving Him back" (Edith).

Having a welcoming and safe outlet to share one's faith via church-based volunteer opportunities can be especially beneficial to Christian women's sense of wellness on a number of grounds across the different domains of wellness.

Not only does the sharing of knowledge foster intellectual wellness, but when such knowledge is perceived to be highly meaningful and even life transforming as the women experienced, sharing that knowledge with others can facilitate emotional wellness by way of the self-satisfaction, contentment, and the happiness that comes from knowing one has helped another. This idea corresponds with the research literature on compassionate lifestyles which support the notion that it is more pleasurable to give than to receive and that showing compassion towards people is beneficial for both physical and mental well-being (Seppala, 2013). Because the type of volunteer work that the women performed generally involved developing connections and supporting people, enhanced social wellness can also be seen as a result. Research in the area of spirituality/religion and health/wellness, social determinants of

health, as well as in the field of compassionate studies have found that being socially connected is good for one's physical and emotional well-being. Social connectedness has been found to foster self-esteem, empathy, trust, and cooperativeness while also increasing longevity and reducing risk of cardiovascular and respiratory disease, depression, and anxiety (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010; Seppala, 2013). Thus, the synergistic manner in which the various domains of wellness interact and influence one another is evident, as is the significant impact their faith had in supporting their intellectual and occupational wellness.

7.1.6 Spiritual Wellness: "the essence of my life"

Throughout this chapter I have demonstrated how spirituality is a key feature woven into each facet of the women's multidimensional experience of wellness and is inseparable from any given aspect of their lives. This finding is consistent with other research evidence which has also demonstrated that for many African diasporic women, spirituality is "interwoven into all aspects of the self" (Wane, 2011, p. 168). However, findings are unique in that I demonstrate *how* spirituality is woven into women's experiences of wellness. While this has been shown through the various dimensions of wellness discussed above, the significance that spirituality and religion played in the participants' daily experiences warrants its own separate area of analysis.

Ingersoll's (1998) overview of the dimensions of spiritual wellness provides a useful guide for further outlining the role that spirituality played in the women's lives. As discussed in the literature review chapter, Ingersoll (1998) devised a ten dimensional framework of spiritual wellness that wasn't specific or limited to any one faith in its approach. In other words, the dimensions of spiritual wellness were not unique to Christianity but instead can be shared among different spiritual traditions. As previously stated, they included: (a) conception of the absolute or divine, (b) meaning, (c) connectedness, (d) mystery, (e) sense of freedom, (f) experience-

ritual-practice, (g) forgiveness, (h) hope, (i) knowledge-learning, and (j) present-centredness. While this framework is consistent with Roscoe's (2009) articulation of spiritual wellness, it also extends Roscoe's formulation. These characteristics were present throughout Modupe's narrative and will now be expanded by other participants' voices.

Conception of the absolute or divine. As Christian women the participants believed in a monotheistic God. This is important to note because they saw Jesus Christ alone as their Saviour and their relationship with him at the centre of their faith. As expressed in the narrative, the women strove to be more like Christ in their day-to-day lives. Sade's words demonstrate the centrality of Jesus Christ in their faith:

> Being a Christian to me means that someone has accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour and you have accepted what he came to do for you. His death, resurrection, the atonement, dying on the cross. Accepting that gift and asking Jesus to be your Lord and Saviour. That is what it means to me to be a Christian.

Beyond this basis of the Christian faith, the women's conceptualization of God was highly multifaceted, extensive, and holistic in that their experience of God extended to every aspect of their lives. To succinctly summarize their view of God, they saw him as omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent – in other words, all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-present. This was made evident throughout their extensive characterization of God based on their varied lived experiences. Despite the nature in which they perceived God, they also perceived him as highly personable and loving and interested in an intimate relationship with them. In short, they expressed that "God is good".

This interpretation of the divine is significant to understanding how spirituality is woven into wellness. By perceiving God as all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present, loving, good, and highly personable presents a boundless reservoir of hope that no matter the circumstance that the women faced, particularly that which could threaten their wellness, God knew, he was with

them, and he was able and willing to help them because of his love. This gave the women great inner peace even in the midst of trials and tribulations. Gloriose expressed this despite the personal life challenges that she was going through at the time of the interview:

> I feel right now at this very moment in my life if you look at the life situations that I'm experiencing, you would be … any person would be like, "Wow. How are you managing?" but yet I feel like I'm on top of the mountain. I feel like I can just jump up and down and just shout to the world how great my God is.
>
> I just feel like, "Who can I tell? What can I … Where should I … when can I go and just tell people of the goodness of my God?" but yet if you look at my tangible life incidents that are happening right now, you would absolutely be devastated, but yet I'm at a complete peacefulness; complete peacefulness, and like, okay, God is doing something. Everyday I'm expecting something great from God.

This notion of peace which was pervasive throughout the interviews relates with the next dimension of spiritual wellness which is meaning.

Meaning. Finding purpose and meaning in life is a common attribute often cited in the conceptualization of spirituality (Klassen, 2003; Thoresen & Harris, 2002; Watt, 2003). Ingersoll (1998) explained that meaning can be explicit in terms of what it is that makes life meaningful and gives it purpose and/or inexplicit characterized by "a sense that pervades one's experiences" (p. 160). He goes on to elaborate that often time meaning may be found through a sense of peace that one has with the very question of meaning itself. This sense of peace, as indicated above through Gloriose's account, was prevalent in the midst of crisis but was not limited to crisis and was a consistent feature among many of the women.

In addition to having peace, the women's sense of meaning, or that which made life meaningful for them, was wrapped up in having a personal relationship with God and living their lives in such a way as to foster that relationship. As Edith succinctly expressed, this relationship was at the "essence of [their] li[ves]". This corresponds with Thoresen and Harris' (2002) understanding of spirituality taken from the Latin roots 'spiritus' meaning 'the breath' which, as

outlined in the literature review, can refer to that which is most vital to life. Modupe's narrative provided some insight as to how the women went about fostering this essential relationship on a day-to-day basis – prayer, reading and studying the Bible, fellowshipping with other believers, and committing their daily activities as well as other issues they faced to God were some of the key practices they engaged in to support this relationship. Through this relationship the women found significance in their identity as "child[ren] of God" and believed that they were not sojourning through their lives alone but that they "ha[d] a high and mighty Father who [was] always there for [them]" (Hassanatou). Their relationship with God was also deeply meaningful in that they believed it was the key to their everlasting destination in heaven. This Devine-human relationship relates to Ingersoll's (1998) third dimension of spiritual wellness: connectedness.

Connectedness. This aspect of spiritual wellness is related to the idea of being connected, and for Christians, having a meaningful relationship with God and with other people. It is a key feature in the conceptualization of spirituality (Berkel et al., 2004; Hamilton-Mason et al., 2012; Mattis, 2002; Musgrave et al., 2002) and a key feature in the women's faith. In addition to having an intimate personal relationship with God, the women desired to have deep meaningful relationships with other believers. While they did enjoy fellowship among other Christians, some of the women recognized that having deep personal relationships among believers that extended outside of church services was an area in their spiritual wellness that could be improved upon. Jolene noted the importance of connectedness and going deeper in her Christian relationships.

> Faith can be personal, it can also be with a group, and I think it's important when you live your personal faith you also need to live it in a group with other people. This is very important. This is something I lack a little bit here in Canada with people because they don't' go deeper in the spiritual life with the average person, they share in the church and outside the church you don't see it really.

Part of the reason for the lack of spiritual connectedness with other believers was attributed to the "individualistic" lifestyle and a "spiritual coldness" they found in Canada as previously discussed. This was detrimental to this facet of their wellness as their faith was the most significant aspect of their lives and therefore they longed to be able to share and discuss it outside of regular church services. As portrayed in the Modupe story, contrary to their native lands, the women found talking about God to be a rarity in Canada outside of a church service. Consistent and frequent opportunities to relate with others in the context of one's faith can be very valuable to one's sense of wellness in that such connections afford a greater sense of self-congruency whereby one is able to share and conduct oneself in a manner according to his/her deepest beliefs, values, and worldview. As Florence expressed, such would lead to less of a "schizophrenic" type of existence "for lack of a better word".

Not only would deeper social connections within a community of believers foster greater self-congruency with one's innermost convictions and outward expressions of it, it would also provide greater edification. In speaking to this, Gloriose noted the important distinction between encouragement from someone who shares the same worldview and a person who does not. In reference to "friends that are believers" she explains: "Yes, because that makes a difference. Anybody can give an encouraging word. If it's just an encouraging word that's coming from someone who just believes in the sky or something, it's not the same". Christian social connections were differentiated from secular social relationship in that the former shared the same core values, principles, beliefs, and worldview that guided their lives. It is these foundational premises rooted in their Christian faith that guided their lives. While the women enjoyed meaningful deep relationships with other Christian believers, for some of them, there was a desire to experience more of this, particularly outside of formal church settings.

Mystery. As referenced in the literature review, this element of spiritual wellness deals with one's capacity to deal with "ambiguity, the unexplained, and the uncertainty of life" (Ingersoll, 1998, p. 160). This ability was demonstrated in the Modupe narrative through Gloriose's experience of infertility, receiving prayer for healing, which she described as a "powerful experience", becoming pregnant, having a healthy pregnancy, carrying her child full term, experiencing a divine dream, finding out that her unborn child had died, and coming out of such an experience with a "stronger" faith and ability to still "praise" God. Clearly, Gloriose's experience of illness, healing, new life, and death within the context of her spiritual faith was marked with ambiguity, the unexplained, and the fragility of life. However, through the process, such experience did not weaken her faith, but rather it strengthened her faith as it made it "more personal" as she came to "kn[o]w that the hand of God was in [her] life".

Ingersoll (1998) provided the caveat that this dimension of spiritual wellness may be more of a reflection of spiritual maturity. That is, an ability to remain steadfast in the faith despite not having all the answers, a full understanding of one's circumstance, or certain issues not working out as anticipated. Through such disappointments, heartaches, and perceived setbacks, spiritually mature Christians are able to remain resolute in their faith and trust in God. Thus, the women did experience hardships and disappointments of various kinds in their lives, things that they did not understand, but through them they maintained a "persistent", persevering, and unwavering faith. Esosa expressed this unrelenting faith as she reflected upon personal challenges and disappointments she was going through at the time of the interview:

> I must say to you, right now I'm going through some things that are really beyond me and it makes me … I'm not going to waiver, but it makes me question, why is this happening to me? Why me? I'm just hopeful and I'm believing that everything is going to be fine and I'm not going to waiver. There is this thing my mother used to say, "if you believe in something and it's not working, why don't you try something else?" ... I'm Catholic, there are some people that I know for sure, they don't even come to church except for

> like festive periods or when things are really happening in the Christian faith like Easter or Christmas, but things are really working for them well; but I hold on to my God, I believe so much in Him. I volunteer myself; I participate in some church activities. I'm more into it, I'm in a group called Couples for Christ, we go for evangelism and all that; but I see some people that are not so close to God and things are really happening well for them and for me it just seems like things are not working well. I don't know why but I'm just going to hold on to that....
>
> I'm not going to waiver, we're just going to hold on to him, we're going to hold on to our faith and with God everything is possible. For sure, he's always been there, even if it seems like he's not there right now, just at a flash, things will just happen. There's just a thin line between life and death and there's this thin line between, things can really work for you and things can really just bring you down. It could happen just in the blink of an eye, it's not impossible. Don't waiver, just be persistent and everything will be fine...

Sense of freedom. This domain relates to one's capacity for all types of play and freedom from internal and external coercion (Ingersoll, 1998). The women's ability to play was most notable within the family context as depicted in Modupe's narrative through her account of playing musical instruments, singing, and praising God with her family. As mothers, the women also enjoyed "play[ing] with [their] kids". However, as also illustrated in Modupe's story, the women felt constrained within mainstream Canadian churches where, as they explained, they could not express their spirituality freely. They longed to dance freely and express their emotions without restraint characteristics to African styles of worship. They also desired to speak freely about their personal faith outside the church. Although they found these external restrictions stifling their spiritual wellness to some degree, they accepted the different styles of veneration as part of the culture they were now living in. They were able to mediate these restrictions to some level by engaging in freedom of worship within the private sphere of their homes.

Experience-ritual-practice. This dimension concerns the spiritual practices and rituals that foster wellness in a person's life and the experiences that accompany such activity (Ingersoll, 1998). It is proactive in nature and the energy involved is directed toward some sort of experience or activity (Ingersoll, 1998). Modupe's narrative illustrated how the participants daily

engaged in such spiritual rituals and practices in her description of a typical day. Daily prayers were ubiquitous among the women and were not only engaged in during a time of quiet and seclusion but also throughout their daily activities and encounters; the women were in constant commune with God. Florence provided an example of this ongoing communication:

> I talk to God. Sometimes like I'm talking to you. People think it's crazy, but I don't do it outside. Or sometimes in my mind, I'm talking with the Lord and saying, "Oh, Lord, did I really think that? That was terrible. How could I think that? Sorry, Lord. Forgive me. Help me to think better." Nobody else is seeing but I know what is going on.

In addition to prayer, reading and studying the Bible, attending church services, and engaging in volunteer activities were some of the other common spiritual practices and rituals the participants engaged in which were intentional and experience oriented. Such activities were extremely significant in the women's lives as they were essential to fostering their relationship with God, helping them to live life according to the precepts of their faith, and maintaining their sense of spiritual wellness, which as demonstrated above, connected with other dimensions of wellness. Again, Florence provided a clear illustration:

> If I don't feel like I'm walking right with God, then I don't have that peace that Christ talks about, that peace that passes all human understanding. If I don't have enough peace it affects me physically. I realized, recently actually, I had a migraine after years. I stopped having migraines years ago. I realized that I didn't have enough peace. It affected me physically....
>
> There had been many times where I am not in the Word. There are times when I don't feel like reading the Word. If I act on that feeling of not … It's a dangerous combination of when I'm not reading the Word and when I'm not praying. Praying not necessarily means getting down on my knees and praying... Then things don't go right because … Probably to everybody else, everything seems fine. Inside, I know that I am not at my best. Then I feel like I'm not giving my best to my family.

Forgiveness. This element of spiritual wellness deals with the ability to give as well as receive forgiveness (Ingersoll, 1998). It is an essential aspect of Christian doctrine and depending on the context may be experienced as a process over time rather than instantaneously. The Modupe narrative articulated the importance of this characteristic through the portrayal of

the women's conversion experience. The transformative power and contribution to wellness that forgiveness can cultivate was also portrayed through Cynthia's testimony of forgiveness toward her father. These illustrations demonstrate how forgiveness contributes to one's emotional wellness by replacing anger and bitterness with compassion and love, as well as social wellness by restoring broken relationships. Cynthia's good deed toward her father at the time of the interview exemplifies this:

> My dad… I just got a call from my cousin, he is in Ontario and he called me because I just did some renovations for my dad in his house… His dad was telling him what I did for my dad, like my dad was calling, "You should come and see. My daughter did this. My daughter did that." Like I say, as a Christian even with all those things that my dad did to my mom I forgave him. It was a struggle for me because knowing for the fact that my mom went through so much abuse and all that from him, it was tough for me to forgive, but I did.

While forgiveness is an important aspect of the Christian faith, the excerpt above also indicates that it is not always an easy thing to do, as Cynthia "struggled" with it when it came to forgiving her father. However the willingness to work through that struggle is also indicative of how deeply the precepts of their faith have been internalized. Through their willingness to forgive the women were able to restore and/or maintain their wellness.

Hope. This speaks to the experience of suffering and the belief that such suffering will not last forever nor be in vain (Ingersoll, 1998). The women in this study all experienced some form of affliction at different points in their lives. However, they all shared in common the hope they had in the midst of their pain which came from their faith. Gloriose's quote cited above regarding the "devastat[ing]" circumstances she was going through at the time of the interview also portrayed such hope in God's sovereignty and divine intervention. Similarly, Hassanatou also expressed hope in God's intervention in the midst of suffering and pain:

> But if you have God in your life, it makes a huge difference because I'm a woman who has been through a lot of horrible, horrible abusive relationships either from my relative or from a relationship. Because of the grace of God, God is able to intervene.

The specific details of what they were hoping for varied with each circumstance, but the belief that God would help them through their circumstance was constant. Hope is an important element of one's wellness, particularly in the midst of struggle and suffering, as it provides a sense of calm in the storm that is conducive to one's inner peace and thus emotional well-being. St. Augustine's famous quote about hope is instructive here as it provides insight into the duality of this phenomenon: "Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage; anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are". Thus, the women's lives were not without challenges and storms, but it was their hope in God that sustained them and afforded them a level of wellness in the midst of such crises.

Knowledge-learning. Spiritual wellness involves continuous growth and development as one seeks to increase his/her knowledge of the self and things external to the self (Ingersoll, 1998). The suffering that spurs on hope is just one of the many ways in which such growth can occur as evident through many of the testimonials (Appendix F). The women also sought continuous knowledge and learning that would bring about growth through their consumption of Christian resources such as books, magazines, television programs, and radio and online Christian messages. They desired to increase their knowledge of their faith in order to help them grow spiritually, and thus they were proactive in such endeavors as Yinka highlighted below:

> I do read Christian books, I listen to Christian radio stations you know... I'm not really a TV person... it helps me to reinforce my faith; I want to know what people are saying about a topic and draw out my own opinions from there. Yeah, learn from new things you know, it helps me to grow spiritually...

Although the women emphasized increasing knowledge and learning in the area of their faith due to the significance it had in their lives as a whole, as a highly educated group by

academic standards, many of them also pursued advanced specialized knowledge that helped them obtain and maintain professional designations. The development of both spiritual and professional/academic knowledge in effect impacts wellness across its various dimensions. Such learning can be distinguished from each other in that the later is often time limited and typically leads to immediate tangible results such as a certificate or a licence, while the former pursuit of spiritual knowledge generally is an ongoing process in a person's spiritual journey and is less likely to lead to direct tangible results but significant inward transformation. However, the inner transformation that takes place through spiritual study, for example, becoming more patient, forgiving, devoted, or having more faith and a deeper understanding of God, while all intangible entities, ought to be expressed outwardly.

Present-centredness. This concept is highly philosophical and abstract and thus is somewhat difficult to grasp and pinpoint (Ingersoll, 1998). Unfortunately, Ingersoll (1998) also did not provide much detail about this idea beyond a cursory overview. It speaks to an awareness of the present moment and includes a recognition of that which is true or real. The participants' belief in God and his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence was true and real. This recognition enabled them to call upon him at any given moment in their daily lives for help, direction, wisdom, protection, forgiveness, thanksgiving, and a multitude of other requests and to offer him praise. As I discussed above, their relationship with the Divine was not limited to a specific time and place of devotion but rather they were in constant commune with him as they recognized his presence among them. Hassanatou's recognition that "God is always there to guide... and to protect [her]" speaks to this awareness. This is significant in that at any given moment the women had available to them a boundless and powerful resource to tap into which offered them a great deal of wellbeing.

7.1.7 Concluding Thoughts

My analysis provides valuable insight into how the various dimensions of wellness are perceived and experienced in the daily lives of a group of Christian African diasporic women in Canada. I have aimed to go beyond the conceptual examination of the wellness construct by simply defining wellness and it's various dimensions, which is typical of the research literature (Adams et al., 2000; Harari et al., 2005; Roscoe, 2009), and provide empirical evaluation of how spirituality is woven into these different dimensions as it is carried out in the participants' everyday lived experiences. My findings demonstrate that Christian spirituality is a paramount factor for each dimension of wellness for my participants.

Unlike much of the wellness literature which proposes that balance amongst the various dimensions is an essential attribute to the experience of optimal wellness, my participants showed preference for their spirituality as it was the "essence of [their] li[ves]" and thus was at the root of how they experienced all other facets of wellness. This important finding corroborates Chandler et al. (1992), Eberst (1984), and Witmer and Sweeney (1992) who have contended that spirituality may play a central role in wellness. This seems to be true at least for those of deep-seated faith such as the women in this study. In light of the women's high level of wellness, their daily lived experiences offer a repository of moral wisdom for a life lived well.

8.0 Conclusion

In this study I adopted an interpretive narrative research approach to explore the lived experiences of Christian African diasporic women in Canada and how their faith is interwoven into their sense of wellness. This paradigmatic and methodological framework is suitable for such inquiry as it privileges research participants' voices in order to gain in depth understanding of their life worlds from their perspectives and how they make sense out of their lives. I used research stories and realist accounts to re-present my participants lived experiences, thoughts, perspectives, and meaning-making processes as complementary ways to emphasize their voices. The research stories re-presented their lives in a fuller more holistic fashion that was organized into meaningful whole while the realist sections re-presented the specificities of their experiences, nuances, and divergent narratives. Together, both approaches offered deeper, richer, more insightful interpretation than would be possible for either ways of re-presentation on its own.

The voices re-presented in this study echo the women's experiences of life in the diaspora and demonstrate how their wellness is fostered and sustained through their spiritual faith. These women emerge as self-determining actors and repositories of moral wisdom. However, their self-determination is reliant upon a deep-seated spirituality. Faist's (2010) characterization of diasporas helped to document my participants' immigration experiences and situate them as women who straddle multiple cultural contexts to establish a secure home base for themselves and their families. The wellness literature helped highlight how the participants' faith was intricately connected to their wellness along multiple dimensions.

Successful settlement and the establishment of home were the major themes with regards to life within the diaspora. I have suggested that successful settlement was associated with the

women's material ambitions such as securing satisfactory employment commensurate with one's training and completing education that would facilitate continuing with one's career of choice. These issues also reflect their relatively privileged social class positions as highly educated women with highly educated spouses. Other immigrant groups may emphasize other concerns in settling well such as English language competency and family reunification.

As transnationals with multiple border-crossings, their ties with former homelands and social networks, such as kinship groups, eased the initial transition and offered a source of emotional and social support. This was particularly important as the participants observed an individualistic lifestyle pervasive in Canada that was in stark contrast to their recollections of an African communal lifestyle. While immigrant services provide various forms of assistance to newcomers such as language training, employment services, assistance in attaining financial aid, and other tangible resources to help facilitate the settlement process, some of the participants felt more strategic services were needed to meet the psychosocial needs of recent African immigrants, particularly given the lack of social support they found in Canada. Initiatives going beyond meeting the material needs of recent immigrants that support their psychological, emotional, and spiritual wellness will help address some of their unmet needs. Beyond the initial stage of migration, the women in this study felt that they had settled well. They acknowledged the process of settlement was difficult in the beginning. In spite of the challenges, they were able to attain their goals in their new homeland such as professional re-certification, occupations aligned with their qualifications, and home ownership. More than just a place to settle well, Canada had become their home, a place where they can be self-determined and live in relative peace and security.

Roscoe's (2009) multidimensional conceptualization of wellness was used to analyze the women's experiences of wellness. Spirituality was a major component woven into each dimension and thus challenged the notion of balance among the various dimensions as a necessary feature of high-level wellness. The participants took their relationship with God as paramount in their lives and nurtured it through various activities such as reading and studying the Bible, attending church services, fellowshipping with other believers, praying, and living according to biblical principles which affected each of the dimensions in their lives. The findings show that this sacred relationship enabled the women to overcome deleterious circumstances, provided them with direction and wisdom, offered them encouragement, and gave them the necessary strength to accomplish what they needed to in their daily living to foster their wellness.

8.1 Research Contributions and Implications

This study offers a number of contributions and implications related to the settlement and establishment of home for African diasporic people in Canada. Participants expressed the importance of having well-researched goals for settlement. Like other studies of African immigrants (The Mosaic Institute, 2002), my participants were optimistic about their prospects in the new homeland and viewed Canada as a land of many opportunities. To avoid disillusionment, a pragmatic approach to reach these goals needs to be adopted to achieve those opportunities. Despite being a highly educated immigrant group, they knew that to continue or enter into their desired professions in Canada that further education would be required. This process, however, led many of the women to feel as though they were starting over again. While this particular experience in their diasporic journey was marked with struggle followed by success, the periods of struggle often challenged their emotional wellness. However, the overall experience can be understood for the functions and values that were engaged as it led them toward greater self-

actualization and wholeness and thereby enhanced wellness. Nevertheless, immigrant service agencies should make prospective African immigrants clearly aware of the possibility of the need for re-certification and not potentially mislead them to believe their qualifications would automatically be transferable in the new homeland.

One of the basic steps the women took to set themselves up for success in the new homeland was to have a thoroughly researched plan of action. Admittedly, not all prospective immigrants have access to the necessary resources to conduct such research, but this step can be invaluable to develop an understanding of the required course of action, ascertain clear goals and thereby create a roadmap to successful settlement. New immigrants may encounter various factors outside of their control that may impede their ability to settle well. While my participants did not find discrimination to be a major problem in Canada (particularly in comparison to some of the other African, European, and North American countries) other studies have found Canada to be a less than a congenial place for African immigrants due to racial and ethnic prejudice (Etoroma, 2006; Yesufu, 2005). Socioeconomic variables such as intellectual, occupational, and financial resources, which my participants had obtained, may have helped to mitigate their experiences of such discrimination.

As African diasporic women who have traversed international borders and left kinships and other important social networks behind, the participants' faced a prevailing challenge of a loss of communal connectedness, which led to a lack of social support during a crucial stage in their lives. Canadian immigration services can extend their efforts beyond newcomers' material needs to offer programs supporting emotional (psychological), social, and spiritual wellness. As Gloriose and others articulated, local churches can help fill the gap of a collective community, particularly in the early stages of immigration, especially with the many Christian African

diasporic women who rely on their spiritual faith. Local churches could partner with immigration service agencies to support recent immigrants. The social support should be offered beyond regular church services and programs and be designed to specifically meet the needs of the immigrants. The objective is not to recruit new church members, but to offer drop-in services that go beyond the material needs to reach the emotional, social, and spiritual levels and nurture these aspects of their wellness.

Such programming would be congruent with many members of the African diaspora as a deeply spiritual population as well as with the participants' advice to those immigrating to Canada from Africa "to hold fast to the God that they knew before they left" (Anna) as this relationship is a boundless resource to live a life of wellness. As such, this study has examined Christian African diasporic women's lived experiences as a repository of moral wisdom (Floyd-Thomas, 2006). It provides an understanding of how the extraordinary faith of such women enables them to thrive in a foreign land. Further, it also adds to the limited body of research literature in the area of African diasporic experiences in Canada. The interpretive approach taken in this study is particularly significant in this regard given that representations of such experiences within the Canadian context are sparse. Thus, this study deepens understanding these traditionally silenced voices and shines light on their experiences and ways of living that foster wellness among African diaspora women. Researchers in the field of wellness can also garner additional insight beyond theoretical and conceptual understandings of wellness to an understanding of how it is embodied and lived.

8.2 Limitations of Study and Future Research

Most participants in this study were primarily highly educated professional middle class women and spoke fluent English on their arrival. These variables have implications for how women may experience the process of settlement, establishment of home, their encounters with discrimination, and their feelings of wellness. However, the wellness narratives of two participants who did enter Canada as refugees did not differ significantly from the other women. In any case, greater diversity in the socioeconomic positions as well as immigration status of the participants may have yielded different results. Future research could focus on non-English speakers (or non-French speakers for French speaking parts of Canada), refugees, and other vulnerable immigrant groups. Examining the experiences of Christian African diasporic men in relation to their wellness would also likely yield interesting and informative results as they generally occupy distinct gender roles in areas such as being the progenitors of migration, "breadwinner", and "head of the household". They may also experience the blurring of gender roles within the domestic sphere differently from women. The ways in which they interpret and experience such processes in light of their faith and migration may also offer critical insight that can be shared with other newcomers, particularly in light of the increasing rates of African diasporic men and women immigrating to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2008a).

In addition, future research should explore how the church may play a supportive role during the initial stages of migration as this period was shown to be the most challenging time in my participants' immigration journey. Developing programs with the consultation of those who have immigrated coupled with immigration services and churches could help attend to the need of social and emotional support in the process of migration. Such a study may use focus groups or one-on-one interviews to examine the effectiveness of this support.

By sharing the women's experiences of spirituality and wellness, this study helps to develop and expand the narratives of African diasporic Christian women in Canada, particularly where dominant cultural narratives have failed to adequately represent these features of their individual and collective lived experiences. The accounts of the women's lives have been presented as legitimate epistemologies for the beauty, wisdom, and strategies of wellness garnered from their way of living. Their lived experiences offer strategies for wellness rooted in a deep-seated faith founded upon an intimate relationship with God. This faith was at the forefront and "essence of [their] li[ves]" and enabled them to excel in a foreign land as it permeated every aspect of their wellness. Such narratives can provide a powerful resource for understanding and experiencing wellness in both scholastic and community based settings as they can offer a source of hope, inspiration, and a guide for coping with personal life challenges and living well.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Information Letter

Research Investigator:
Nike Ayo
E488 Van Vliet Centre
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2H9
Email
Phone Number

Supervisor:
Dr. Lisa McDermott
P412 Pavilion
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2H9
Email
Phone Number

Dear Participant:

I would like to interview you as part of my PhD research in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta. My research focuses on the experiences of wellness among Christian women who have moved to Canada from Africa. The purpose of my study is to learn what role, if any, spirituality plays in these experiences. My interview will focus on how you understand wellness and spirituality. Taking part in the interview will allow you to talk about your thoughts and experiences about wellness and your faith. Sharing your thoughts about these things will provide you with the opportunity to help further knowledge about these issues. This process can be empowering for some people. Aside from that, there is no other direct personal benefits to your participation. The only risk for you is when you share information, however, I will do everything I can to minimize any potential discomfort or distress, which might occur as a result of participating in this research project.

The interview should take about one to two hours to complete in a place that is convenient to you. You may be contacted for a follow-up interview. This should also take about one hour.

If you agree, this interview will be audio-recorded and typed out word for word. If you do not want me to record the interview, I will take notes during the interview. This is done so that information from all the interviews can be written into a research analysis. Information from each participant will be kept private. In addition to myself having access the audio recordings, I may employ the services of a transcription company to assist in typing out the recorded interviews. Only I and those assisting in the analysis of this research may read the typed record of your interview under the shield of anonymity. Your name will not appear in the interview notes or recordings. I will use fake names in all presentations related to this study. All personal identifying information will be removed. All the notes and audio will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. After five years I destroy them.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to answer a specific question you can skip it. You can request to have the audio recorder switched off any time during the interview. You can also change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time during the interview. You can also withdraw from it up to three weeks after your interview. You can let me know by contacting me by phone and your interview will not be included in the study and will be destroyed. You can request to see the interview transcripts to make changes. You can also request to see any publications from this research. A copy of the completed narrative stories, which will be based on the findings of this study, will be offered to you upon completion of this study and mailed to your address.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to ask me at any point during the interview. You may also contact me or my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Lisa McDermott, at the emails or phone numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time.

A Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta has reviewed the plan for this study for its adherence to ethical guidelines. For questions about participant's rights and ethical conduct of research, you may contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615. This office has no direct involvement with this project. You can also visit the following website, which provides guidelines for the conduct of ethical research http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/gfcpolicymanual/policymanualsection66.cfm

Thank you for your participation in this project.

Sincerely, Nike Ayo

Appendix B: Consent Form

Principal Investigator:	Nike Ayo, PhD Candidate
Affiliation, email, phone number:	Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta Email Phone Number
Doctoral Supervisor:	Dr. Lisa McDermott, Professor
Affiliation, email, phone number:	Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta Email Phone Number

	Yes	No
Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?		
Have you read and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet	Yes	No
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?	Yes	No
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you can withdraw from the study at any time during the interview and up to three weeks after your interview without consequence, and that your information will be withdrawn at your request?	Yes	No
Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you? Do you understand who will have access to your information?	Yes	No

This study was explained to me by: _____

I have read and understood the attached information letter and agree to take part in this study:

_____ _____

Signature of Research Participant Date

_____

Printed Name

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator or Designee Date

Appendix C: Interview Guide

1.0 Questions about the Immigration/Diaspora Experience

*** Please tell me about your experience of immigrating to Canada?**

Probes:

1) Why did you decide to move to Canada (what factors brought you here)?
    a. Probe: Who initiated this decision?
2) Do you have any other family members here in Canada with you?
3) What was it like for you coming to this country and leaving your native land behind?
4) Are there any aspects of (native land) culture that you hold on to here in Canada?
    a. Probe: Are there any aspects of this culture that impact the organization of your family life or the way you organize your household?
5) Can you think of any aspects of (native land) culture that are either beneficial or a hindrance to your wellness?
6) Can you think of any aspects of Canadian culture that are either beneficial or a hindrance to your wellness?
7) In what ways does the (native land) culture that you grew up in impact your day to day life here in Canada?
8) What advice can you offer someone who is moving from Africa to Canada?
9) Has your spiritual faith played any role in your ability to settle in your new homeland? If yes, in what way(s)?
10) What factors have helped to promote your sense of spirituality in Canada?
11) Overall, how would you say that living in Canada has impacted your faith?

12) Is there anything else that you would like to add about immigrating to Canada from Africa?

2.0 Questions about what your spirituality means to you

*** Please tell me the story of your personal spiritual journey as if you were writing the story of your life?**

Probes:

1) How would you describe your personal faith?
2) When did you become a Christian?
3) How did you become a Christian?
4) What does being a Christian mean to you?
    a. How important is your faith to you?
5) Has your life changed in any way since you have embraced this faith? Please explain.
6) Are you a member of a particular church?
    a. What church do you attend?
    b. What is it like there?
    c. Tell me about what draws you to this particular church
7) How often do you attend church services?
    a. Why do you go to church?
8) Aside from attending church on a regular basis, are you involved in your local church or another ministry whether formally or informally in any other capacity?
    a. If yes, please explain, why so?
    b. What does this mean to you?
9) Do you ever listen to religious programs on TV or on the radio?

a. How often? What are some examples? Why do you watch/listen to this particular program?

10) What is positive about being a Christian for you?

11) What might be negative about being a Christian for you?

a. Are there any limitations that you feel this faith places on you?

12) How has your faith helped you at various stages throughout your life? (Can you provide any tangible examples? Not just psychological/ coping/ instrumental)

13) In what ways has being a Christian impacted how you see yourself or your sense of who you are?

14) What challenges or barriers to your spirituality have you experienced since you moved to Canada?

a. How about before moving to Canada (barriers to the faith in native land)

15) Do you think that having a (cultural) background has in anyway shaped your sense of spirituality?

16) Overall, how would you say that living in Canada has impacted your spirituality? (made stronger, eroded it, challenged it?)

17) What differences do you see and/or have experienced in Christian spirituality in Canada versus (country of origin)?

18) In what ways, if any, does your Christian faith play a role in your everyday life?

a. How would you say a typical day in your life looks like as a Christian woman? (thoughts, practices, behaviour?)

19) Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about what being a woman of Christian faith means to you and the role that spirituality plays in your life?

3.0 Questions about wellness

*** Please tell me about your journey of personal wellness as if you were writing the story of your life?**

Probes:

1) When I say the word wellness what do you think of?
    a. Have you always understood wellness in this way?
    b. What has led you to understand or define wellness in this way?
    c. From your perspective, what kind of factors/things impact on your overall sense of wellness?
2) Based on your explanation of wellness, what are the times in your life that you can recall when you felt you experienced wellness the most? Please explain.
    a. What factors contributed to this?
3) Do you think your cultural background has in anyway shaped your sense of wellness?
4) Has living in Canada in anyway impacted your sense of wellness? (made it stronger, eroded it, challenged it?)
5) Have you experienced any positive effects to your wellness since your move to Canada?
    a. What factors have helped to promote your sense of wellness in Canada?
6) How would you describe your present level of wellness?
7) How does that compare to the level of wellness that you experienced in your native land?
8) What aspects of an African (native land) identity are beneficial to your wellness?
9) What aspects of an African (native land) identity are hindrances/obstacles to your wellness?
10) What aspects of Canadian identity do you feel are beneficial to your wellness?

11) What aspects of a Canadian identity you feel are a hindrance/obstacle to your wellness?

12) How do you believe that being a woman has impacted your sense of wellness?

13) What advice would you offer to other women who have recently immigrated to Canada from Africa to help promote their wellness?

    a. What do you think are the most important things they should do to help promote their sense of wellness when they undertake such a significant transition?

    b. What are things that you believe that they should not do in order to promote their sense of wellness?

14) Are there any areas in your life, in your past or in the present, where you have struggled with having a sense of wellness? Please explain?

    a. What factors contributed to this?

15) What kind of factors/things help to promote your overall sense of wellness?

    a. Probe/Example: social, familial, financial, spiritual, individuals, cultural, etc.

16) What do you see as the factors which hinder your experiences of wellness?

    a. Probe/Example: social, familial, financial, spiritual, individuals, cultural, etc.

17) Are there any specific areas of your life that you feel lack a sense of wellness?

    a. If yes, please explain/why so?

18) What are some of the specific strategies that you use to help promote your feelings of wellness?

19) From your perspective, is there a relationship between your spirituality and your sense of wellbeing? Please explain?

    a. In what ways do you believe your spirituality is related to your wellness?

20) Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about what wellness means to you?

4.0 Questions about Womanhood

1) What does it mean to you to be a woman of faith?
2) What would be your favorite aspect about being a woman?
3) What are aspects of womanhood that you dislike?
4) What has it been like, specifically as a woman, immigrating from (country of origin) to Canada?
5) Are there any specific issues that you've had to deal with in your immigration process related to your role as a wife and mother?

*** If you had the ability to make changes in your life, how could things be better?**

*** Is there anything else that you would like to add about how you believe your spirituality is related to your sense of wellness or more generally?**

Appendix D: Demographic Information Sheet

1. Age ____30-35 ____36-40 ____41-45 ____46-50 ____51-55 ____56-60
____61-65 ____66-70 ____71-75 ____76-80 ____81-85 ____86-90
____91-95 ____96-100

2. Country of Origin_____

3. Number of Years in Canada_____

4. Number of Years Living Outside Africa If Different From Above (please specify where you lived prior to coming to Canada)_____

5. Marital Status: _____ Married _____ Separated _____ Divorced
_____ Widowed _____ Single _____ Remarried

6. Christian Denomination _____

7) Christian Denomination in native country _____

8. What is the highest level of education that you have completed??
_____Elementary School _____High School Diploma
_____Trade School/College _____Some University
_____University Degree _____Graduate/Professional Degree
_____Other

9. What is your spouse's highest level of education that he has completed?
_____Elementary School _____High School Diploma
_____Trade School/College _____Some University
_____University Degree _____Graduate/Professional Degree
_____Other

10. What is your occupation?_____

11. What was your occupation in native land? (if applicable)_____

12. What is your spouse's occupation?_____

13. What was your spouse's occupation in native land? (if applicable)_____

14. How many people are in your household? (number)_____

15. What is your current living arrangement? (With whom do you live with?)

_____ Parents or Relatives
_____ Spouse or Common Law Partner
_____ Spouse/ Common Law Partner with Children
_____ Children
_____ Alone
_____ Share Residence with Friend/Roommate
_____ Other (please specify) _____

16. Number of Children_____

17. Age of Children _____yrs _____yrs _____yrs _____yrs _____yrs
_____yrs _____yrs _____yrs _____yrs _____yrs

18. Please indicate your personal income bracket

a) $0 - $4,999
b) $5,000 - $9,999
c) $10,000 - $10,999
d) $11,000 - $11,999
e) $12,000 - $12,999
f) $13,000 - $13,999
g) $14,000 - $14,999
h) $15,000 - $16,999
i) $17,000 - $19.999
j) $20,000 - $21,999
k) $22,000 - $24,999
l) $25,000 - $29,999
m) $30,000 - $34,999
n) $35,000 - $39,999
o) $40,000 - $49,999
p) $50,000 - $59,999
q) $60,000 - $69,999
r) $70,000 - $79,999
s) $80,000 - $89,999
t) $90,000 - $99,999
u) $100,000 and over

19. Please indicate your combined household income bracket

a) $0 - $4,999
b) $5,000 - $9,999
c) $10,000 - $10,999
d) $11,000 - $11,999
e) $12,000 - $12,999
f) $13,000 - $13,999
g) $14,000 - $14,999
h) $15,000 - $16,999
i) $17,000 - $19.999
j) $20,000 - $21,999
k) $22,000 - $24,999
l) $25,000 - $29,999
m) $30,000 - $34,999
n) $35,000 - $39,999
o) $40,000 - $49,999
p) $50,000 - $59,999
q) $60,000 - $69,999
r) $70,000 - $79,999
s) $80,000 - $89,999
t) $90,000 - $99,999
u) $100,000 and over

Adapted from:

Mattis, J.S. (1995). *Work(i)ngs of the spirit: Spirituality, meaning construction and coping in the lives of Black women*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Appendix E: Lived Experiences

Julia's Testimony: Deformity and Complications with Unborn Child

I'm just going to give you an example of when I was pregnant with my son. I think I was around three months gone then, I was asked to go for a scan. I went for a scan and while I was there, it was taking longer than usual. So I was like, "What is happening?" When I asked them, they said, "Do you have this? Do you have this?" "No, no, no, why? What's happening?" So the doctor said "Oh, I think there's something wrong with this baby in your tummy." "So what is wrong with my baby?" He said that when the baby is born, he's going to have some kind of deformity. I said, "Jesus, what did you say?" He said, "yeah." I said, "What?" My husband was in the lobby and I said, this is what the doctor said. I said, "Okay, thank you very much." I went home, I was scared. So I quickly called my doctor to inform him. I thought of everything and I said, "I can't I kill, God forbid I kill my own child." I said "no, it's not true. I don't know what the doctor saw. Whatever he said is not true and even if it is…"

That is my son there [pointing to a picture], he is sleeping now. So I said "okay." I called my prayer partner and we started praying. I told my pastor in the church and we were praying and praying and praying and fasting. I said, "God I don't know what is happening but I know when I wanted to conceive with this child..." Even that day when I went for a scan they were asking me, "Do you want to know the sex of the baby?" I said I didn't want to know because I already know he's a boy. I said "yeah, I prayed for it." I told God what I wanted. I told God specifically I wanted a boy. I didn't only want to conceive, I wanted to conceive within this time period and it was exactly as I wanted it. So whatever it is they are telling me right now, I was praying, I fasted, my family, friends, my mom in Nigeria I called them and said "you guys keep praying, this is what the doctor said, but no, I'm not going to believe this report," I said no to it.

To God be the glory, when my son was born…. It was a battle. At eight months I went for a scan again and they said, the amniotic fluid is already dried up. My baby is going to die because there's no fluid for him to move around. So they wanted to take out the baby, but when he's going to be born, the oxygen is going to be like this and he's not going to breathe very well, he's going to have heart issues. They said all sort of things. I was looking at them and they said, "Madame you seem so confident?" I said, "Yes because I know the God I serve. I don't know what you guys are talking about, but even if it is true, power must change hands in this one."

They induced me and it took a while. When I wanted to have the baby, they called all the specialists because they were going to take the baby away because they said he wasn't going to be breathing very well and God proved them wrong. When I had him, they tested his oxygen, it was 100%. Everything was okay. They said "What! What have we been seeing?" I said, "You saw what you saw, but God changed everything." Everything was fine. They were all shocked. They were not even sure, they still said, "Okay we still have to take this baby away. Let's just examine him for a few days." I said, "Take him for one week. It's okay. Take him for one week. He's fine." And that is my son [pointing to picture]. So I named him Emmanuel. His name is Emmanuel, which means God with me. So Emmanuel.

It was by divine intervention. God intervened. I'm not saying that they didn't see what they saw, but God intervened. So he's Emmanuel. It kind of built up my faith so that there's nothing in this world that God cannot do. There is no impossibilities with Him. Definitely when they said there was no amniotic fluid that was right, there was none, but he was there, pulling through, and they said all sorts of things but, lo and behold, when he was born the story changed and I give glory to God for that. So God has been faithful. That's why I said, I can't leave him.

That is my boy [pointing to picture]. He's sleeping upstairs now, I would have called him downstairs. Oh my. Yeah. They were monitoring him, they said "we still have to monitor him." I said, "Take him for one week, monitor him and then get back to me." So they took him for one week. He was just in the hospital because he had to come out before nine month so he was still there, they wanted to make sure that he was doing okay.

They didn't give me any answer even until now. But I prayed to God and God answered that prayer. I remember crying and I said, "God what is this." I laid hands on my tummy and I said, "God, wherever this is coming from I send it back to sender, even if it is true, God no, this must not happen." I prayed, not just me. My husband, family friends here in Canada, back at home, they were keeping vigil and praying and God answered that prayer. When he was born, they were all shocked. They brought all their gadgets you know because they said he's not going to be breathing very well. When the baby was born, they said, "This one is breathing very well. He doesn't need this." I was just lying on the bed looking at them. They said, "He doesn't need it." I said "just bring him to me. His name is Emmanuel." They said, "What?" Yes. I said, "His name is Emmanuel because this actually is divine intervention. God intervened divinely on him." Yeah.

Abiola's Testimony: Under Attack by Armed Robbers

I remember just before my husband got transferred out of Nigeria, where we lived, it was supposed to be a nice, cozy environment, gated, with security men and blah, blah, blah. Thieves, armed robbers … With all the … You feel that, "I'm good." I don't know how they did it, these armed robbers came. They jumped the giant gate, killed one of the security guys and took possession of the estates. This happened maybe at about 11:30 in the night to about five a.m. the next morning. They were going from house to house. I mean, they would tell you, "Open your gates," Every house has the big gates, "Open your gates. If you don't open your gate …" They planned it because they came in, killed the security guys, got the other ones to surrender, let themselves in, drove their equipment in. If you don't open the gates, they had enough time, they would cut through your wall and come inside. Now you're in big trouble because they've gone through. It was horrendous. It was horrible and we could hear them going from house to house. The guy that lived opposite had surveillance cameras so the next day, we could all watch what happened. It was terrible.

I'll never forget it. We called the police, no help came. Nothing, and people knew the number to the commissioner. They called all the high power and shakers. No one came to our rescue and my husband, we put off the lights and we were praying. We're praying and praying and God is wonderful. My daughter was like what, maybe less than a year, so it was night, with all that noise, I was so scared she'd wake up and cry but she slept through it. My maid who normally is very silly was wise enough, God gave her

wisdom. She turned off the lights in the boys' quarters, she switched off the air conditioner. She went underneath her bed to create the impression of no one being there so by the time it was our turn, they jumped into our house from my neighbor's house. They opened the gates, let themselves in, so we could hear them. They went to the back where we too had also turned off all our lights, switched off the air conditioner, took the phone off the hook to give the impression that no one's here. They went and they looked in the boys' quarters, they were like … We could hear them … "Oh, there's nobody here. There's nobody here …" and they're leaving and so on, and then someone said, "No." Then they're banging, "Open this door." They were already in our compound, so for us they jumped down and broke the locks on the gate and let themselves in and we were just praying, praying, praying, we said "Let's pray," and we're praying and there was like the sound of a siren, but there was actually no siren, so they were like "Oh, police is here. Police is here," and they ran out and by the time they realized, "Oh, there was no police." They just moved on to the next house, so they came into our compound but they never did come into our house and if that's not God, I don't know what it is.

Now tell me, would you leave that experience and think, "Ah, there's no God," or "God is not good," or "God doesn't care about me," because there's so many horrible things that could happen in that situation. I mean they can come in and they're like, "Oh …" They tell my husband that "Oh, you're so young, you've accomplished so much." Out of jealousy, they might, "Shoot him." They might decide, "Oh, we're going to rape her …" You know? Any horrible thing could have happened but God spared that ordeal. ….

I guess, it made me realize though, because we have that false sense of security, "Oh, wow, you live in a nice estate, the policemen guarding," but it just made me realize that honestly God is the Protector. We have all that, "Oh, I'm scared to go to Nigeria ..." In your nice cushy Canada stuff can still happen to you. You have to look to God to protect you.

Cynthia's Testimony: Forgiving Abusive Father

Like I said, as a Christian even with all those things that my dad did to my mom I forgave him. It was a struggle for me because knowing for a fact that my mom went through so much abuse and all that from him, it was tough for me to forgive but I did. At the same time when I did that, that was the beginning of my life, the transformation of my life. My other siblings didn't have as much anger in their heart the way I did. I felt like killing him. That was how bad I was, because when I heard of the many things that he did to my mom I just wanted to go there and F him off.

There was a point God showed it to me that I needed to forgive him. I was in school then, my pastor came and he was talking at the pulpit and he said, "There is somebody here, you've got so much anger in you like somebody has hurt you so bad and you don't want to forgive the person. I just want to let you know that God wants you to forgive that person because he wants to bless you. He wants to take you from where you are right now to a different place." As he was saying it the picture of my dad just came to me and I started weeping. People didn't know what was going on, I was weeping and weeping because I would say some things about him in anger like "I don't want to see him, he is an evil man. He is this and that." Even as I would say these things my siblings would say, "Stop saying this. Stop!" I say, "I won't stop as far as I'm concerned I don't

have a father." I was weeping, I said, "No, I can't forgive him. I can't God, no, no way." The Spirit kept coming, "You need to let go." Finally, I said, "Okay, God if it is you that said this, I'm going to let him go. I'm not angry anymore."

Basically then my brother came to me which was very unusual and I said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "Daddy sent me to you" I said, "Which dad?" He said, "How many daddies do you have? Daddy!" I said, "Daddy, what does he want, what did he say?" He started telling me that all of a sudden that he woke up and started weeping, started crying like he wants us to forgive him. That he has done so many things that he can't even recollect, that he is not even worthy of forgiving but he is just begging for mercy and calling everybody that we should forgive him and all that. He asked specifically of me, "Where is Cynthia?" because I was at school. He said, "Please tell …" he gave my brother money and said, "Go and meet her, tell her that I want to see her." So that's why he came. I said, "Really? Daddy wants to see me?" Exactly what came to my mind as the Spirit of God was speaking to me that I needed to forgive him, the same time the Spirit of God was talking to him to ask for mercy. This is the time the moment. It was exactly the same time and I just said, "God, you are just so mysterious, you're just so awesome." I started crying, it was a confirmation of what the Spirit was telling me. I said, "Okay, go and tell him I'll come when I have holidays I can't just leave school right now." He went and told him this is the reply. Really when I went there my father was weeping and weeping.

Jolene's Testimony: Given a Car and Furniture in Time of Need

We were missionaries in Burkina Faso for two years. My husband had a very good job, well-paying job. We felt like we had to give two years to God. We already had our four kids and could quit everything because we were convinced that this is one thing we had to do. We put our house on for rent and went to Burkina Faso for two years.

While there, ministering between poor people and helping with medical equipment, my husband is an engineer specialized in medical equipment, they were fixing them and also providing hospitals with equipment that would be available for poor people, affordable for them. I had to teach in my kids' school because we couldn't afford the school fees. It was so incredibly expensive. It was really tough because I didn't expect to be working for my kids' school to pay their school fees. I wanted to minister. I was going there to do God's work. It was kind of challenging for me, I was really sad that I had to go in this big school with rich people and be among them every single day, hearing them complain about everything you see outside. These poor people are wanting to have everything they can have; they can't even have a meal once a day to eat. It was really hard for me to accept that I came in this poor country with the purpose to minister and now had to work to pay my kids' school fees.

It ended up finally that our renter stopped paying his rent for our house back in Belgium for ten months which was really long because when you are a missionary you have to go from church to church to raise money, this is what we did before we left. Our salary was really low because as missionaries you don't have enough ... Dave was earning three times what we were having as missionaries, because we had to pay everything in Africa and still pay our mortgage for our house in Belgium. We were tight on money, we ended up with debt, like 10,000 in debt from the bank, this is Euros.

Canadian dollars is 15,000. After two years, we wanted to stay longer but after two years we decided we had to go back and pay off our debt.

When we were coming back, we didn't' know how we were going to live because we were deep in debt. No money, no savings, no car, nothing. Dave had to look for a job. I didn't have a job. We had a house but you have to furnish the house. We had no money to do that. We were literally crying ... literally crying to God. Every night, we would sit hand in hand, cry, really cry to God. One day we said, we know God is capable to do so many things and we said God, we want to dare to ask you one thing. Give us a car. Because we thought and talked about it, when we go back to Belgium Dave has to go look for a job, he will need a car. Please give us a car.

A month later, this one guy from one church in Belgium called us. We were still in Burkina Faso and he said, "Dave and Jolene, I have a car for you." "What?" He said, "Yeah. You can use it when you ..." when he was speaking, we were stuck on ... he has a car, we can use it.

We were so thankful to God. "No problem." Dave said, "When I come back I will use the car. Once I find a job we're going to give you back your car and maybe I will find a job where they can provide a car for me." He said, "Don't you understand what I'm telling you? I'm not telling you I'm borrowing you my car. God told me to give you my car." "What?" My goodness, I heard of these kind of stories before but it never happened to me. It was like a dream, I remember that Dave and I, we cried that night, we couldn't sleep, just worshiping God for answering our prayer.

We came back to Belgium; the car was ... I can't even tell what kind of car this was. It was the kind of car, we would never be able to afford that kind of car. He was a very rich guy in the church. He said, he heard it when he was praying for us. God put it in his heart and his wife's heart because they pray together and he said, "I have something in my heart but I don't know if I can tell you. I also have something in my heart but I'm afraid to tell you." They said they're going to write it down. They wrote it down and it was the same feeling. The next day they called us. This is an amazing story and it's a true story. The other thing that happened that strengthened our faith was when we came in the house, nobody told us, not even my parents in law, we opened the door of the house and got in, the house was furnished. Everything was in the house. Table, dining table, fridge, freezer, beds. People at one of the churches. Because we were sending our prayer letters every time talking about what was happening they knew our testimony. They decided, who gives a TV, a chair, couch, everything was in the house.

This is something ... it was big. Our faith had grown before that. We knew God ... you know things in your heart, in your head about God. Like Job said. I hear from you, I have heard about you. I'm trying to translate from French. Now my eyes have seen you. This is what happened to us at that time. Give you a car. Does someone just take his brand new car, like $40,000 car and say God told me to give it to you? Seven seats. The kind of car when you unlock the door just opens automatically. You have heat in the seats. My goodness.

Esosa's Testimony: Contemplating Abortion and a Divine Dream

This was between myself and my husband. When we had my child, I told him I was done and done there. When I realized I was pregnant I said I was going to take it off. That is totally against my religion, but I didn't know where that thinking was coming from. My husband was totally against it. I said to him "Look here, I'm just going to start school in February and I realized I was pregnant in January. When I get tested they're going to tell me to pull out." He said "No, they won't tell you to pull out." I said "It's going to be hard on me to go to school and take my pregnancy and carry my bag and all that, and two other kids. It won't work." He was totally against it I tell you, but then I said "This is my call, I'm the one going to carry the baby and all that. The one that will nurse this baby after the baby comes to life. I'm not ready for that thing. I'm never going to be ready for it again. I told you I was done with it as soon as I had my second." He said "Suit yourself."

Then I went to one of these abortion clinics. They already booked me in for everything and then he said he was going to call my mom, that was my aunt, because he knows I listen to her when there's any issue and she talks to me. I said "Even if you talk to her that won't change anything because she's not here right now. She's not going to hold on to me. I'm going to do what I'm going to do. This is what I'm going to do." In a nutshell, they booked me for the whole thing and then for the whole procedure and all. I was supposed to go the following day. At night he said "Let us pray." Usually we just pray together.... Because for some time… I used to pray with him, but because we were both not agreeing so I just thought … Then he said "Let us pray." Then we prayed; my mind was made up anyway. The procedure had been scheduled and I was sure it was going to go on. We prayed and I slept. He said something in his prayer. He said "God, reveal unto us if this is the right thing to do because for me I'm not into it. This is killing somebody, even if we're not physically killing with a knife, but we're killing a life. I'm not a party to it, but because my wife is doing it, it means I'm a party to it."

When your mind is made up with something, mine was made up. I went to sleep and then I had a dream that I was in a church, a church back home in Africa. His parents church that I used to go to every Sunday. I was in that church and then I met with Reverent Father. When he finished the sermon and everything, after the whole sermon people would just go and say "Hello Father" and all that. I went to say hello to him. Then I said to him "Oh, your message today was very inspirational, I loved it. I loved every part of what you said today, it was as if you were talking to me." He said "Yeah" and then he said to me "Whatever it is you have on your mind right now, just withdraw it." Then he said something in my native language, he said "Anu Oluwa kinton". That word means "God's mercy is always there, it never finishes. God's mercy, His goodness, it never seizes, He's always there, He's always going to help you." That's the meaning of that word anu Oluwa kinton. When I woke up in the morning I said "This is the dream I had." I said "You know what that means, anu Oluwa kinton? You think you don't have finances right now. You think you don't have the energy right now, but God is going to see you through everything you think you're going through right now." I said "That's not for me, no way."

I got to this clinic. When I got to the clinic, for some reason… because I was there one time to book the whole thing, when I got there I saw this Buddhist thing. You know Buddhist, their image, statue? I'm like "oh!" At the clinic here, it's only downtown. They

had a Buddhist there and they had a fountain of water just flowing down. Then I just sat down while I was waiting for the whole procedure. Then they had this Buddhist … It wasn't a Bible but their Buddhist thing. I don't know if it's a Bible, I don't know. It was there and then I saw people coming in and going out. I'm like "What am I doing? Why am I here?" then that thing came to me again and said "You had a dream today that said "anu Oluwa kinton" God's mercy never seizes. He's always there for you, His love endureth forever more." I just stood up and I said to the lady "You know what? I'm going home." She said "Why?" I said "I don't want to do it anymore." "Oh what happened?" I said "Nothing." She said "You're next in line" I said "No, I'm not interested anymore." She said "Okay." then I just left.

To me, I don't know but it's still a spiritual journey for me, because it is God passing a message on to me in my dream. This is not the first time, He always does that. He's always been doing that. I don't know what just incited me "You need to leave this place right now. This is not good. You're a Christian. Why would you want to do this?" Ever since then it's always been a problem for me, because I'm like "I need to share this with somebody, I wanted to kill a life. It's so wrong." Something in Catholicism that they believe is that you can always confess your sins to Reverent Father. My husband said "You need to go confess your sins" I'm like "No. I've already told my God my sins and I believe he's already forgiven me, so I'm not going to tell anybody."

Anytime I just see my son … Well, this one time when he started walking my husband said to me "See what you wanted to kill" Then he said to me "When this boy is 21 years old I'm still going to remind you that you wanted to kill him." "You don't have to tell me that." Just you keep hammering the same thing over and over again. It's done and over, I already asked God to forgive me. I felt the only way for me to cleanse myself even after telling God was to tell somebody. I called my sister and then I told her. She said "Really? You were thinking about it?" I said "Yeah. I thought about that and these are all the steps I took and this was a dream I had and all that." She said "Well, I'm happy you didn't do it because if you had done it, you'd just simply tell me you lost the baby and I would have believed you lost it." Because that would have been the next thing, I was going to tell people that I lost the baby. When my mother-in-law came too, I felt I should still tell somebody. When I told her she was "Oh really, you wanted to kill somebody, you wanted to kill a life?" Now I feel at peace with myself because I know I didn't do it and I've asked for forgiveness of sins. I'm just relating back to spirituality and wellbeing, because this is God talking to me I believe when I'm sleeping. It's an entirely spiritual thing; so it's a spiritual journey. I totally believe in it. That's an example; I've got lots of examples.