Racial Identity Development Of Somali Refugees In The Midwest

Nnenna Lindsay

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.und.edu/theses

Recommended Citation
Lindsay, Nnenna, "Racial Identity Development Of Somali Refugees In The Midwest" (2018). Theses and Dissertations. 2271.
https://commons.und.edu/theses/2271

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, and Senior Projects at UND Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of UND Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact zeinebyousif@library.und.edu.
RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF SOMALI REFUGEES IN THE MIDWEST

by

Nnenna Irene Abena Lindsay
Bachelor of Arts, University of the West Indies, 2003
Master of Arts, Texas Woman’s University, 2010

A Dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
University of North Dakota
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Grand Forks, North Dakota
August
2018
This dissertation, submitted by Nnenna Lindsay in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

This dissertation is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.

Dr. Grant McGimpsey  
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies
PERMISSION

Title                    Racial Identity Development of Somali Refugees in the Midwest
Department               Counseling Psychology
Degree                   Doctor of Philosophy

In presenting this dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a graduate degree from the University of North Dakota, I agree that the library of this University shall make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for extensive copying for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor who supervised my dissertation work or, in her absence, by the Chairperson of the department or the dean of the School of Graduate Studies. It is understood that any copying or publication or other use of this dissertation or part thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of North Dakota in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my dissertation.

Nnenna Lindsay
June 2, 2018
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................... vii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................. viii

ABSTRACT ....................................................................................................................... ix

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 1

   Brief History of Somalia ................................................................. 3

   Sociocultural Context ................................................................. 5

   Resettlement Experiences .......................................................... 6

   Black People in the United States ............................................ 10

   Racialization and Racial Formation ......................................... 13

   Racial Identity Development .................................................... 16

   Experiences with Racism and Discrimination .......................... 17

   Psychological Adjustment ......................................................... 18

   Purpose of the Present Study ..................................................... 19

   Research Questions ................................................................. 20

II. METHOD .................................................................................................................... 22

   Research Design ........................................................................... 22

   Researcher as Instrument .......................................................... 24

   Participants .................................................................................. 26
III. RESULTS .................................................................................................................. 33

Participant Narratives .................................................................................................. 34

Hani: “You hear all the time that you’re oppressed but you know it’s not true” .................................................. 34

Aar: “In the US, they value the life of a gorilla more than a black child” ................................................................. 36

Ladan: “I never felt any racial discrimination in Minneapolis like the same one I felt here in Grand Forks”... 39

Siman: “I identify myself as a Somali American, and I identify myself as a Black Muslim woman. That is my identity and that is my strength” .................................................. 42

Cali: “I'm not depressed, I’m only depressed because of the condition, so I need to find a solution to the problem” .. 45

Fahmi: “You can't do anything about it. You can't fight it” .. 48

Afrax: “Moral of the story is it's great to be in this country as a Muslim American” .................................................. 51

The Overarching Narrative ....................................................................................... 53

Narratives of Race .................................................................................................... 55

Pre-Migration ........................................................................................................... 55

Unexamined Racial Identity .................................................................................... 57
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race Becoming Important</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race Important for Survival</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories of Resistance</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Represent</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assimilate</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting Out</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compositions of Coping</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing What is True</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing Who I am</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing Where I Belong</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. DISCUSSION</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Identity Development of Somalis</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stages and Intersections</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Construction</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism and Discrimination</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation and Resistance</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping Strategies</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths and Limitations</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Definition of Terms</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My heartfelt gratitude is extended to my advisor and chair, Dr. Rachel Navarro, whose guidance, mentoring, and encouragement helped me navigate the arduous journey of completing my dissertation. Without her patience and confidence in my ability, I might not have persisted in completing my life-long goal of becoming a psychologist. Many thanks to the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Cindy Juntunen, Dr. Kara Wettersten, and Dr. Joseph Miller, for their flexibility, continued support, and thoughtful feedback. Enormous gratitude is also extended to the participants in this study who graciously shared their time and narratives with me.

It would have been impossible to accomplish this task without the support of my mentors, family, and friends. I am forever grateful to Dr. Debra Mollen for her consistent mentorship, care, and support since pursuing my Master’s degree at TWU. I am eternally thankful that I had the opportunity to be supervised by Dr. Roberta Seldman prior to her transition. I am grateful that she reminded me of my purpose and was a beacon of light. Special thanks to my mother, Dr. Marion Sutton, for being an unwavering source of strength and support throughout this journey. Finally, deepest gratitude to my son, Jelani Nelson, for his patience, joy, love, enthusiasm, understanding, and ability to keep me grounded and connected.
This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Theresa White, and to my father, Louis Lindsay. Although both are no longer on this earthly plane of existence, their light, spirit, love, and guidance are ever present and eternal.
ABSTRACT

The number of Somali refugees continue to increase, yet research on their racial identity development, racialization experiences, and strategies used to cope with racism and discrimination is lacking. This qualitative study was conducted to explore the unique racial narratives of Somali refugees. In order to better understand how Somalis make meaning of their racial identity and adjust to the contemporary racial climate of the Midwest, in-depth interviews were conducted with seven Somali refugees and a narrative methodology was used to analyze the results. The overarching narrative highlighted the journey to becoming Black for Somali refugees forced to flee their non-racialized homeland of Somalia. The findings suggested that Somali participants responded to racism and discrimination by utilizing both passive and active negotiation strategies. Knowledge about what was true, who they were, and where they belonged seemed to help participants cope with oppression experienced because of their intersecting minority statuses. This study served to expand limited research on the racial identity development and racialization experiences of contemporary Somali refugees in the Midwest. Future research is needed to expand Black racial identity models and to explore the gendered aspects of racial identity development in relation to Somali youth.

Keywords: refugees, racial identity, Somalia
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Forced migration and displacement of individuals from developing countries are at a record high globally. It is estimated that 65.3 million people are forcibly displaced from their homes; and one in every 113 people around the world is either an asylum-seeker, internally displaced or a refugee (UNHCR, 2018). Additionally, 25.4 million (or a third of the world’s displaced population) are refugees; and more than half of all refugees originated from either Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, or Somalia. Although it is true that refugees flee their homeland and cross borders in pursuit of safety and protection because of conflict, civil war, and fear of persecution, this narrative fails to acknowledge the role of Europe and the United States (U.S.) in the creation and perpetuation of the refugee crisis. For example, most refugees are from countries in the Middle East or Africa which were colonized by European nations, exploited by European and U.S. imperialism and capitalist expansion, and were further impacted by Western involvement in international conflicts and peace negotiations (Rodríguez, 2018).

Thus, even though imperial powers were directly involved in the exploitation and oppression of war-torn countries such as Somalia, their involvement is often ignored or forgotten and developing nations are blamed for their own demise. The current dominant narrative—created by those in power—typecasts refugees and asylum seekers as dangerous criminals from uncivilized territories who seek to exploit, victimize, and
terrorize citizens in the U.S. and Europe. Ironically, in this narrative which is propagated by conservative media and right-wing politicians, it is the European and U.S. citizens who are vulnerable and in need of protection from refugees. Conversely, human rights advocates and organizations counter the dominant refugee narrative by asserting that the refugee crisis is a humanitarian crisis and developed nations have a legal and moral responsibility to assist with finding solutions to this global phenomenon. They also contend that since the U.S. is primarily a nation of immigrants, anti-immigration policies and attitudes fundamentally contradict the national values of this country.

Contentious and contradictory attitudes towards immigration and the refugee crisis are perhaps symptomatic of the confusing and complex times in which we live. On the one hand, the United States historically prides itself for being a diverse and welcoming country for migrants in pursuit of the American dream. On the other hand, the immigration system in the United States is racialized, hierarchical in nature, and has historically served to limit the number of immigrants from countries deemed undesirable from entering the country. For instance, President Donald Trump’s travel ban against Muslim countries such as Somalia and his racist remarks about not wanting more immigrants from “shithole countries” in Africa and Haiti but wanting to accept more immigrants from countries like Norway are prime examples of structural racism within the immigration system.

Mwangi (2014) argued that “traditional constructs of race are complicated by globalization, migration, and the growing population of Black immigrants in the United States” (p. 2). Moreover, new racisms have emerged (such as islamophobia) which “marginalize and exclude certain social groups based on more than just biological traits”
Unfortunately, the needs of the Black foreign-born population are often ignored within scholarly research because of double invisibility related to their racial identity and immigrant minority statuses (Bryce-Laporte, 1972). For example, a paucity of psychological research has been published in peer-reviewed journals regarding how refugees from predominantly Black countries adjust to the racial context of the United States and make meaning of their racial identity.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to address this under examined area of research by exploring the racial identity development of Somali refugees in the Midwest. To better understand the constructs being assessed, the history, sociocultural background, resettlement experiences, and psychological adjustment of Somali refugees were reviewed. Additionally, the history of Black people in the United States and theories on Black racial identity development were examined in this chapter.

**Brief History of Somalia**

Somalia is a country in East Africa with a tumultuous history. Geopolitically, it is strategically located in the Horn of Africa where the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea converge. The country’s prime location made it a target of interest for European colonizers, the United States, and the former Soviet Union. During the middle of the 19th century, colonial powers partook in the scramble for Africa which subdivided territories and nations by creating artificial colonial borders (Besteman, 2014). Somalia was greatly impacted during this scramble and experienced colonialization by France of the Northwest region, Great Britain of the North Central, Italy of the South, and Ethiopia of the inland region of Ogaden (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2008).
In 1960, Somalia gained independence from Britain and Italy and with the union of the Italian and British regions became the independent state of the Somali republic. Contrary to the media’s negative depiction of Somalia, the country held free and fair elections and was ruled democratically for most of the 1960’s. After independence, attempts were made to rejoin with ethnic Somalis who were left in Kenya and Ethiopia. The colonial boundaries were, however, maintained, which contributed to increased divisiveness as clans continued to be disrupted (Besteman, 2014; CDC, 2008).

By 1969, the President of Somalia was assassinated and the civilian government was overthrown by means of a coup. Subsequently, General Mohammed Siad Barre, the leader of the military coup became the leader of Somalia. Ultimately, Barre’s failed leadership and oppressive military dictatorship over the next two decades resulted in the development of clan-based opposition militias, a civil war, and the collapse of the central government of Somalia in 1991 (CDC, 2008; Putnam & Noor, 1999). During 1992-93, the ongoing clan violence, in conjunction with the effects of a severe drought, resulted in the death of approximately 250,000 Somalis; 800,000 refugees fled to Kenya and Ethiopia, and nearly 2 million people were internally displaced (Hammond, 2014).

Currently, there are approximately one million Somali refugees and Somalia has the fifth highest number of refugees worldwide (UNHCR 2018). Sadly, “displacement within and from Somalia is one of the longest-running crises in the world today” (Hammond, 2014, p. 16). Most Somali refugees are hosted in neighboring countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia, and the largest Somali communities outside of Africa are in the United States, Canada, and Europe. Approximately 150,000 Somalis reside in the United States; and Minnesota is the state with the largest Somali community in the country.
Sociocultural Context

Somalia has been described as the most homogenous country in Africa because of the lack of ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural diversity among the Somali people. For example, most Somalis speak Somali, perceive their ethnicity as Somali, and over 99% identify their religion as Sunni Muslim (Bigelow, 2010). Social and cultural differences among groups of Somali people, however, do exist; and these differences are perceived by Somalis as being related to ancestral lineage or membership within a clan (which is determined through patrilineal descent) (UNHCR, 2016). Kusow and Eno (2015) reported that the “primary category of social organization in Somalia is the clan system, which acknowledges four major clan families (Darood, Digil-Mirifle, Dir, and Hawiye) as constituting the primary Somali ethnic people” (p. 412). Conversely, the three major minority groups are the Somali Bantu Jareer; the Banadiri Reer Hamar; and the occupational caste groups (Kusow & Eno, 2015).

The Somali Bantu comprise the largest minority group in Somalia and are descendants of indigenous farmers and runaway slaves (Hill, 2010). Even though they have been in Somalia for at least two hundred years, they are reportedly marginalized and treated as foreigners within Somali society (Hammond, 2014; UNHCR, 2016). According to Kusow and Eno (2015), Somali Bantu experience othering, racial prejudice, and discrimination in Somalia because of their physical features appearing more African than the typical Somali. They further contend that “Somali society is organized along caste lines and is fundamentally racialized” (422).

Hill (2010) pointed out the importance of attending to the needs of minority groups such as women and clan minority groups within Somali communities. Minority
refugees are arguably at risk of becoming invisible or forgotten because of their status as a minority within a group that is already disadvantaged. Hill (2010) reported that “while all Somali refugee groups remained disadvantaged as an underprivileged ethnic minority sometimes subject to xenophobia, the majorities usually had the most start-up advantages such as education, employment experience, familiarity with western life, family links with established earlier refugees, as well as clan support structures (p. 26).

Finally, clan identity and membership play a critical role in the life of Somalis. It is said that “when Somali people who do not know each other meet, the first question is often not ‘where are you from’ but ‘who are you from’: ‘Qolo maa tahay?’ (Literally: ‘Who are your paternal kinsmen?’) (UNHCR, 2016, p. 16). While the answer to this question will likely remain the same, there is arguably some fluidity involved in clan identification. As the UNHCR noted, the “clan system can lead to changing alliances and temporary coalitions that may cause any one person, at any time, to stand in opposition to another (UNHCR, 2016, p. 16). Ultimately, the clan system is complex—it can provide Somalis with psychosocial benefits such as a sense of belonging and community but can also lead to marginalization and violence for those not aligned with one of the major clans (UNHCR, 2016).

Resettlement Experiences

According to the Refugee Processing Center (2015), between January 2005 to March 2015, 4,085 refugees resettled to the state of North Dakota; 703 of those refugees were from the country of Somalia. These statistics, however, likely underestimate the number of refugees in the state since they do not include secondary refugees who chose to relocate to North Dakota after initially arriving and resettling in a different area of the
United States. With a population that is 87.3% White, 5.4% American Indian, 2.9% Hispanic, 1.8% Black, and 1.2% Asian (ND Compass, 2013), it is not surprising that the state of North Dakota has a reputation for being racially and culturally homogenous. As the fastest growing state in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), however, North Dakota is becoming more diverse and is arguably in a state of transition. The oil boom and the influx of refugees into the state have contributed to the state’s changing cultural and racial landscape. For example, from 2010 to 2014, the non-White population of North Dakota increased by 23.8%, in comparison with the national average of 6.2% (ND Compass, 2013).

Similarly, the foreign-born population in North Dakota has experienced a tremendous population growth. In fact, from 2000 to 2013 there was a 74.2% population change within this demographic; and by 2013, 9.2% of the foreign-born population was from East Africa (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). According to Arnold (2015), in North Dakota the “foreign-population by and far is the refugee population” (p. 639). Refugees are resettled to this Midwestern state at a higher than the national average per-capita rate (Gaber, 2004). From 2000 to 2004, for instance, North Dakota had the fourth highest per-capita distribution of refugees; this trend will likely continue due to the state’s small population size (Arnold, 2015).

Grand Forks is the second largest city in the state of North Dakota; it also has the second highest population of refugees in the state (Arnold, 2015). The estimated 95 primary refugees that arrive in the city each year initially receive financial and medical assistance, a furnished apartment, and employment, case management, and skills training services from Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota (LSSND), which is the only
federally approved refugee resettlement program in the state (LSSND, 2015). Global Friends Coalition (GFC) is another local agency that aids refugee families. Specifically, their mission primarily involves supporting both refugees and community members to connect, accept, and positively engage with each other (GFC, 2015).

Lutheran Social Services “helps refugees adjust to their new life in the community and gain self-sufficiency as quickly as possible” (LSSND, 2015, para.11). It is important to highlight that the demand for refugees to quickly adjust and acclimate to their new environment can also serve to further disenfranchise and oppress these individuals. In addition to learning English, and acclimating to the frigid winters, different foods, and often unspoken cultural expectations, newly arrived refugees in the United States (also referred to as New Americans) resettle into Grand Forks already indebted to the government. The limited financial assistance that they receive only lasts for up to eight months (LSSND, 2015; Global Friends Coalition, 2015). They are also required to repay their travel loan within three years of arrival (LSSND, 2015; Global Friends Coalition, 2015).

Additionally, even though newly arrived refugee families have access to social services, they continue to experience educational, economic, and health disparities. For example, 40% of Somalis have less than a high school education and approximately 50% live in poverty (Gambino, Trevelyan, & Fitzwater, 2014; McCabe, 2011). Regarding education, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (2011) noted that a lack of financial resources resulted in refugee parents not being fully involved in their children’s academic pursuits. Accessing healthcare can also be challenging for refugee families.
because of cultural differences, language barriers, and a lack of transportation and health insurance (Simmelink, et al., 2013).

Finally, refugee families do not get to choose the area in which they resettle; the US State Department makes this decision (LSSND, 2015). Refugees from war-torn Somalia who arrive in North Dakota are expected to quickly acclimate to the new culture, find a job, and become financially independent. Despite the support received from local social service agencies, these New Americans experience economic, health, and educational disparities. Clearly more preventive and clinical services are needed to address the complex needs of refugee families.

Not everyone is pleased with the increased presence of refugees and foreign-born people of color in the region. Some community members perceive refugees and immigrants as a drain on local resources, schools, and jobs (Arnold, 2015; Waters, 2013). Moreover, post-September 11, 2001, Muslims in America (regardless of immigration status) have experienced an upsurge in hate crimes, discrimination, and racial and religious animosity (Khan & Ecklund, 2013).

Somali refugees are a particularly vulnerable group in contemporary America because of their race, ethnicity, and religion. In addition to fleeing their homeland and needing to adjust to the cultural, linguistic, and social differences characteristic of life in the United States, Somalis must also learn how to navigate the process of becoming members of marginalized racial and religious minority groups. Newly arriving refugees of color are at risk of experiencing trauma while attempting to resettle into unwelcoming communities (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010). It is therefore
important to understand how Somali refugees in the contemporary sociocultural climate of the Midwest experience, respond to, and cope with race, racism, and discrimination.

**Black People in the United States**

In order to examine and gain knowledge about Somali refugees’ experiences of race and racial identity, one should have a general understanding of the history of Black people in the United States. In 1619, Africans were brought to the United States to work as indentured laborers. After the White plantation owners realized that enslaving Blacks was economically more profitable, millions of Africans were captured, sold, and shipped to North America and the institution of chattel slavery began in the United States (Williams, 1994).

The system of slavery was physically, psychologically, and spiritually oppressive (De Leary, 2005). African slaves were brutally dehumanized, had no legal rights, and experienced horrific atrocities such as physical torture, rape, and forced removal from their family members (Du Bois, 1998). Since individuals whom are oppressed tend to feel inferior to their oppressors, the psychological trauma that the slaves endured was likely even more debilitating than their physical and spiritual trauma (Freire, 2000; Memmi, 1965). One could argue that some African slaves experienced symptoms akin to the Stockholm syndrome since they identified with, and at times even idealized, the values and beliefs of their oppressor.

Although slavery was abolished in the United States in 1865, systemic and institutionalized racism prevailed and was manifested through the Black Codes and the Jim Crow laws that were established to keep Africans in America in bondage (Oshinsky, 2008). For instance, a Black Code in South Carolina allowed White people to punish and
whip Black people under the age of 18 for acting unruly. In addition, the Jim Crow laws served to maintain the status quo by legalizing segregation, endorsing a “separate but equal” status for African-Americans, and by providing the racial minority group with inferior infrastructure (Tussman, 1963).

By the 1960’s, improvements were evident in the plight of African-Americans (Landry, 1987). For example, the Civil Rights Act in 1964, ended legalized segregation in public places, outlawed employment discrimination, and allowed for the formation of a Black middle class in the United States (Landry, 1987). Passage of the Voting Rights Act the following year allowed African-Americans the right to exercise their political muscle by voting at the polls (Davidson, 1992). Finally, 43 years later, Barack Obama was elected the first African-American president in the nation.

Despite the progress and gains made within the past 50 years, many of the estimated 39 million African-Americans in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011) are still disenfranchised and experience various forms of discrimination and oppression. African-Americans make up 13% of the U.S. population yet have the highest unemployment rate (13.4%) of all the racial groups (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). In 2013, the average income was $58,270 for White households and $34,598 for Black households (DeNavas-Walt, and Proctor, 2014); and 27.6% of African-Americans live at or below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Racial disparities in which people of color tend to fare more poorly than their White counterparts are also evident in health, education, and incarceration rates. Some racial disparities in health include higher infant mortality rates, number of deaths from diabetes, and increased rates of depression for African-Americans in comparison with the
general population (Carlo, Crockett, & Carranza, 2011). In 2011, the homicide rate for black male victims was 31.67 per 100,000; and only 3.85 per 100,000 for white male victims (Violence Policy Center, 2014). In fact, the homicide rates for African-American males are so alarming that the Children’s Defense Fund and other national agencies developed campaigns such as the Cradle to Prison Pipeline to address this health problem (Carlo, Crockett, & Carranza, 2011).

According to the APA Presidential Task Force on Educational Disparities (2012), educational disparities mirror ethnic and racial disparities in socioeconomic status, health outcomes, and healthcare. These disparities in education are apparent throughout childhood, high school, and even affect enrollment in higher education (APA Presidential Task Force on Educational Disparities, 2012). Specifically, African-American students typically underperform White students academically; they also receive a disproportionate amount of behavioral sanctions in schools (APA Presidential Task Force on Educational Disparities, 2012).

Finally, criminal justice statistics indicated that there are significant racial disparities in incarceration and drug sentencing rates (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP], 2015). For example, African-Americans are incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of White people, and approximately 1 million out of the total 2.3 million individuals incarcerated are African-American (NAACP, 2015). Similarly, although 12% of the total population of drug users are African-American, they represent 38% of those arrested for drug offenses, and 59% of those in state prison for a drug offense (NAACP, 2015). It is predicted that “if current trends continue, one in three
black males born today can expect to spend time in prison during his lifetime” (NAACP, 2015, n.p.).

Based on the literature explored, it is clear that despite gains made during the civil rights movement, racial discrimination continues to be a significant issue in the United States. Omi and Winant (2014) reported that “race remains a fundamental category of (dis)empowerment” in the United States (p.2). After noting empirical studies that demonstrate racial inequalities in health care access, educational opportunity, and incarceration rates, the authors suggested that structural forms of racial inequality not only persist, but may have even deepened (Omi & Winant, 2014).

**Racialization and Racial Formation**

Before discussing racialization and racial formation, it is important to discuss the concept of race. In this study, race refers to the “categories to which others assign individuals on the basis of physical characteristics, such as skin color or hair type, and the generalizations or stereotypes made as a result” (APA, 2003, p. 380). This definition alluded to both the biological and social constructionist perspectives of race. The biological perspective assumed that racial groups differ because of genetic differences. The social constructionist perspective, on the other hand, argued that racial categories are “culturally and socially produced, and…. vary over historical eras and across cultural and historical contexts” (Kusow, 2006, p. 534).

Currently most social scientists reject the biological perspective and accept that race is a social concept (Omi & Winant, 2007; Omi & Winant, 2014). Since the biological theory is often used to legitimize racism and discrimination towards Blacks and other ethnic/racial minority groups, dismissing this perspective is arguably a step in
the right direction. Kusow (2006), however, contends that the social constructionist perspective is also problematic because it de-emphasizes the central role that race plays in dividing American society. Omi and Winant (2014) further elaborated this point by asserting that:

the task for theory is to capture this situation and avoid both the utopian framework that sees race as an element of social structure rather than as an irregularity within it; we should see race as a dimension of human experience rather than an illusion (p. 112).

Omi and Winant (1986) worked on the aforementioned task by developing a theory of racial formations. They defined racial formations as “the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed” (Omi and Winant, 2014, p. 109). The racial formations theory is based on the premise that “race is the most important organising category of social understanding in the United States” (Kusow, 2006, 535). It also presumed that racial categories and meanings are socially constructed within a historical context.

In other words, the concept and meaning of race is dynamic and dependent on social location and time. Before the 17th century, for example, the concept of race was nonexistent (Lieberman & Reynolds, 1996). Currently racial constructions in the United States are predicated on “white European colonization of Native Americans, enslavement of Africans, and the oppression and marginalization of ethnic communities including Asian and Latino immigrants to the United States” (Fries-Britt, Mwangi, & Peralta, 2014, p.1-2).
There is also a political dimension to racial categorization and meaning making. The role of the federal government in racial formation is evident in the racial categories listed (or not listed) on the US Census. Liebler et al. (2014) used internal data from the US Census Bureau and found that approximately 9.8 million people (that is, 6%) had a different race and/or Hispanic origin response in 2010 than they did in 2000. Interestingly, the largest number of those who chose a different racial identity moved from indicating that they were Hispanic and “some other race” in 2000 to Hispanic and White in 2010. The benefits and privileges associated with identifying as White may have contributed to this change. Another factor could be a difference in how race was conceptualized.

Kusow (2006) argued that African-born black immigrants conceptualize race in radically different ways than North Americans. In other words, blackness does not necessarily share the same meaning for immigrants who were raised in non-racialized societies and/or were members of the dominant racial group in their country of birth (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007). Thus, racialization—which is the “extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group” (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 111)—becomes a tool used by the oppressor to inform foreign-born people of color of their racial minority status in the United States. West (2002) pointed out that immigrants undergo the racialization process in order for the status quo to be maintained. Currently, there is limited research specifically examining how Somali refugees in the Midwest experience and respond to racialization.
Racial Identity Development

Racial identity can be defined as a “sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common heritage with a particular racial group” (Helms, 1990, p.3). The first theory on Black racial identity was developed by William E. Cross, Jr. in 1971, shortly after the Civil Rights Movement (Vandiver, 2001). Cross’s theory was named the nigrescence or the process of becoming Black theory (Cross, 1978).

The nigrescence theory assumed that there are five identity stages: (a) Pre-Encounter, (b) Encounter, (c) Immersion-Emersion, (d) Internalization, and (e) Internalization-Commitment. The theory initially asserted that Black racial identity development is on a continuum from self-loathing (i.e., Pre-Encounter) to having a healthy and positive self-concept (i.e., Internalization-Commitment) (Vandiver, 2001). The Pre-Encounter stage of racial identity was presented as being the most harmful to the psyche of Blacks. In this stage, African-Americans tend to take on an anti-Black, pro-White stance, which can lead to low self-esteem and poor mental health outcomes (Vandiver, 2001). Conversely, research indicated that the Internalization-Commitment stage is associated with better mental health outcomes (Nghe & Mahalik, 2001; Cokley, 2002).

The nigrescence theory also suggested that the process of becoming Black varies by social location and context (Cross Jr. & Vandiver, 2001). For instance, socialization patterns, evident throughout infancy to early adulthood, influence whether a Black person will develop a racial self-hatred identity profile or more of a multiculturalist type of racial identity (Cross Jr. & Vandiver, 2001). In effect, contextual factors such as child-rearing
play a role in racial identity development. Correspondingly, Helm’s (1995) people of color racial identity model also posited that identity development progresses from a negative or unexplored perception of one’s minority group to a more positive and balanced perception of one’s race and ethnicity (Fries-Britt, Mwangi, & Peralta, 2014). This model proposed that a more positive racial identity may serve as a buffer against racism and discrimination for African-Americans (Lee, 2005; Miller, & MacIntosh, 1999).

Since the nigrescence theory and Helm’s people of color racial identity model were both developed to explain the identity formation of African-Americans, they might not adequately explain the racial identity development of Somali refugees. Ethnicity and nationality are more salient than racial identity for some foreign-born persons of color (Fries-Britt, Mwangi, & Peralta, 2014). Additionally, even though researchers have argued that the legacy of slavery and colonization resulted in the experience of internalized oppression for Black people throughout the African diaspora (Freire, 2000; Memmi, 1965, Bailey, et al., 2011), this simply might not be the experience of refugees of color born outside of the United States. The variability of Black racial identity makes it impossible to capture its essence in one or even a series of studies (Cross Jr. & Vandiver, 2001); more research needs to be done on this important topic.

**Experiences with Racism and Discrimination**

Somalis in the United States experience interlocking systems of oppression because of their intersecting minority statuses as people of African descent, refugees, and Muslims (Collins, 2010; Waters, 2013). Waters (2013) noted that anti-Somali rhetoric may include racist ideologies against African-Americans due to White people perceiving
Somalis as Black. In other words, the visibly darker skin of Somali refugees leaves them vulnerable to experiencing subtle racial attacks as well as other more blatant forms of racism.

Alexander (2010) argued that African-Americans are currently living in a new Jim Crow era where racial oppression is pervasive yet less visible. Racial microaggressions are an example of a damaging yet often less visible form of oppression that Black people in the United States frequently experience (Sue et al., 2007). On the other hand, the torching in December 2015, of the only Somali restaurant in Grand Forks by an arsonist who hated Somalis, called them the N-word, and wanted them to go away (Morlin, B., 2016, September 7) is an example of a more blatant attack against Somalis because of their intersecting minority statuses.

Racism and discrimination can lead to negative outcomes for Somalis in the Midwest. For example, racial oppression and islamophobia can make it harder for Somalis to find employment and decent housing. In addition, ostracism from both the White and African-American communities might also negatively impact their mental health. More research is needed to identify how Somali refugees characterize and respond to varying forms of racial invalidation and oppression.

**Psychological Adjustment**

Research shows that refugees experience many obstacles before (premigration), during (migration), and after resettling into a new community (postmigration) (Kirmayer, et al., 2011). While each stage has its own unique challenges, the prevalence of mental health problems, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and somatic complaints, seem to relate to the amount of adversity and violence experienced by the
Several factors impact the mental health of refugees during the premigration, migration, and postmigration stages. For instance, the age and development stage of the refugee at migration and being separated from loved ones are important factors during the premigration stage; being exposed to violence and harsh living conditions is significant at the migration stage; and language barriers and social exclusion are key factors during the postmigration stage (Kirmayer, et al., 2011).

Racism and discrimination also negatively impact refugees of color during the postmigration stage. Specifically, it can lead to emotional, physical, spiritual, and psychological harm (Carter, 2007; Pyke, 2010; Speight, 2007). Kirmayer et al. (2011) also argued that refugees from predominantly Black developing countries are at an increased risk of developing a psychotic disorder during the postmigration stage because of racism and discrimination in their resettlement communities (Kirmayer, et al., 2011). Psychological adjustment to racialized experiences in the United States might be more challenging for refugees from predominantly Black countries given that ethnicity rather than racial identity is often more salient in their country of origin. Moreover, their lack of awareness about issues pertaining to racism and racial identity coupled with their experiences of discrimination may leave them vulnerable to experiencing mental health problems.

**Purpose of the Present Study**

The goal of this study was to explore the racial identity development of Somali refugees who reside in the Midwest. Somali refugees are a vulnerable population who fled hardships in their home country and face discrimination and racism in their host country. They are also challenged with the task of adjusting to both their new physical
environments and the complex racial realities of the United States within a relatively short period of time. Racial identity development is important as it can serve as a buffer to racism and discrimination, yet few empirical studies have explored the racial identity development, racialization experiences, and coping strategies utilized by Somalis.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to expand the limited research on the racialization experiences and racial identity formation of Somali refugees in the Midwest. Through increased knowledge and understanding, service providers such as practitioners, clinicians, and educators will be better prepared to provide more culturally sensitive and relevant services that meet the unique needs of this population. Somali refugees experience multiple, intersecting forms of oppression such as racism, religious intolerance, and discrimination. These negative experiences, combined with language barriers, often serve to silence their voices. It was hoped that participants would feel empowered through sharing their narratives with this researcher.

**Research Questions**

The main questions guiding the research were:

1) How do Somali refugees in the Midwest construct and make meaning of their racial identity development?

2) How do Somali refugees experience, negotiate, and cope with racism, racialization, and discrimination within the Midwest?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asylum Seeker</td>
<td>A person who has left their home country as a political refugee and is seeking asylum in another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internally Displaced</td>
<td>A person who is forced to flee his or her home because of war or persecution but who remains within the borders of the home country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New American</td>
<td>A newly arrived refugee or immigrant to the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>“Categories to which others assign individuals on the basis of physical characteristics, such as skin color or hair type, and the generalizations or stereotypes made as a result” (American Psychological Association [APA], 2003, p. 380).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racialization</td>
<td>“Extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group” (Omi &amp; Winant, 2014, p. 111).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Identity</td>
<td>A “sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common heritage with a particular racial group” (Helms, 1990, p.3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>“A system in which covert and subtle forms of institutional, cultural, and individual practices produce and reproduce racial injustice” (Applebaum, 2010, p. 8).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>A “person who is unable or unwilling to return to the home country because of a well-founded fear of persecution due to race, membership in a particular social group, political opinion, religion, or national origin” (American International Council [AIC], 2014, p.1).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER II

METHOD

This chapter presents the methodology selected to address and respond to the research questions posed in this study. A paucity of empirical research exists on the racial identity development and racialization experiences of Somali refugees. A qualitative research design was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the unique lived experiences of Somalis in the Midwest. Qualitative research is based on the assumption that reality is socially constructed and this inductive research approach is often used to better understand, interpret, and/or contextualize complex variables (Glesne, 2011). This chapter begins with background information regarding the specific methodology used in this study. Subsequently, the researcher as instrument, criteria used for selecting participants, data collection procedures, and setting will be explored. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the data analysis, and the strategies implemented to ensure that the data was trustworthy.

Research Design

For the purposes of this study, a narrative methodology was used to collect and analyze the data. As the name suggests, narrative data collection methods and/or analysis are used in narrative methodology (Bolt, 2012). More specifically, narrative inquiry is defined as “a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000,
Narrative inquiry radically departs from more traditional research approaches; it challenges the dominant narrative that assumes that phenomenon is fixed and unchanging (Clandinin, 2013). It also differs from other methodologies by simultaneously attending to temporality, sociality, and place. Since all three are integral to the conceptual framework of narrative inquiry they will be briefly discussed (Clandinin, 2013).

Temporality refers to the temporal location of an event. Carr stated that, “we are composing and constantly revising our autobiographies as we go along” (1986, p. 76). Narratives are not stagnant; rather they ebb and flow at any given moment in time. The meaning ascribed to a particular event is likely to change in relation to the temporal context. For example, the interviews for this study were conducted after Donald Trump became the Republican nominee yet before he became the President of the United States. Participants’ narratives on race could have changed during this specific time period.

Sociality is the process of simultaneously attending to both the personal and social conditions (Clandinin, 2013). The personal conditions relate to the internal feelings, reactions, and moral responses of the researcher and participants and the social conditions refer to the broader social and cultural context in which the events and experiences transpire (Clandinin, 2013). Narrative researchers recognize the fluid and dynamic nature of narratives. They recognize that stories are impacted by internal and external conditions.

Place refers to the “specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of place or sequence of places where the inquiry and events take place” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p.480). Similar to the concept of sociality, place has both an internal and an external dimension. The external dimension is outward and more concrete. In contrast,
the internal dimension is abstract and shapes one’s identity and understanding of self (Clanidin, 2013).

Narrative inquiry is often used in mental health research on refugee trauma (Bochner, 2001; De Haine, Grietens, Verschueren, 2012). It can be used as a tool to help participants construct meaning from their lived experiences (Bold, 2012). Storytelling and the oral tradition are also popular within African traditions. Through the use of storytelling, oppressed and vulnerable social groups are given a voice; relationships are developed; and social justice is promoted (De Haine, Grietens, Verschueren, 2012). Given that the goal of this investigation was to explore the racialization experiences and racial identity development of Somali refugees in the Midwest, a narrative inquiry was utilized.

**Researcher as Instrument**

Qualitative researchers play an integral role in the research process. Whereas quantitative researchers are often expected to remain neutral and objective in order for their work to be deemed credible, qualitative researchers interact and engage with the participants in their study. By interacting with participants and constructing meaning from these encounters, the qualitative researcher serves as an instrument in the research process. Clandinin (2013) argued that, “We are not objective inquirers. We are relational inquirers, attentive to the intersubjective, relational, embedded spaces in which lives are lived out. We do not stand metaphorically outside the inquiry but are part of the phenomenon under study” (p. 24).

As an instrument in the research process, the qualitative researcher is responsible for ensuring that their interpretation of the data is credible and trustworthy. Engaging in
reflexivity or self-reflection can help qualitative researchers manage their subjectivities and communicate that their study is internally consistent and credible (Morrow, 2005). Researcher reflexivity is the ability of the researcher to acknowledge the impact their contextual experiences have on the research process and outcomes (Etherington, 2004). Personal information is provided below in order for readers to gain a better understanding of the lens from which I interpreted and analyzed the data.

As a 36-year-old, middle-class, Nigerian born, Jamaican-American, female, doctoral student, I can never fully understand the unique experiences of Somali refugees. English is my first language and I am accustomed to American culture and traditions. Additionally, I am awarded privileges from being a U.S. citizen and from not being part of a religious minority group. On the other hand, I have experienced feeling “different” in various social locations and contexts. I have also experienced being removed from family and friends and having to start afresh in a different country. For instance, moving from a predominantly White environment to a predominantly Black environment as a child resulted in significant changes to my racial identity development. I shifted from desiring to be White to being proud of my racial identity.

It is important for researchers to understand how one’s background, values, and biases influence the research process. Shared similarities and characteristics between the researcher and their participants can be both advantageous and harmful. Sharing certain characteristics and experiences with my research participants, for instance, helped to facilitate dialogue and open communication.

On the other hand, my biases, assumptions, and expectations could have negatively impacted the results of this study if left unchallenged. Bolt (2012) pointed out
the importance of engaging in critical reflection in narrative research. She wrote, “If we are critically reflective, we question actions and challenge accepted truths or claims and we consider various alternative ways of interpreting and analyzing situations” (p.3). A self-reflective journal was utilized throughout the data collection and analysis to manage, challenge, and process through my biases and assumptions.

**Participants**

Given that narrative inquiry requires an in-depth analysis of a participant’s lived experiences, small samples are typically recommended (Patton, 1990). Eight Somali refugees who resided in North Dakota during the time of the interviews were initially selected for this study. However, significant language barriers resulted in one of the interview recordings being inaudible and therefore not utilized in the final analysis. Three participants identified as female and four identified as male. Their ages ranged from 23 to 33 years old at the time of the interviews and 8 to 21 at their time of arrival to the United States. All of the participants self-identified as a Black, refugee from Somalia and provided written consent to participate in the study.

Participants were recruited through advertisements and my professional network. Flyers were posted at local community agencies that provide services to refugees. Additionally, a snowball sampling technique was utilized in which participants were asked to identify other Somali refugees who might be interested in participating in the study. The selection of the participants was exclusively based on voluntary participation. Individuals who expressed interest in the study were contacted by this researcher.
Data Collection

Participants were screened prior to the start of the interview to determine whether they qualified for the study. As recommended in the literature on narrative research with vulnerable populations, particular attention was placed on safeguarding against re-traumatization (De Haene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010). Prior to the initial face-to-face interview, participants were asked general questions pertaining to their comfort discussing their migratory experiences. This screening was done to ensure that the participants meet the inclusion criteria and could engage in the interview process without the assistance of a translator. After obtaining the necessary background information, the interviews were scheduled for a mutually convenient time and place. Each interview transpired in a private room located in the Education Building at the University of North Dakota.

The interviews began with a discussion about informed consent. This researcher informed participants about their rights and the purpose of the study. The participants were told the following: (a) participation in the study was voluntary, (b) they were free to withdraw from the study without penalty at any time, and (c) they were free to not answer questions if they felt uncomfortable. Participants were also informed that the interview sessions would be recorded and excerpts from the interviews might be published in the future. This researcher explained that: (a) identifiable information about participants were kept confidential (materials were stored in a locked cabinet and I was the only one able to access them), (b) information was coded to protect their identity, and (c) the recordings would be destroyed at the completion of the study. Finally, this researcher informed participants about the limits of confidentiality and the $20 compensation they would
receive at the completion of the interview. Participants were asked if they had any questions about the study. They were given a copy of the informed consent form and a list of agencies in the community that provided affordable counseling services.

**Data Sources**

In addition to the transcribed interviews, other sources of data were utilized in this study. Specifically, the data sources included existing literature such as electronic news articles, the New Americans issue of *ON SECOND THOUGHT* (a journal published by the North Dakota Humanities Council), participant feedback, and informal discussions with individuals who worked with Somali refugees. Throughout the course of this study, I also immersed myself in the field by attending relevant workshops and presentations on issues pertaining to the needs and experiences of Somali refugees. Field notes and self-reflective memos were also sources of data used in this study.

**Interview Approach**

Each face-to-face interview transpired for approximately 45-90 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions as is typically done in qualitative research (Glesne, 2011). This open approach served to personalize each interview; allowed for deeper and more meaningful dialogue on topics of interest to participants; and facilitated participants voicing their narratives and experiences in a less prescribed manner. The initial guided interview questions were as follows:

1. What ethnic or racial group did you consider yourself in Somalia?
2. In Somalia did you ever think about issues related to race, or skin color?
3. How about in the United States?’
4. What ethnic or racial group do you consider yourself now?
5. What does it mean to be a member of the identified group/s?

6. Have you ever experienced discrimination in the US? If yes, describe an incident. Religious, racial, other form of discrimination?

7. Can you tell me your story of migration, in particular your experience and process of adjusting to the United States?

8. When you look back, what was it like reestablishing your life in the United States?

9. What are your challenges now and how do you cope?

10. What else would you like to share about your unique experiences?

Description of Setting

The setting in narrative inquiry goes beyond describing the physical environment of an event to referencing the sociocultural environment in which the story takes place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Polkinghorne, 2007). Ultimately, the findings and the interpretation of the results are relevant in relation to the cultural context in which the study takes place. In this section, the physical and sociocultural landscape will be explored.

This study was conducted in the Midwestern city of Grand Forks. Grand Forks is the third largest city in North Dakota. In 2013, it had an estimated population of close to 55,000 with an estimated population percent change of 3.9 (US Census Bureau, 2015). The city is also becoming more culturally diverse. For example, in 2000, 93.3% of the population was White and .9% was Black; in 2010, however, 89.7% of the population was White and 2% was Black (US Census Bureau, 2015).
Most participants referenced having lived in Minneapolis, Minnesota for extended periods of time; some even considered the city their home. While Grand Forks and Minneapolis are both Midwestern cities, they differ significantly in terms of their sociocultural environments. For instance, Minneapolis or ‘Little Mogadishu’ (as it was affectionately called) has been identified as the Somali capital of the world because it likely has the largest Somali community (outside of East Africa) in the world (Almond, K., 2017, February). Conversely, even though Grand Forks is becoming more culturally diverse, it remains a predominantly racially homogenous city.

**Data Analysis**

Epistemologically, narrative research is centered in the philosophy that truth is relative and multifaceted. In keeping with this perspective, a universal approach to narrative inquiry data analysis does not exist. A narrative thematic approach, however, was used to analyze the interview data regarding Somali participant’s racial identity development and racialization experiences in the Midwest. This approach involved identifying and examining the themes both within and across the narratives shared by the participants while also including extracts from the interviews in the data analysis (Bold, 2011).

The first stage of this process involved transcribing and deidentifying the data. Specifically, a professional transcription company which abided by the regulations of the University of North Dakota’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) was employed to transcribe the interviews conducted by this researcher during this study. After the interviews were transcribed, this researcher carefully reviewed and analyzed one
transcribed interview at a time while closely attending to the unique story of each participant.

Readings of narratives were conducted utilizing more of a holistic or life story analysis rather than a categorical or coding-based approach (Josselson, 2011). Additionally, the readings were focused more on the content (or what was told) of the narratives rather than the form in which the narrative were told (Josselson, 2011). Each transcribed interviewed was read multiple times to re-familiarize and immerse myself in the material. The audio recordings were also reviewed as needed for clarification purposes and/ or to gain a better understanding of the tone, context, and subtleties within the narratives. After identifying and exhausting the themes within each narrative, this researcher began to look for patterns or themes across narratives.

Validity Techniques

Narrative approaches to research provide a valid and credible method for exploring people’s lives (Bold, 2012). Morrow (2005), however, argued that in order for a qualitative study to be trustworthy and valid certain indispensable qualities are needed regardless of research design or paradigm. These indispensable qualities include “sufficiency of and immersion in the data, attention to subjectivity and reflexivity, adequacy of data, and issues related to interpretation and presentation” (p. 250). Morrow (2005) also indicated that social validity is an important standard for trustworthiness across qualitative research paradigms. The validity of this study was maintained through the utilization of the aforementioned standards.

Social validity refers to the process of applying social value criteria to a study (Morrow, 2005). It also considers the social relevance and importance of the findings to
the population of interest. Given recent incidents of islamophobia and racism towards Somalis, this study is particularly timely and socially relevant. Reflexivity and subjectivity were addressed by continually identifying and acknowledging my assumptions and biases throughout the entirety of the research process.

Peer debriefing and consistency checks were also utilized to improve the trustworthiness of the study. More specifically, this researcher consulted with peers and my adviser to gain insight about areas of importance and to discover alternative perspectives. Further processes to address validity concerns included: (a) triangulation of the data through means of communication with service providers whom interacted with Somali clients, (b) immersion in the data through multiple readings of the interviews, (c) keeping a self-reflective journal to record my experiences, reactions, and biases, and (d) the utilization of a recording device to ensure that the actual words of participants were used in the report.
CHAPTER III
RESULTS

The results of this study illustrated how seven Somali refugees understood and made meaning of their racial identity and racialized experiences within the current sociocultural climate of the Midwest. Their stories revealed an overarching narrative consistent with the hero’s journey. Forced to flee their homes in Somalia, they journeyed to what most thought would be the land of milk and honey, the United States of American (U.S.). Upon arrival, however, they quickly realized that life in the U.S. presents with its own unique set of challenges. Oppressive systems of racism, islamophobia, and sexism sought to constrain and disempower them. Trapped in between vastly different worlds and cultural realities, these heroes were each challenged with the task of forging a new path and perhaps more importantly constructing and consolidating a new sense of self.

Overall, the experiences of the Somali refugees interviewed in this study were consistent with the literature on the situational nature of racial identity for foreign-born blacks (Kusow, 2006; Fries-Britt, Mwangi, & Peralta, 2014). Their intersecting identities, however, also seemed to significantly impact the construction of their narratives. Regarding my research questions, “How do Somali refugees in the Midwest construct and make meaning of their racial identity development?” and “How do they experience, negotiate, and cope with racism, racialization, and discrimination within the Midwest?,”
participant stories suggested that the processes of identity development and coping with discrimination were dependent on a rich interplay of both intrinsic (i.e. personality and psychological makeup) and extrinsic (i.e. contextual and environmental) factors.

To highlight the unique standpoint and distinct lived experiences of the seven participants in this study, this chapter begins with an individual presentation of their life stories. Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of the participants. The title of each story was a direct quote vocalized by the narrator of each story. Following participant narratives, the results were then organized in direct response to the research questions posed in this study. Themes from the narratives will be presented in relation to the sociocultural context of the Midwest. My reflections as the researcher will also be infused throughout this chapter.

**Participant Narratives**

**Hani: “You hear all the time that you’re oppressed but you know it’s not true.”**

Hani identified as female and was 25 at the time of her interview. She was born in Somalia but moved to Ethiopia with her family prior to relocating to Kenya at the age of 8 or 9. Her older brother was the first member of the family to move to the United States. He filed for his parents and siblings and they all relocated to Minneapolis when Hani was 13 years old. Hani’s first impression of the United States was related to the weather being so cold. She also discussed living with her brother and his family for approximately a month prior to moving into low-income apartments with her parents and younger siblings.

Hani recalled attending a charter school in which most of the students identified as Somali. She described getting lost on her way from school and almost walking on to
Due to not speaking English, Hani had limited interactions with community members who were not Somali. She expressed feeling embarrassed about being pulled out of class to learn English but also noted that this experience motivated her to push hard and practice her English language skills more regularly.

Hani discussed needing to move with her family to different areas of Minneapolis on multiple occasions; the noise of her younger siblings resulted in her family experiencing problems with their neighbors. While Hani acknowledged that frequently moving was difficult, she also described the benefits of being exposed to many different things and being able to quickly adapt to new environments. Hani also noted that moving gave her the opportunity to interact more with African-Americans. She described the older African-American women as encouraging and helpful; she was pleased to receive help with her homework in the community. Hani pointed out that Minneapolis was considered little Mogadishu; she did not miss Somalia or feel out of place there. She indicated that her family has been settled in Minneapolis for over a decade and where they live now feels like home.

Regarding cultural identities, Hani described being Muslim and a Somali (in that order) as most salient pre-migration and post-migration. Her racial identity was not salient prior to migrating to the United States since people were primarily identified by their nationality or tribe in Somalia and Kenya. Hani stated that it was “when we came to America we start noticing people being identified by color.” She reported feeling happy about her skin color and being Black. She also referenced feeling blessed to have darker skin since she does not get sunburned like her mother and sister. On a different note, Hani
did not perceive herself as a refugee, rather she noted that the term New American was a better fit for her.

In 2013, Hani moved to North Dakota to attend college. She experienced challenges such as being the only Somali and the only black person in her classes and reported feeling different as an African, Muslim woman. She discussed feeling a need to educate others, while also being cautious about what she says since she represents many different cultural groups. Hani noted that people judge her and underestimate her academic abilities by making statements like, “I didn’t realize you were able to do this.”

It was interesting to observe the differences between how Hani perceived herself and how she was perceived by others. For instance, Hani reported that, “You hear all the time that you’re oppressed but you know it’s not true.” People assumed she was oppressed because she wears a hijab, yet she has chosen not to internalize that narrative.

Finally, Hani discussed coping with challenges and discrimination by not taking things personally; ignoring such actions and events; and knowing what she believes in and what is true. She also pointed to a strong faith in her religious beliefs as sources of coping, acknowledging that she tries to stay physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy. She conveyed that the support of the community makes her feel hopeful. Hani noted that North Dakota is becoming more diverse; there is a mosque now; and people are becoming friendlier towards immigrants.

**Aar:** “*In the US they value the life of a gorilla more than a black child.*”

Aar identified as male and was 26 at the time of his interview. Aar left Somalia as an infant and lived in the largest refugee camp in Kenya for 18 years with his mother, sisters, and brothers. He comes from a family of 12 siblings and is the fifth child and first
boy for his parents. Aar arrived in the U.S. with 30 other refugees but did not understand that they would all be separated. It was terrifying for him to find out that they were all relocating to different states.

He first arrived in Virginia and remembers feeling lost upon arrival since his caseworker was not at the airport and he did not know English. Fortunately, an African-American male helped him at the airport until his Somali caseworker picked him up. Aar’s caseworker told him that he was not supposed to arrive that day. He, however, took Aar to his home and they ate Somali food together prior to Aar being taken to stay in a hotel. He spent his first five days in the U.S. in a hotel.

Subsequently, he moved into an apartment in a bad neighborhood and lived there for three months. Ironically, Aar noted that the first time he ever heard shooting was in the U.S. although people assumed he would be used to violence given his nationality. After realizing that mostly labor jobs were available to those without a college degree, Aar moved to Minneapolis to live with family members and to pursue a higher education.

Adjusting to American food and learning how to cook did not come naturally for Aar. He pointed out that in Somalia females traditionally care for their families which meant that he was unaccustomed to preparing his own meals. It was initially hard for him to know which foods were unclean according to his religious beliefs. Back home, meat was eaten the same day since they did not have a refrigerator. Aar stated that he enjoyed eating at Chipotle since it reminded him of foods from back home.

Aar made friends with Pakistanis; they ate Halal food together and encouraged his pursuit of a higher education. He noted being treated like a “brother” at Black barbershops but felt like he could not relate to Black culture. He was not into rap songs
and preferred slower music. Aar reflected on being made fun of for acting too white. 
Arguably, the development of Aar’s bicultural identity was evident on the soccer field. 
For example, he noted going between both teams since he had both African American 
ad Pakistani friends. While he got along with everybody, he felt closer to Pakistanis due 
to their religious connection and often chose to play for the Muslim team over the 
African team.

Aar stated that Somalis experience more discrimination because they are Muslim 
and Black. He reported being called a terrorist and the N word—the latter understandably 
had more of an impact when he learned about U.S. history. Aar reported having more 
things to consider now, such as the additional responsibility of representing both his 
religion and race, and his fear of potentially getting shot while driving lost in a White 
neighborhood. He discussed numerous encounters with racism and noted being looked at 
as less than a person in the US: “In the US, they value the life of a gorilla more than a 
black child.” He reported trying to defy stereotypes about Somalis always being late but 
was accused of not acting Somali when he showed up on time for his appointments.

Aar shared that he responds to racism and discrimination in a variety of ways. He 
provided an example of not backing down during an argument with a White dog owner 
and stated that: “I don’t want anybody to feel like they can control me.” He reported 
more than once during the interview a desire to not become too violent. He also responds 
to discrimination by striving to prove his worth which makes sense given his perception 
that animals are valued more than Black lives in the U.S. Aar expressed pride related to 
starting college within two years of arriving in the US; his educational status seemed to 
serve as a confidence booster.
Regarding identity, Aar referenced being called a Sijui—a Somali who does not know Somali—in Kenya. He noted that some Somalis in the U.S. experience an identity crisis. He denied being confused though and stated that he knows where he is from. Home for Aar is actually in Kenya since that is where he grew up. Prior to migrating to the U.S., his religious identity and ethnicity were the most salient aspects of his identity. The first-time Aar heard the term Black was in the U.S. Back home, “you are either Kenyan or Somali; we never had to call ourselves Black.” Aar currently identifies himself in a variety of ways such as Kenyan American and Muslim American; however, on forms he typically identifies as Black American or chooses the “Other” category.

Ladan: “I never felt any racial discrimination in Minneapolis like the same one I felt here in Grand Forks.”

Ladan identified as female and was 28 at the time of her interview. Ladan left Somalia with her family at the age of three. She has six siblings and is the second oldest child. Ladan lived in a Kenyan refugee camp with her mother and siblings for approximately eight years, prior to her family relocating to Minneapolis when she was 11 years old. Ladan’s first memory of the US involved the weather. She remembers feeling cold because of not being dressed properly and being greeted at the airport with jackets from the people that welcomed her family at the airport.

America was not what she expected. The plan was for her family to stay with Ladan’s aunt until they got an apartment. They, however, did not know that her aunt lived in a two-bedroom home with her husband and five children. Moreover, Ladan’s aunt did not know that Ladan’s parents were relocating to the U.S. with their children. Ladan and her family ended up moving into a shelter that first night; and stayed there for the next six
months. Ladan’s father was an educated man. He worked as an engineer prior to relocating to the U.S. and had never stayed in the refugee camp with his family. He ended up taking the first job he could find which involved working at Walmart.

Fortunately, from Ladan’s perspective, the community in Minneapolis was welcoming. The Iman of the mosque helped Ladan and her family move out of the shelter while social agencies assisted by helping them find a two-bedroom apartment. The mosque and community members also donated money and supplies to her family such as backpacks and winter clothing. Ladan noted that her family used public transportation during their first year in the U.S. until they could afford to buy a car.

Ladan reported that she started school in the 6th grade but the school was teaching material she had already learned in 3rd grade. She and her older sister went to school in the refugee camps. It was a rule that her father enforced. The school that Ladan attended in the U.S. was diverse with more African-American students than White students. She was surprised by the ignorance of the American students who assumed she could not speak English and asked questions about why she wore a head scarf, if she had hair, if she was black, if they have schools in Africa.

After completing high school, Ladan moved to North Dakota to attend university. She reported: “I never felt any racial discrimination in Minneapolis like the same one I felt here in Grand Forks.” At the mall, people would randomly ask her, “why are you here?” She even had a client from her job tell her that he did not like Black people and she should go back to Africa. Ladan also described instances in which she witnessed discrimination against newly arrived Somalis and advocated on their behalf. She reported that while Somalis do not receive “full-blown discrimination” from African-Americans,
they are told “you guys think you’re Black but you’re not” and “we are Americans, you guys are not.” Ladan also discussed experiencing racism from other Muslims. She noted feeling hurt by a person from Saudi Arabia not wanting their shoulders to touch within the mosque.

In Kenya, Ladan had not noticed race and she reportedly continues not to see it now that she is in the U.S. She identifies herself as African American: “as far as my skin color goes and what region of the world I'm from, I'm from Africa. So, I do define myself as an African-American. I don't know, I just kinda put the words together. I'm from Africa, and now, I'm an American.” Ladan pointed out that elders in the Somali community do not identify as African-Americans or Black; they identify as Somali. She stated that it was “like they have their own race.”

Ladan identified being Muslim as the most salient aspect of her identity and noted that it impacts important decisions such as whom she should marry. She also described herself as 90% American since she moved to the U.S. in childhood and most of her memories were located here. She identified feeling lost in the middle of Somali and American culture:

But as far as being lost, I do feel lost sometimes. I am Somali, yes, that's my identity. I am Black, I am from Africa. But at the same time, it's like all my friends or other people that I grew up with, the people that I learned with all have been Americans. And so I identify myself as an American as well, because I didn't grow up in Somalia.

Regarding current challenges, Ladan reported that the lack of community acceptance of New Americans makes her feel like she constantly must advocate on their
behalf. While community groups like Global Friends in Grand Forks, North Dakota are helping, Ladan stated that more education is needed. After being pressed about her personal challenges, Ladan noted that she was a single parent to a young child working two jobs without receiving financial assistance. Ladan identified that being a single parent was more challenging than her race or gender.

Ladan primarily copes with her challenges by talking with family members, venting to her supervisor, and by choosing to not focus on them. She reported that both of her parents taught her to not be a victim. Her father ensured that she was independent by encouraging her to get her driver’s license as a teenager and by teaching her the importance of being financially independent within romantic relationships. She has also reportedly worked and supported herself since the age of 17. Ladan stated that her desire to help others comes from her mother. She described her mother as the community daycare and noted that her family was like the resettlement agency in that they always took refugees into their home.

_Siman: “I identify myself as a Somali American, and I identify myself as a Black Muslim woman. That is my identity and that is my strength.”_

Siman identified as female and was 31 at the time of her interview. She fled with her family from Somalia to a refugee camp in Kenya when she was six years old. She noted that their lives were paused in the refugee camp and her father wanted to return to Somalia to find work. Her mother, however, refused because she did not want her sons to get involved in a war that was not theirs and she wanted her daughters to grow up in an environment where they would have the opportunity to become educated and self-
sufficient. They waited for five years and were fortunate to relocate as a family to the U.S. when Siman was 11 years old.

Siman discussed having positive experiences in the refugee camp but unrealistic expectations of the U.S.:

I remember, I had a really, really good childhood. I don't have any memories of pain or sadness or suffering. Our parents really kept and protected us within the camp about the hardships of the world. The bad thing was when we did come to the States our expectations were extremely high…people talk about America like it's like this gold rush.

Siman and family spent their first two years in California prior to relocating to Minnesota. She discussed living in the not so nice part of town yet being able to quickly adjust to her new environment. The support of her siblings reportedly helped her feel less alone.

Prior to moving to the U.S., Siman did not know about race and identified others according to nationality and ethnicity. She was fascinated by the diversity of people in the U.S.; everyone had looked the same to her in the refugee camp. Even though she was young, Siman noticed and was upset about how dismissive and disrespectful service providers were to her mother. She stated that Minnesotans dislike the fact that Somalis do not assimilate as other immigrants do. In other words, it could be argued that Somalis face rejection due to constructing a different immigrant narrative. Factors such as religion, race, and nationality make it harder for Somalis to assimilate into US culture. Siman also discussed feeling like she was between cultures her entire life. She loves both Somali and American culture and noted that both give her strength.
After graduating from the University of Minnesota, Siman worked as a case manager for Somali inner city youth. She discussed some of the unique challenges of this population. For instance, their parents typically do not speak English and are unable to accompany them to court. She found it difficult to conduct research on juvenile delinquency among Somali youth since they are often classified as African-American and there are limited funding opportunities for research about Somali youth.

Siman was candid about the challenges she experienced because of her intersecting identities. For example, she stated that she was called the N-word and told to go back to where she came from. Her gender also appeared to add additional concerns of being “sized up” or treated like a prey:

It makes me uncomfortable because I feel. I feel. I could feel that it's someone that could overpower me if it ever came to being a fight or something, you know? It's that discomfort, like a prey, like when an animal knows they are being prey and they just feel it, they do that… I feel that a lot. But when that happened, that is just very coward behavior. Just a man trying to make a women feel uncomfortable because he can, with his body size.

Despite the challenges, Siman indicated that she would never change from being a Black, Muslim woman because it has given her compassion, understanding, open-mindedness, and a desire to advocate. Even though Siman experiences challenges, she tries to maintain a balanced perspective in which she remains focused on the positives while not ignoring the negatives.

Siman moved to Grand Forks to further her education and described her experience in North Dakota as positive. She has interacted with welcoming individuals
and agencies such as the Global Friends Coalition. Siman is passionate about advocacy work and stated that, “I’ll advocate if I see injustice and I’ll celebrate when I see inclusion.”

Finally, Siman disclosed that a side effect of being a kid in the diaspora is you do not really belong anywhere. She summed up her narrative with: “I am from Somalia. I was born in Somalia. I grew up in Minnesota. I identify myself as a Somali American, and I identify myself as a Black Muslim woman. That is my identity and that is my strength.”

_Cali: “I’m not depressed, I’m only depressed because of the condition, so I need to find a solution to the problem.”_

Cali identified as male and was 32 at the time of his interview. Cali was approximately five years old when his family moved from Somalia to the Kenyan border. His mother fled to a neighboring state which resulted in Cali’s father becoming a single parent to Cali and his nine siblings. Cali’s father could not afford to take care of all his children hence Cali was sent to northern Somalia to stay with extended family. He spent the next eight years living a life he described as nomadic and beautiful. Water scarcity, however, was a problem so Cali returned to live with his father in Kenya and hoped for a sponsor to the U.S.

Cali reported experiencing prison, beatings, police harassment, and intimidation prior to relocating to the US. He, however, considers his experiences a piece of cake compared to what others went through. He noted that: “It's just a lot of people go through difficult time. When it comes to civil war and refugee, it's a hard life. People lose their
sense of being sometimes, sense of belonging, sense of hope, I guess… like a bird lost in its nest. Just fly on autopilot.”

At the age of 17, Cali relocated to Minneapolis with his father and brothers. He remembers initially feeling excited but finding out quickly that the U.S. has its own challenges. Upon arrival, he was separated from his father and brothers; they lived with different relatives while trying to find employment. While Cali received help from the church and relatives, he did not have a car and the transportation system was not good where he lived. He also did not feel confident going to places and asking for job applications. The process was confusing to him and he remembers thinking: “if I cannot fill application for myself today, what am I gonna do for myself after 10 years?”

Cali decided to attend school and thinks he started in about the ninth grade. Within two years, he graduated in the top five of his class and was offered a scholarship to attend the University of Minnesota. Cali was excited about the opportunity to pursue his dream of becoming a screenwriter. He, however, developed a health condition which negatively impacted his life.

For eight years, approximately half of Cali’s paychecks went towards paying physicians who said nothing was wrong with him and referred him to different mental health providers. Cali was certain that his condition was medical rather than a psychological concern. He noted that:

The psychiatrist tell me your brain is lying to you. There is nothing wrong with you. So you need to get this medicine, and I was like no, I'm not going to take it. I'm not depressed, I'm only depressed because of the condition, so I need to find a
solution to the problem, because if I don't find a solution to the problem, then what's the point of taking anti-depressants.

This was a very difficult period for Cali; he lost friends, family members, his scholarship, and even considered suicide. He believes that language barriers combined with doctors not listening to him or paying attention to his concerns led to him being medically misdiagnosed. He also acknowledged that he did not trust interpreters to maintain his confidentiality which likely impacted the information he chose to share. Fortunately, he eventually found a physician who listened and could treat his medical issue. Cali thinks that other refugees face similar concerns. Some refugees, especially in small communities, might avoid seeking medical treatment due to fear of translators sharing their stories with other Somalis. He was alarmed to witness translators without adequate training being used to interpret and relay information to medical professionals.

While discussing his resettlement process, Cali stated that it takes:

A long period of transition, to accept a new way of life. Because at first everything is difficult…everything is hard. And in three years, you're kind of sensing okay, I can communicate… I know some people who are different from me, they're accepting …I know I can look at that problem and say I finally have people here who support me. … You see new things. You appreciate the sense of diversity.

For Cali, the process of self-identifying as an American citizen came with its own unique set of challenges. He wrote a poem in which the Somali flag was weeping while the American flag was being accepted. He noted that becoming a citizen was an emotional process because he felt like he was abandoning his roots.
Cali noted that Somalis in the U.S. are perceived as outsiders even if they have been a U.S. citizen for 10 years. He reported feeling sad that Black children who were born in the U.S. were also treated like outsiders and feel like they do not belong. Even though Cali stated that he believes in the justice system, he was not convinced that a judge would perceive him as innocent until proven guilty. He discussed avoiding law enforcement since he moved to the U.S. and being fearful of police brutality. He has been stopped multiple times driving while Black.

He reported coping with challenges by helping and serving others. He stated that the “day I help someone is the day I sleep well no matter what I did for that person.” He also noted that he expresses himself through writing. Despite his challenges, Cali maintains that “in this beautiful land, nobody can stop anybody from being who they want to be.”

**Fahmi:** “You can’t do anything about it. You can’t fight it.”

Fahmi identified as male and was 33 at the time of his interview. He left Somalia at the age of seven with his siblings; his father and brother stayed behind because there was not enough sponsors or money to financially support everyone. His mother had already relocated to the U.S. and was able to sponsor her children. Fahmi remembered being amazed by the roads, buildings, people making out at the airport, and the way how things were structured. He also remembered living with his mother, siblings, and grandmother prior to his mother suggesting that he move to Tennessee to live with his aunt. He agreed; the apartment was overcrowded and he was told that he could get a better education there. Fahmi lived in Tennessee for approximately eight years; and at the age of 16, he decided to move to Minneapolis.
While the focus in Somalia was on survival, he also had to learn how to survive in the U.S. He recounted his difficulties adjusting to the U.S. culture and learning English. For example, he discussed how hard it was for him to meet people. He reported that the weakest link in school becomes a target; he was bullied at times by other Black students. Fahmi noted that it was especially tough living in neighborhoods with gangs; he moved around a lot with his aunt and cousins to find a peaceful neighborhood. He reported living in a diverse community with African-Americans, Latinxs, Kurdish, and Middle Eastern folks. Unfortunately, they all belonged to different gangs which resulted in violence at times.

Fahmi experienced challenges such as having no one to guide him. Even though he described himself as having been a quiet young person, he also reported that he was physically assaulted on multiple occasions. In addition, Fahmi disclosed feeling disrespected and looked down on by White people. He stated that they will smile at you but not mean it. He reported being told: “Go back to your country. You always come into our territory. You always taking what's ours. Always getting free stuff.” He also narrated that he witnessed Somalis being racially profiled at his place of employment.

When asked how he copes with challenges, Fahmi stated:

You get angry at some point, you get frustrated, but what can you do, really? Sometimes you have to walk away. Sometimes you explode, and you just talk back. But even if you talk back, they just look at you crazy. They don't really take you serious, so there's nothing better than, that you can do then just walk away, and just shut up relax or find a different type of solution, I guess. Once they get a clear understanding next thing you know they’re asking you for sugar.
Fahmi noted that being patient, having an open mind, and learning about the intricacies of different cultural groups can also lead to positive change.

Adjusting to the U.S. was difficult for Fahmi. He stated: “It's tough you come in here in the United States now and it's like hey now I have to build my dream. First I have to try learn the language and I have to try to find my way to fit in to people. You have to learn to live the way they live.” He discussed his experiences moving from a predominantly Muslim country to an environment in which Muslims are hatred. “So, it's tough, it's tough, I would say. In Grand Forks, there was, before we moved here, before I moved here last semester [to attend university], there was a restaurant, a lovely Somali restaurant that was here. It was burnt down because of hatred. Not because of reasons, but because that person hate that, where you're from.”

Fahmi’s family recognized that he was troubled. They decided to send him back to Somalia to spend time with his father and brothers and to learn more about his cultural heritage and background. The most important aspects of his identity now are getting through college, establishing a career, making a stable living, and possibly building a community clinic back in Somalia one day. For Fahmi, home “is not just where I was born at, but also where my blood, my ancestors, what the roots is at. To me, that's where is home”.

Afrax: “Moral of the story is it's great to be in this country as a Muslim American.”

Afrax identified as male and was 23 at the time of his interview. After the civil started in Somalia, eight-year-old Afrax fled with his mother and three brothers from a refugee camp in Kenya to Minneapolis, Minnesota. Afrax’s father was educated and had an important position in Somalia which required bodyguards; his mother, however,
stayed at home with her children. Afrax’s father left his family in the camp and decided to marry a different partner. Afrax remembered it being a challenging time for him and his family.

It was -15 degrees when Afrax arrived at the Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport and he did not know how to speak English. He reported that: “I was kinda like zero, I didn't know how to speak English properly. So I had to start over. I had to learn, and I had good teachers. Also good classmates, they used to play with me and stuff like that, but I didn't know how to communicate with them.” A White teacher came to his home after school and on the weekends to teach him English.

After receiving a computer, Afrax reported also teaching himself English using YouTube videos. He reported that his life became easier once he started making friends. One way in which he learned about American culture was by having sleepovers. He noted initially being afraid of the African-American children though. “I had a little bad experience when I got there. They followed me a little bit and they used to be more like my people now. They got a little bit aggressive. So I just didn't used to like them. They used to be very loud.”

Afrax reported that having a positive mindset and personality helped him cope with challenges:

Sometimes there was kids, classmates, they used to laugh at me when I used to speak. I never looked at them as bullies and stuff like that. My mom was teaching me great lessons in life. So that has really helped me to actually cope…And I used to be a very private kid, growing up…So it pretty much helped me, my
personality a little bit helped me a little bit. I keep to myself, I don't go outside or meet bad influences.

His younger brother, however, was not as fortunate. Not having their father to guide them, Afrax’s brother was exposed to negative influences, started smoking, and gave their mother a lot of problems. The police would arrest his brother but their mother could not speak English and did not have a car to pick him up. Afrax reported that “it was a very difficult time, but we got through it. You know mothers, they're a completely different species, they love their kid through everything.”

Regarding racial identity, Afrax reported that being Black means “I'm just like any other regular person. It doesn't mean anything negative or positive. He also reported that race was used as an excuse:

There’s a lot of opportunities here. There's people just use [race] as an excuse… I mean you can go anywhere, you can do whatever you want, as long as you're following the rules. Just don't get into crimes, don't do something bad and you should be fine. You can be anything you want in this country. They're schools here, you can educate yourself. You can be a millionaire if you want to, you can be a preacher if you want to. As long as you're not doing anything wrong nobody's gonna come to you and victimize you.

Afrax noted that his friends think he is Westernized and some Somalis treat him as an outcast and an outsider. This, however, did not seem to bother him. He indicated that he wanted to live a positive life and noted not liking what he perceived as negativity within the Somali community.
For Afrax, his religious identity was most salient. He noted that being Muslim means everything to him and even though some Muslims are mistreated in the U.S., he has “trained [his] mind not to look at those stuff.” Afrax stated that he tries to “do as my religion says, to the best of my abilities. It doesn't say anything about killing people, and stuff like that.” He reported that the world would be better if people were more open-minded and tried to understand each other. He attended a Christian church with a friend and noted enjoying the experience and feeling welcomed and acknowledged.

Afrax recommended that social agencies work on being more patient and understanding while trying to see things from the perspective of Somali refugees. He reportedly was considering returning to Somalia to give back and rebuild the country after he graduates from the University of North Dakota. He mentioned wanting to take what he “learn[ed] from this great country and apply it over there.” Ultimately, Afrax believed that he could “go anywhere in this country and nothing bad will happen to me. I believe that in my heart. Because I don't hurt people or disrespect people… Moral of the story is it's great to be in this country as a Muslim American.”

**Overarching Narrative**

The previous section of the results illustrated the life stories of the seven Somali refugees interviewed in this study. Each life story demonstrated how lived experiences were impacted by identity constructs (such as age, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, and personality) combined with social, cultural, and historical factors. Given the fact that the voices of marginalized and oppressed groups are often silenced and ignored, I chose to highlight the lived experiences of each participant prior to examining the themes across narratives. The rest of the results section will focus on the themes and subthemes across
narratives. The findings will be illustrated in relation to the research questions posed in this study.

This study was designed to answer questions about how Somali refugees construct and make meaning of their racial identity as well as experience and cope with racialization and discrimination in the Midwest. The overarching narrative highlighted the journey to becoming black for Somali refugees forced to flee from a non-racialized society to a country in which race is arguably the most important organizing principle (Kusow, 2006; Omi & Winant, 2014). The first theme, *Narratives of Race* illustrated the process of racial identity development for the participants in the study. Specifically, this theme was broken down into four subthemes which each corresponded with a stage of racial identity development: *Pre-migration, Unexamined Racial Identity, Race Becoming Important, and Race Important for Survival*. The second theme, *Tales of Discrimination* described the psychological and behavioral responses of participants to their experiences of racism and discrimination. Each of the four subthemes—*Represent, Assimilate, Act Out*, and *Advocate*—represented a negotiation strategy used by participants in the study. The final theme, *Compositions of Coping* highlighted the coping strategies utilized by the participants. The three subthemes: *Knowing What is True, Knowing Who I am*, and *Knowing Where I Belong each* identified a specific tool used by the participants to navigate systems of oppression.

**Narratives of Race**

My first research question focused on how Somali refugees in the Midwest construct and make meaning of their racial identity. While each participant’s understanding of their racialized self was idiosyncratically influenced by their lived
experiences, there were also important subthemes across the broader theme of Narratives of Race. More specifically, the subthemes were: Pre-Migration, Unexamined Racial Identity, Race Becoming Important, and Race Important for Survival. Each subtheme represented a stage of racial identity development for the Somali refugees interviewed in this study.

All of the participants developed an increased awareness about race after migrating to the United States (U.S.). In addition, increased knowledge about U.S. history and direct encounters with racism seemed to impact the racial identity construction of the Somalis interviewed in this study. It was also interesting to note how other factors such as gender, religion, and class intersected with race and impacted participant’s racial worldview. Overall, participants’ narratives about race were consistent with previous research yet also provided new insights about the racial formations of Somalis (Kusow, 2006) as they learn about race in a U.S. context (Fries-Britt, Mwangi, & Peralta, 2014).

Pre-Migration

The participants identified that their perception of race and the salience of their racial identity changed when they moved to the United States. They all reported that race was not important or even considered in their country of origin. For instance, Hani reported that it was “when we came to America we start noticing people being identified by color.” Similarly, Aar, a participant who left Somalia as an infant and was primarily raised in Kenya prior to relocating to the U.S., noted that the first time he heard the term black was in the U.S. He stated that “we never had to call ourselves the black term cuz you were either Kenyan or Somali or Somali-Kenyan.”
Kusow (2006) asserted that identity categories in Somalia were non-racialized and primarily clan-based. The participants’ responses seemed to verify this assertion. Fahmi, for instance, pointed out that in Somalia tribal identity was more salient than racial identity due to the homogeneity of Somali’s physical characteristics. He stated that “when you’re Somali your skin color really doesn’t, it’s not important but your dialogue and your tribe was important…the thing is that we all look alike…” Interestingly, while discussing the meaninglessness of utilizing race as an identity category in Somalia, one participant pointed out how colonizers utilized Somalis identification with clans as tools for oppression. Siman stated that:

There are no other races in Somalia, there are no other religions at least before the war. And there was no other language being spoken. So if you ever want to colonize a country like that, what do you use? The only thing that they used to separate each other throughout history was clans. And because they're nomadic people, when you leave one place and go to another place you tell people, hey I'm this clan and they're like they know you, they know where you're from. It was like a way to identify you because there's nothing else to identify you…But that identification became this prideful thing like I'm from that and that clan, that's my family's name. And colonizers were able to use that pride that was already there in a way to separate and conquer. Divide and conquer.

**Unexamined Racial Identity**

While all the participants acknowledged that their understanding of race changed in the United States, the significance and meaning ascribed to their racial identity and racialization experiences varied. At one end of the continuum, two participants identified
not noticing race in their country of origin and continuing to either not see race or ascribe meaning to racial encounters after migrating to the US. Their responses were reflective of the Unexamined US Racial- Ethnic Identity category (Fries-Britt, Mwangi, & Peralta, 2014) in which racial identity is initially not perceived as being relevant or impactful. For instance, after being asked about her current thoughts about race and skin color Ladan stated that:

For me, I don't look at anybody like, this person's white, this person is black, or this person came from here, this person came from here. I never look at that. Even for my son, I never try to teach him that. I just expose him to any diversity a lot of times. And, but I don't know how other people see me and I don't worry about that. If they ask me questions, I answer their questions. I'm friendly with them and I guess a lot of time their questions are more like they need to be educated more about new people.

Similarly, Afrax reported that “…when I came to America I never really looked at [race] the way my people look at it or the way African people or Caucasians look at it. I don't see the negativity of it. I don't let what people say get to me and stuff like that. So, until today that actually has helped me tremendously.” Further on in the interview, Afrax brought up the topic of the race card:

Like the race problem, or my people, for example, if they talk to somebody, if they see a Caucasian and they have a reaction, they will always blame the race card. When they get pulled over, when the police officer gives them a ticket, they'll I shouldn't say such things but to me I don't look at it that way. I don't look
at skin as a problem. If somebody say some bad stuff really don't take it personal, actually.

Afrax’s perspective of Somali’s using the race card was also indicative of an unexamined racial identity. While reviewing Afrax’s narrative, I found myself questioning the relationship between his construction of race, social class, and attitude towards assimilation. More specifically, I questioned whether his social class (as reflected in him coming from a more privileged background in Somalia and current pursuit of a university degree) was contributing to the development of a “pull yourself up by the bootstraps” mentality towards black people.

**Race Becoming Important**

Two of the participants noted that race became more important to them after learning about US history. It was interesting to observe gender differences in response to their racialization experiences. For instance, Hani reported feeling shocked about how badly Blacks in the US were treated because of their race; yet her narrative was more optimistic about the future than Aar’s. She stated that:

I don’t know, [race] wasn’t really a significant thing for me to, notice or care about. And to this day, I still see it as okay, color, you’re black, you’re white. I feel more about it once I learn history, American history…Like how people were treated so badly just because of their skin color, that was really shocking for me. Because that was something new to me, so it wasn’t something I kind of experienced before. So I’m happy that we’re not exactly [in the] perfect place, but we’re better than 50 years ago.
Conversely, in Aar’s narrative concern about possibly becoming violent in response to racialization experiences and negative racial encounters were observed. These concerns were highlighted in the story he told about the N-word. He set the scene by comparing his response to being called the N-word with the response of his African-American friend.

Aar: I have a I have a friend, my best friend. One time he was called a nigger. And I remember the guy. He punched him, took a tooth out because the guy called him a nigger.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Aar: So I’m trying always to be non-violent. It's just I think, most of the Kenyans, especially the Kenyans I think, they don’t get mad about those kind of names.

Interviewer: What do you think is the difference why the African-Americans get mad and not the Kenyans?

Aar: Mostly because I can see those guys [African-Americans] were mostly raised and born here…. Still there are some [Kenyans] were raised here and some of them were born here but then they usually have the same feelings as African-Americans. They'll get very upset….But I don't have the same feeling and I used to back in the days when I was first coming here cuz it didn't have any effect when somebody calls me a nigger.

Interviewer: When you first moved here you didn't have-

Aar: Didn't have any effect. No, it can't have an effect on me.

Interviewer: Yeah?
Aar: It cannot, yeah, but again, it still, it does not move me to the extent to get violent. I don't get violent but back then I was like okay, I don't even think it was something. But now, it's kind of like I read a lot about the history on how it came about. So, it's not, I do not have the same feelings that I had before.

Interviewer: Yeah, so from reading the history now, you're a little more sensitive to the [N-] word?

Aar: Yeah, I'm a little bit more sensitive to the word. But it still does not, I can still just train myself to not get in a fight like my friends do.

This part of my interview with Aar was quite impactful since it highlighted a critical turning point in Aar’s level of racial consciousness. For example, Aar noted being unaffected by the N-word when he first arrived in the U.S. His racial innocence appears to have initially protected him from internalizing oppression from verbal racial attacks. However, Aar’s encounters with racism and his racialization experiences were starting to shift his racial narrative. I reacted internally to Aar’s felt sense of vulnerability. It was clear that on some level he recognized the potential physical and psychological dangers associated with increased time spent in the U.S. as a black male. For Aar, becoming a black male in the U.S. seems to have resulted in him feeling the need to mentally guard against becoming physically violent in response to racism.

**Race Important for Survival**

Only one participant identified racial identity as being the most salient aspect of her identity. In her narrative, Siman takes readers on a journey through her changing understanding of race. She reported that “how we identify is very, very important, but being in the States I learned that before I'm Somali I'm black…they don’t care what type
of Black I am.” Here we see the complexity and nuanced nature of identity construction. On the one hand, Siman asserted the importance of personal identity construction for Somalis in the United States. Yet, in her next statement she spoke of the racialization process which teaches Somalis that race is more important than their ethnicity and nationality. Arguably, personal identity construction was both important and irrelevant to Siman. She suggested that the broader society and those with power do not care how Somalis perceive themselves. In order to survive, however, it becomes important for the oppressed to understand how they are perceived by others.

Siman provides a poignant account of her racialization process in the following example. She stated that:

I remember the first time I was exposed to race. I actually remember it vividly. It was, we were filling out school paperwork to start school. And I started school in the fifth grade. And the administration people were helping us fill out the paperwork, and, then a little box called race popped up. I was always a very curious child, I asked questions…And they asked which race do you consider yourself, and I was like what are you talking about. And I said why are there boxes? In my mind, I couldn't communicate this with them. But why are there boxes, why are they boxing people? I thought I'm new, I'm Somali and I thought everyone else was American… I was being told this is where you belong. And that was the first verbal, I guess, act of putting me in that box, of being told hey, by the way, in this country, yeah, you're from Somalia and all but before that, what really matters is your skin color. Because your skin color here has history and that history will affect you and everything you do and how everyone views
you, more than anything else. Give or take there's a terrorist attack and then [it’s] your religion.

In this scene, we witness the mechanisms involved in the racialization process. For Somalis, *learning race in the U.S. context* occurs in many spaces including social institutions like schools. The inherent power differences between teachers and students (or more globally speaking between the colonizer and the colonized) makes it difficult for Somalis to defend themselves. Additionally, language barriers often result in their voices being silenced.

Narrating the story as an adult, Siman was able to situate her racialization experience within the historical context of race relations in the US. For instance, she highlighted the fact that *skin color here has history* which affects one’s behaviors and how one is perceived by others. For Somalis in the United States, the process of becoming black seems to involve a recognition on some level of how the legacy of slavery contributes to racial identity being imbued with meaning far beyond the scope of one’s skin color.

Interestingly, Siman’s narrative also underscored the ways in which racial identity and religious identity converge and intersect for Somalis. Given increased islamophobia in the U.S. post 9/11, racialization for Somalis also seems to target Somalis religious identity through the characterization of Muslims as dangerous and threatening terrorists. Siman’s narrative also illustrated the situational nature of identity. Generally speaking, a sudden terrorist attack would likely lead to religious identity feeling most salient for Somalis.
Finally, Siman alluded to the possibility of empowering Somalis in the U.S. to combat the racist and oppressive system. If we contend that knowledge is power, Somalis remaining ignorant about race relations in the U.S. arguably puts them in a power down position. Siman’s words suggested a felt sense of responsibility to educate other Somalis about the importance of race in the U.S.:

So how do I tell them, hey you guys, race matters more now because they see [us] as one and so we should fight as one. We should protest as one, we should come together as one because we're being seen as our race more than our nationality. The system doesn't care about your nationality. The system cares about your race, and you've been put into this. Now you're part of this. And this is something you need to learn about, so you need to learn how to survive in it.

This powerful statement highlighted the role that racial socialization can serve in teaching Somali refugees how to survive in a racist society and in galvanizing black people around the diaspora to fight against racial tyranny and oppression.

In summary, the narratives of race shared by the Somali participants in this study reflected a journey towards blackness. Relocating to the Midwest not only involved the loss of their homes, community, and way of life, it also inadvertently resulted in the loss of their racial innocence. Learning about U.S. history appears to have been the first step in the racial identity development of the participants. Next, through exposure to racism and racialization, they began to construct their own racial narratives. It was interesting to observe how factors such as social class, religion, and gender impacted the racial narratives of the participants. For example, a Somali male participant disclosed that once race became more salient he needed to guard against reacting to racism with physical
violence. The final stage of racial identity development seemed to include a racial consciousness attuned to educating and empowering Somalis to join forces with the Black community to fight racism and discrimination.

**Stories of Resistance**

My second research question focused on how Somali refugees experience, negotiate, and cope with racism, racialization, and discrimination. All of the participants discussed instances in which they either directly encountered or witnessed other Somali refugees’ encounters with racism. Their experiences with racism and discrimination typically involved being treated as ‘Other’ because of their race, ethnicity, nationality, and/ or religion. *Stories of Resistance* thematically highlighted the ways in which participants responded to their experiences of racism and discrimination. Additionally, the four subthemes, Represent, Assimilate, Act Out, and Advocate, each represented a distinct response style or negotiation strategy utilized by the participants in this study. These negotiation strategies varied from being passive to more active in nature. While passive strategies such as Represent and Assimilate seemed to involve a change in attitude, behaviors, and/ or beliefs about self, active strategies such as Act Out and Advocate were typically associated with feelings of anger and a desire to fight back. These subthemes will be explored further in the next section of this study.

The overarching purpose of this study was to explore the racial identity development and racialization experiences of Somali refugees in the Midwest. Prior to conducting the interviews for this study, however, I underestimated the far-reaching impact of social location on participants lived experiences within the Midwest. Simply put, the participants’ stories about their experiences with race in North Dakota were quite
different from their stories about their experiences in Minneapolis. In effect, the negotiation strategies utilized by Somalis in North Dakota might be different from those used in Minneapolis.

Represent

According to Aar, a male participant, “sometimes when you're Somali, you're expected to be perfect.” He reported feeling “like I have to be the best way to represent my faith in [one] way and again my race in other way.” Aar’s statements reflected sentiments expressed by many of the participants in this study. In response to racialization and stereotyping, some participants arguably took on the role of a model minority person. Incidentally, serving as a representative for one’s minority group was taught to Aar by his mother prior to his arrival in the United States. He stated that: “back in Kenya, she said you are an ambassador. I didn't know what that means, but I came and I know what she meant… [I] kinda feel like, okay, I need to be very cautious, and I have to show best example as I can.”

A female participant, Hani, articulated a similar shift in perspective after moving from Minneapolis to attend university in North Dakota. Similar to other participants, Hani considered Minneapolis as home and noted feeling more welcomed in that social location: “our Somali population there is large so I never felt like I was different from other people.” After moving to North Dakota, however, Hani seemed to become more aware of her intersecting minority statuses:

So when I came here [to North Dakota], and I was the only Somali in the whole class and the only African-American present in my whole class… being a Muslim, a woman, an African just brings its own challenges and even though I
haven't experienced a lot of like personal attacks but I can just tell when someone is not. You just feel different. They have different opinions of you, even like getting to know you…I don't know, just people judge you or they just have their own assumptions about you and when they come to you like, my god, I didn't realize you did this or you were able to do this. Things like that.

In response to the challenges inherent in being the only black and the only Somali within a white social space, and as a reaction to feeling judged for her differences as a black, Muslim, female from Africa, Hani utilized the negotiation strategy of becoming a representative of her intersecting minority groups. For instance, Hani narrated that, “I'm representing a lot of different people at once, so just have to be like, okay I need to be aware of what I'm saying in front of these people.” The narratives of the participants in this study suggested that Somali refugees in the Midwest might become more cautious in response to and/or in preparation for being treated differently. This caution appears to be associated with a felt need or responsibility to represent or be an ambassador for their race, religion, as well as their intersecting minority identity statuses.

**Assimilate**

Assimilation was another negotiation strategy utilized by participants to adjust to their racialized experiences within the Midwest. Fahmi noted that: “it's tough but you come here [to] the United States now and it's like hey now I have to build my dream. First I have to try learn the language and I have to try to find my way to fit in…You have to learn to live the way they live.” While the process of assimilation can take on a variety of different forms, attempting to pass and/or self-identifying as an African-American
were the ways in which this negotiation strategy was used by some of the participants in this study.

According to Fahmi, Somalis are followed in stores, excluded from attending certain clubs in Minneapolis, and have a difficult time finding employment. He posited that:

To them, these are all similar, you are all one. You are Somali, you know what I mean? That's the one main problems that you get is that you're just Somali. They don't look at you as a different character. So, today, if you're black, and another black person comes in the store, they might take a look see into that person, but they're really not gonna look too deep into it. But if you're Somali, and you come to a store that your community's well known, you start being followed.

Fahmi’s narrative suggested that Somalis in the Midwest are treated worse than black Americans. For instance, he noted that: “some jobs {Somalis} will not get unless [they] are an African American.” Given the perceived advantages of identifying as African-American, it is perhaps not surprising that some Somalis choose to identify as the former.

In Fahmi’s narrative, he also described his ability to blend in with African-Americans as a good thing. His process of assimilation, however, seemed to result in him becoming distant from the Somali community:

The other good thing was that I grew up mostly in the African American side, so I was able to blend in with the African Americans. I was not much of a Somali as well. So, I had a different racial style and lifestyle, because I see my own type of people, Somali or other Somali communities, kids at school. And I don't even talk
them, associate with them, because I never been with them that close to associate or get to know.

Interestingly, it also resulted in Fahmi developing his own racial style.

According to the narratives of participants in this study, Somali refugees in the Midwest receive conflicting and confusing messages about their racial identity. For example, while they might be identified as African-American by White people, they receive messages such as “you guys are not African-Americans because you weren't born here” from African-Americans. Some participants responded to their racialization experiences by accepting how they were identified by others.

For instance, Aar provided an example of identifying as African-American while completing paperwork and being told by an African-American female that he could not identify that way. Instead of respecting Aar’s racial identity, the African-American female chose to classify him as ‘Other.’ Aar acknowledged that he did not resist being put in the ‘Other’ category: “I did not question it. I still kinda remember that she was identifying myself not as African-American, she wasn't letting me identify myself as African-American.” In response to racialization, Somali refugees might assimilate by accepting their racialized status.

**Acting Out**

It was a female participant who pointed out potential gender differences in the racialization experiences of Somalis. Specifically, Siman shared her observation of Somali men in the United States being perceived and treated as dangerous predators:

They don't talk about it, people expect them to kind of like figure it out on their own and just, I don't know, because now all of a sudden you're seen as this
predator because now you're this black man in this culture. And you've never seen yourself that way. Like you walk into a room, people are afraid of you, or you're in an elevator with someone alone, someone's afraid of you, just for your race. And if you don't understand that, that's weird…and there’s no one there to guide them.

The results of this study indicated that Somali male refugees might respond to gendered racism by Acting Out. A couple of male participants noted getting angry to the point of wanting to physically lash out, whereas none of the female participants endorsed having those feelings. The anger of the Somali males appeared to result from them feeling disempowered and unable to do anything to change the situation.

Throughout Aar’s narrative, there was this underlying theme of hypervigilance to potential danger or threat. He also shared stories about experiencing discrimination in multiple contexts because of his intersecting identities. For instance, he described an incident in which he got lost at night while driving in a white neighborhood, made a U-turn into someone’s driveway, and felt afraid that he might get shot. He has been called a terrorist and the N word; and was followed around in stores while wearing religious clothing. Aar appeared to be aware of his growing frustration and anger. He disclosed more than one time during the interview a desire to not get or become too violent. He also noted needing to appear tough to prove his worth: “I have to go hard on them so that they don’t feel that way. I have to go hard on them make them feel I’m equal.”

Finally, the results also suggested that Somali women also act out in response to experiencing racism and discrimination. Their methods of acting out, however, seemed to differ from the methods used by Somali men. For instance, Siman expressed that she
enjoyed playing the role of disruptor. She acted out through being herself and not backing down in response to attacks against her intersecting oppressed identities. We witnessed this in the following narrative:

It's two layers, it's just like one, you're in my space, you shouldn't exist, you shouldn't be here. One, two, you shouldn't be here and like three, three. Two, you shouldn't be here and like be yourself. And dress the way you do, why aren't you assimilating? And then, three, you shouldn't be here, dressed the way you are and happy, smiling, content. All of that is disruption. It's not one or two, it's three things. It's three things that shouldn't have happened. Especially, because of everything you are. You're not discriminated just by one thing. You're discriminated based on multiple things…If it's not your gender, it's your religion. If it's not your religion, it's your race. If not your race, it's affiliated [with] where you're from.

**Advocate**

Overall, participants seemed to experience a shared sense of responsibility to advocate on behalf of other Somalis in the Midwest. This more active negotiation strategy was apparent in the stories shared by participants of speaking up for newly arrived Somalis, protesting after the Juba coffee shop in Grand Forks was burned down, and seeking out employment opportunities in which they could assist Somali refugees. Unsurprisingly, most participants appeared to empathize with the needs of newly arrived Somali refugees which likely contributed to them advocating on their behalf.

In Siman’s narrative she described herself as being passionate about advocacy work and noted how witnessing the dismissive and disrespectful behaviors of service
providers towards her mother as a child inspired this passion. Witnessing her mother being treated as “inferior” or as if she was “nothing” left an imprint and Siman’s anger was evident as she shared this story:

This woman survived the war, she survived a refugee camp with nine children. No, no, no, nine children, lost my brother in the camp, gave birth to my sister, nine children, okay? And she survived all that, and now she's in a foreign country where she didn't speak the language or understand the culture, and the customs, and she's trying to raise her family for a better future. And she's so strong, and so brave, and so kind, and she still has time to play with her kids and make them laugh, and help them feel important, and that they can do anything. And you have the audacity to dismiss this person because they look different than you?…just because someone looks like they went through hardship or they're struggling, they wanna dismiss them as inferior and like, you're nothing. And I used to get angry, and I used to feel bad for people.

Ladan pointed out that Somali refugees in North Dakota are mistreated by those who are employed to help them. She reported observing social workers in North Dakota “mak[ing] Somalis feel like they're not, they're less of people like why are you asking for help kind of thing” and noted having more positive experiences with social service agencies while assisting family and friends in Minnesota. In her position as an employment specialist, Ladan advocated on behalf of Somali refugees. She provided examples of some of the challenges Somali refugees face and the ways in which she has been able to help:
And a lot of them are scared to lose their job and not say anything. So, as an employment specialist, when they come to me and tell me, I automatically get involved. Like, I called Walmart and asked them...what's going on? Why did this person get fired? Or why did their hours' change? Did you guys let them know before... So, recently, I went in to Fargo, it was like a Justice Department for like immigration, like immigrant employees... They get discriminated a lot because in Grand Forks, they ask them [for] like an EAD Card, which is like an employment card. And they don't really need that to work. They only need a social security and file 94... So, I kind of been bringing a lot of heat to them. And now, they're hiring everybody... And then, I get this report that they're all like really good employees. Because a lot of them have families back home they have to support and kids here. So, for refugees, the struggle is really real... So, again, they don't get nothing easy. Especially the ones that come here and they're single people. They get $335 a month. That's not enough at all. And after eight months, they're done. So, within the first month, the first three months, I have to find [them] a job. So, they're able to support themselves and pay for their portion of rent.

Ladan also advocated for Somali refugees outside of her place of employment. Her advocacy work occurred in a variety of social contexts and situations. For instance, Ladan shared a story in which she advocated for two Somali women while shopping for groceries at Walmart:

So there's a lady just came out of nowhere and start yelling like, don't speak your language here. You need to speak English. If you gonna speak your language, go back to where you came from. She just went on and on. And these two Somali
ladies just stood there. So, I told her, why are you yelling at these ladies? And she was like, why do you care? And she was like, if they're gonna live in America live and family be here in Grand Fork, they need to speak in English. So, I was like, they're not speaking to you, why do they need to speak in English? Does it matter? And she was like, well. I was like, Grand Forks doesn't belong to you. Why are you even talking?

Instead of being assisted by the store manager, Ladan was accused of making a scene and was asked to leave the store. In this narrative, not only does Ladan not receive assistance from those in power, she also became a target while trying to empower other Somali refugees. According to Ladan, “it’s just in Grand Forks I noticed stuff like that usually happens.”

**Compositions of Coping**

In the previous section of this study, participant’s stories of resistance to racism and discrimination in the Midwest were examined and explored. More specifically, attention was focused on answering my second research question about how Somali refugees experience and negotiate their experiences with racism, racialization, and discrimination. My second research question also asked how Somali refugees cope with their experiences of racism, racialization, and discrimination. This section of the results seeks to answer this question while highlighting the final theme found in this study.

*Compositions of Coping* thematically revealed the coping strategies utilized by the participants to survive despite racial attacks against their identity and personhood.

*Knowing What is True, Knowing Who I am, and Knowing Where I Belong* were the subthemes; and each subtheme identified a specific tool used by the participants in this
study to navigate and cope with systems of oppression. These subthemes will be further explored in this final section of the results.

**Knowing What is True**

Participants in this study who were connected to their family, religious community, and to other Somalis appeared more grounded and resilient. Conversely, participants who were more disconnected from these external resources appeared more at risk of taking on negative messages from the wider community. The results suggested that Somalis in the Midwest might benefit from maintaining connections with people within their respective communities who can relate to their experiences. Arguably, this connection might serve to legitimize and normalize their lived experiences. It might also allow Somalis to engage in reality testing when feeling confused about what is true.

Perhaps as a result of gender roles and expectations, female participants seemed more interpersonally and socially connected than male participants. They also often also seemed more certain and clear about what was true for them. A female participant, Siman, reported that she gets her strength from her community. She indicated that who she is has been celebrated her entire childhood and noted that she would also teach her children to be proud of who they are. Validation of their lived experiences by others within their communities might assist Somali refugees with knowing what is true about racism and other forms of oppression in the United States.

**Knowing Who I am**

Participants in this study who were connected to their family, religious community, and to Somali culture appeared to have a more positive self-concept and understanding of self in relation to others. Participants who left Somalia at a young age
yet could fluently speak their native language and were well-versed in Somali culture expressed pride in being able to do so and in knowing where they were from. In addition, participants who were attuned to their own inner landscape also seemed to benefit from using this coping strategy. Siman, for instance, reported that:

How I cope with my challenges is, I think I just try to have a clear understanding of who I am all the time. Every year as I got older, I try to be honest with myself and say who are you, who do you want to be, who do you see yourself as? And, how do you identify yourself? And not as how others want to identify me, but what makes me happy, what identity makes me happy the most and comfortable in myself.

On the other hand, participants who were more disconnected from these external resources appeared more at risk of experiencing identity confusion. A male participant, Aar, pointed out that some Somalis in the US experience an identity crisis and do not even want to be identified as African. Although he denied experiencing identity confusion, I found it interesting that he shared a story about having been labeled a Sijui—a Somali who does not know Somali—while living in Kenya. Overall, female participants were more vocal about the positive influence that knowing who they are had on shaping their self-confidence and understanding of self in the Midwest.

**Knowing Where I Belong**

The results of this study suggested that Somali refugees in the Midwest benefit from experiencing a felt sense of belonging within their families, communities, and the wider society. One participant shared how having her siblings with her helped her feel less alone after relocating to the U.S. For example, Ladan reported that: “the great part
about it was it wasn't just me going through this experience, it was me and all of my siblings, and we were going through it together. So we were able to talk about it together and learn about it together and I didn't feel alone in the process.”

Participants often described the Somali community in Minneapolis as a tight-knit community or place of refuge in which they felt more connected and had access to Somali culture, institutions, food, people, and ways of being. In fact, some participants even referenced Minneapolis as home. While North Dakota, was not depicted as warmly, many participants seemed hopeful that it was becoming more welcoming to Somalis. For instance, participants noted how the community of Grand Forks came together in support of Somalis when the Somali restaurant was burned down as part of a hate crime.
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION

Sue and Sue (2008) argued that “one of the most promising approaches to the field of multicultural counseling/therapy has been the work on racial/cultural identity development among minority groups” (p. 235). They noted the dangers of therapists treating all clients of color the same and suggested that racial identity models could assist therapists with meeting the unique needs of culturally diverse clients. While racial identity models have arguably helped therapists to focus more on individual differences, they also could have ironically served to negate or ignore critical differences among individuals within the same racial minority group.

Traditional racial identity development models were developed by African-American psychologists after the Civil Rights Movement to explain the racial identity development of African-Americans. Therapists utilizing these models to conceptualize black clients from other nationalities and ethnic backgrounds could cause harm to these clients by stereotyping and viewing their racial identity development through a monolithic lens. Additionally, the concept of race is fluid and dynamic. Even though these models continue to be widely used in the field of psychology, they might not be as relevant or useful in explaining racial identity in contemporary times.

It is predicted that racial and ethnic minorities will become the numerical majority in the United States by 2044 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). The foreign-born population is
also increasing at a rapid pace. Given the diversification and monumental changes in the racial and cultural landscape of the country, it is imperative for therapists to be well-versed in understanding the unique needs of culturally diverse people. This knowledge must include an awareness of how systemic oppression, structural racism, and issues pertaining to power and privilege intersect and impact the psychological adjustment and mental health of immigrants, refugees, and people of color. Understanding the collective strategies used by racial minorities to combat discrimination and racial oppression is also of critical importance (Viruell-Fuentes, et al., 2012).

Somali refugees are a particularly vulnerable group during this unprecedented soociopolitical moment in U.S. history. They arrive to the U.S. with the hopes of pursuing the American Dream, and are often met with racism and discrimination. To date, limited psychological research has been done on the racialized experiences of Somali refugees. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the lived experiences of seven Somali refugees who relocated to the Midwest; specifically, in relation to their racial identity development. This study was designed to gain a better understanding of how Somalis construct and make meaning of their racial identity as well as experience and cope with racialization and discrimination in the Midwest. The goal was to contribute to the limited research about the racial identity development of previously non-racialized populations.

This chapter will present the findings of this study within the context of the research questions posed in this study and the extant literature relevant to racial identity development. First, the racial identity development of Somalis will be examined. After discussing the stages of Somali racial identity development, attention will be focused on how Somali refugees construct and make meaning of their racial identity. Somalis’
experiences with and response to racism and discrimination, as well as their coping strategies will also be discussed. Finally, this chapter will conclude with the strengths and limitations of the study as well as the implications for research, training, and practice.

Racial Identity Development of Somalis

The findings of this study suggested that racial identity development of Somalis in the Midwest is a process with distinct stages which progress from a state of racial ignorance and innocence to an increased awareness and understanding of the centrality of race in the United States. More specifically, as Somali participants learned more about U.S history and were exposed to racism and racialization, they developed differing levels of racial consciousness. At the same time, it is important to note that the findings did not demonstrate that one stage of racial identity development was necessarily better than the other. This finding runs counter to traditional Black racial identity models (e.g., Cross, 1991, 1995; Helms, 1984) which are widely used in psychology. For example, Constantine et al. (1998) noted that the traditional racial identity and Nigriscence theories:

reflect the notion that healthy racial identity development is achieved when Blacks progress through a series of linear stages commencing with degrading thoughts and feelings about themselves and other Blacks (accompanied by idealized beliefs about Whites), and ending with internalized positive feelings about themselves, other Blacks, and other racial and ethnic groups” (p. 95).

The participants in this study did not commence their racial identity development with racial self-hatred or internalized racism; rather they arrived in the Midwest with what could be called a racial tabula rasa since race was not salient in their country of
origin. As Bigelow noted, “Somalis typically come to countries such as the United States with an ethnic, religious, or national identity, and over time, they develop a racial identity in countries where they are minoritized” (p. 101). In other words, it is through experiencing racism, othering, and discrimination, that Somalis develop a racialized understanding of self.

While conducting research with foreign-born students of color, Fries-Britt, Mwangi, and Peralta (2014) also found that traditional frameworks on racial identity development did not fully explain the racial identity formation of this population. Instead, their study revealed what the authors described as an emergent framework on Learning Race in a U.S. Context (LRUSC). The LRUSC framework consisted of four main categories which were respectively: unexamined U.S. racial-ethnic identity; ethnic/racial encounters in the U.S. context; moving toward identity examination in the U.S. context; and integrative awareness in the U.S. context. The LRUSC theoretical framework is generally compatible with my findings on the racial identity development of Somalis and thus will be used to further inform this analysis.

**Stages and Intersections**

Findings from the current study suggested that there are four stages to the racial identity development of Somali refugees. The *Pre-Migration* stage reflected participants’ perceptions about race prior to relocating to the United States. After arrival, participants moved into the *Unexamined Racial Identity* stage. A few participants appeared to remain at this stage of identity development. After learning about U.S. history, however, some participants moved into the *Race Becoming Important* stage. Only one participant seemed
to be in the final stage of racial identity development which was entitled *Race Important for Survival*.

Although the findings on racial identity development from this current study share many similarities with the Learning Race in a U.S. Context (LRUSC) framework, important differences were also observed. For example, the Somali participants in my study experienced less variability in their initial stage of racial identity development than the foreign-born students. This difference might be explained by the fact that the foreign-born students were from different countries throughout Africa and the Caribbean (Fries-Britt, Mwangi, & Peralta, 2014), whereas all the participants in my study were from Somalia. Additionally, the foreign-born students temporarily traveled to the U.S. from their home country to pursue a higher education and had more awareness about the United States being a highly-racialized society (Fries-Britt et al., 2014).

Somalis, on the other hand, typically arrive to the U.S. without knowledge about the complexity of race relations in this country. Moreover, many Somalis in the Midwest are part of ethnic enclaves in cities like Minneapolis. While ethnic enclaves provide Somalis with a sense of community and belonging, they also might serve to separate them from the wider community (Shah, A., 2017, March). In effect, Somalis in ethnic enclaves might arguably be sheltered from racism and remain at the *Unexamined Racial Identity* stage for longer periods of time. More research is needed on the relationship between ethnic enclaves and the racial identity development of Somalis in the Midwest.

At the broadest level of analysis, it could be argued that the differences between the participants in my study and the foreign-born students in the LRUSC study were primarily related to power dimensions of ethnicity, class, and immigrant status.
hierarchies. For example, the social class and immigration status of the foreign-born students likely provided them with more access to knowledge and information which impacted their level of racial awareness. Fuentes et al., (2012) argued that Intersectionality theory—rooted in the writings of Black feminists—provides a useful framework for examining how immigrant health trajectories are simultaneously shaped and impacted by constructs such as race, class, and gender.

Finally, the findings in this study highlighted the impact of intersectionality and the sociocultural context on racial identity development. For instance, a Somali-identified female university student residing in Grand Forks might experience and understand race quite differently than a Somali-identified adult male without a high school education. Clearly, factors such as ethnicity, nationality, level of education, socioeconomic background, and length of time spent/anticipated (e.g. international students; refugees) in the United States influence the racial identity development of Black people in the United States.

Identity Construction

Of particular interest to this study, was finding out how Somali refugees understand and construct their racial identity. Bigelow (2010) suggested that utilizing a framework in which identities are thought of as imposed, assumed, and negotiable could help explain how racial identity is constructed by Somalis. The author defined imposed identities as “those that are not negotiated,” and argued that an identity is imposed “if the person identified does not have the opportunity to contest this categorization” (p. 99). A teenager born in the United States to Somali parents yet inaccurately identified as a refugee by educators was provided as an example of an imposed identity.
An assumed identity, on the other hand, was described as an identity that is also not negotiated yet “is accepted by the individual thus positioned” (Bigelow, 2010, p. 99). An example of this was provided earlier when Aar, a participant in this study, wanted to identify as African-American on paperwork but was told to identify as ‘Other.’ Aar did not resist being put in the ‘Other’ category. Instead, he reported that: “I did not question it. I still kinda remember that she was identifying myself not as African-American, she wasn’t letting me identify myself as African-American.”

Bigelow (2010) defined negotiable identities as “those that are contested or challenged by individuals or groups” (p. 99). An example of this was provided in Siman’s narrative when she reported that she enjoyed playing the role of disruptor and chose not to back down or play small in response to attacks against her oppressed identities. Participants in this study also described contesting assumptions made about their religious and racial identities by being successful and even taking on the role of a model minority person.

Finally, the Somali refugees interviewed in this study were impacted by racialization in different ways and showed varying levels of openness and awareness to being racialized. Bigelow (2010) argued that racialization is damaging to agentive identity (Bigelow, 2010); the Somalis participants in this study demonstrated agency in constructing their own racial narratives. For example, choosing to identify as “Other” can even be perceived as a radical act of countering the status quo in certain social contexts.

**Racism and Discrimination**

Prior to December 1, 2015, the Juba Coffee Shop, located in Grand Forks, North Dakota was considered a safe space for the local Somali community to gather and break
bread with each other. Sadly, Somalis in Grand Forks are no longer able to gather at what was the only Somali restaurant in town. This is because, a few days after a Nazi-like symbol was spray-painted on the coffee shop, a Minnesota man used a Molotov cocktail to burn down the Juba Coffee Shop (Pioneer Press, 2015, December 7; Morlin, B., 2016, September 7).

The hateful incident was investigated as a hate crime by the FBI; which seemed to make sense since court documents revealed that the arsonist strongly disliked Somalis, frequently got angry with them, and would call them the N-word. According to news reports, the arsonist also “told friends and co-workers that he thought Somalis ‘needed to go away’ and that he would ‘do something’ about it or ‘take care of it’ or ‘kick all Somalis’ asses’” (Morlin, B., 2016, September 7). In spite of the evidence, however, there were people who argued that the attack was not racially motivated. The defense attorney in the case, for example, argued that the arsonist was not a racist or a white supremacist.

Given the fact that the Juba coffee shop was torched after Donald Trump—the Republican presidential candidate at the time—proposed that Muslims be barred from entering the United States, some community members reportedly believed that the attack was racially or religiously motivated (Pioneer Press, 2015, December 7). Participants in this study referenced this attack against the Somali community in their narratives on race. A few participants noted that they attended the candlelight vigil that was held outside the remnants of the torched coffee shop.

During the vigil, a member of the Somali community shared her reactions to the hate crime and noted the vitriol Somalis receive because of their interlocking oppressed
identities. Her words powerfully summarize the narrative of racism experienced and expressed by the Somali participants in this study:

> When people say horrible things about black people, that's part of the Somali community. When they say hateful things about Muslim people, we're in there. When they hate refugees and they don't want immigrants, we're also that,” Esse said. “We're literally a combination of every category in which people choose to hate (Lauhlin, R. & Forum News Service, 2015, December 9).

**Negotiation and Resistance**

Racism and racial discrimination manifest within a variety of egregious forms ranging from racial microaggressions (i.e. subtle forms of racial invalidation and insults) to systemic, internalized, and institutionalized racism. Another important aspect of this study involved investigating how Somalis in the Midwest respond to experiences of racism and discrimination. Similar to previously discussed findings about within-group differences existing in black racial identity construction, this study also found heterogeneity in the way participants responded to their experiences of racial oppression. For instance, factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, length of stay in the United States, social location and context, personality, and psychological makeup impacted participant’s attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral responses to racism.

Although the participants in this study experienced and reacted to racism in diverse ways, commonalities were also observed in their response styles. The findings suggested that Somalis respond to racism and discrimination by utilizing passive and/ or active negotiation strategies (i.e. response styles). These response styles (i.e. Represent, Assimilate, Act Out, and Advocate) involved either a change in attitudes, behaviors, and/
or beliefs about self or a desire to advocate and fight back against oppressors and oppressive systems.

While it might be tempting to label certain response styles as healthier than others, making such value judgments ignores the complexity of agency involved in how racial minorities respond to racialization and racial oppression. Somali youth, for instance, might respond to racialization by attempting to assimilate into White or African-American culture by choosing to “act White” or “become African-American” (Bigelow, 2010). The sociocultural context and setting would likely impact the decision-making process of Somalis in relation to what option is deemed most advantageous in the moment.

**Coping Strategies**

Racism and discrimination negatively impacts the emotional, physical, spiritual, and psychological well-being of Blacks in the United States (Carter, 2007; Pyke, 2010; Speight, 2007). In addition to experiencing language barriers, difficulty finding employment, and other challenges associated with their intersecting minority statuses, Somalis who relocate to the Midwest must learn how to cope with being judged as inferior due to the color of their skin.

Given the harmful effects of discrimination, it felt important to investigate how Somali refugees cope with their experiences of racism, racialization, and discrimination. Participants shared narratives of experiences in which they felt othered and stigmatized because of their race, religion, and nationality. Findings revealed that *Knowing what is True, Knowing Who I am, and Knowing Where I Belong* were strategies used by the
participants in this study to navigate and cope with racial and religious discrimination and oppression.

In the era of alternative facts, fake news, biased, and sensationalized news coverage, it can be difficult to ascertain truth from fiction. Perhaps, this is why CNN felt the need to create an advertisement ending with the words, “Facts First” and featuring an apple with a voiceover which says:

This is an apple. Some people might try to tell you it's a banana. They might scream 'Banana, banana, banana,' over and over and over again. They might put 'banana' in all caps. You might even start to believe that this is a banana. But it's not. This is an apple (Guerrasio, 2017, October 25).

If American citizens are finding it challenging to distinguish fake news from actual news, refugees and immigrants with limited English proficiency and unfamiliar with the U.S. political and cultural climate might find the task insurmountable.

Fortunately, the truth can also be known by Somali refugees in the Midwest. Connecting and maintaining relationships with family, religious community, and other Somalis might serve to legitimize their experiences, allow for reality testing when feeling confused about what is true, decrease experiences of identity confusion, and provide a felt sense of belonging. Overall, the findings were consistent with previous research on the benefits of social support, particularly from others who have shared similar experiences, for persons who have experienced discrimination (Matheson & Anisman, 2012).
Strengths and Limitations

This study used in-depth interviews to examine the racial identity development of Somali refugees who resided in either North Dakota or Minneapolis at the time of the study. Due to the small sample size recommended for in-depth interviewing when utilizing a narrative approach, the findings are not generalizable to other populations, settings, or locations. Eight participants were initially recruited and interviewed for this study, however, language barriers resulted in one of the transcripts being inaudible and therefore not utilized in the analysis.

The age of the participants at the time of the interviews ranged from 23 to 32 and their age of arrival to the United States ranged from 8 to 21. This means that the racial identity experiences of newly arrived Somali refugees in the Midwest and Somalis from older age groups were not included in this study. Limited funding opportunities resulting in my inability to hire a translator also impacted the scope of this study. Finally, practical barriers such as this researcher’s change in geographic location, prevented participants from taking part in the data analysis.

To ensure the quality and validity of this qualitative study, Morrow’s (2005) guidelines were followed. More specifically, I completed the following activities to enhance the trustworthiness of this study: immersion in the data through multiple readings of each interview; recording of my experiences, reactions, and biases in a self-reflective journal; a recording device was used to capture the actual wording of participants in the report; consulted with peers and my Dissertation Chair to gain insight about areas of importance; and triangulation of the data was ensured through communicating with service providers whom interacted with Somali clients.
additional strength of this study included my use of multiple data sources such as electronic news articles, informal discussions with individuals who worked with Somali refugees, field notes, and attendance at workshops and presentations about the needs and experiences of Somali refugees.

**Implications**

This study served to expand the limited qualitative research on the racial identity development and racialization experiences of contemporary Somali refugees in the Midwest. This study also functioned to fill an important gap in the research by elucidating how Somalis cope with the process of becoming Black while undergoing attacks against their religious, ethnic, and racial identities. Through sharing the narratives of Somalis and highlighting how their lived experiences were impacted by intersections of their identities as well as social, cultural, and historical factors, this study gave voice to a minority group often ignored or silenced by dominant narratives within the status quo.

This study contributed to the field by exploring intragroup differences in the experiences of Black people in the contemporary United States. Traditional Black racial identity development models specifically focused on the experiences of African-Americans and then generalized their findings to include other Black people (Sellers, et al, 1998). Given the rapid changes in the racial and cultural landscape of the U.S., it is vital for therapists to understand the heterogeneity and diversity within racial minority groups. Simply put, ignoring or devaluing critical differences among individuals within the same racial group can result in ethical violations including harming clients of color.

The findings from this study can be used to train both current and future therapists about the unique racial and cultural experiences of Somalis residing in the Midwest. This
study showcased how intersecting identities in conjunction with external factors such as social location, community support, political climate, and experiences of racism and discrimination all play a role in the racialization experiences and racial identity development of Somalis in the Midwest. As therapists working with Somali clients, it is critical to attend to factors both within and outside of the therapy room.

Specifically, attend to the unique sociocultural experiences of each client and adjust your interventions accordingly. Find out your client’s comfort level with speaking English and utilizing translators. Take time to fully explain and answer questions related to confidentiality. Educate yourself about Somali culture and attend to the ways in which your client might be impacted by forces outside of their control (for example, immigration policies). Assess your client’s stage of racial identity and their felt sense of belonging to the Somali and African-American communities. Finally, attend to the potential advocacy needs of your Somali clients and consider incorporating creative interventions such as narrative therapeutic approaches.

**Future Research**

Future research should focus on expanding Black racial identity development models to make them more relevant to the contemporary racialized experiences of foreign-born Black populations in the United States. As this study demonstrated, contextual factors and within group differences among Black people from different ethnicities and nationalities does not allow for a universal narrative on Black racial identity development. Thus, it is important for research to be conducted on the racial identity development of Black people from diverse social locations and contexts; including Somali refugees from different age groups, generational backgrounds, and
length of time lived in the Midwest. Future research might also include exploring the unique needs and experiences of minority groups such as the Somali Bantu in the Midwest. In addition, future research on the racial identity development of Somalis should utilize a variety of different research methods such as longitudinal and quantitative approaches.

Finally, future research should focus more on the gendered aspects of racism, racialization, and racial identity development, especially in relation to Somali youth. With the uptick in the criminalization of Black people and the shooting of unarmed Black men by police, Somali males might be a particularly vulnerable group. Somalis might benefit from the development of social programs that promote social justice by providing racial socialization, psychological support, and social services to Somali youth.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The University of North Dakota
Consent to Participate in Research

TITLE: Racial Identity Development of Somali Refugees in the Midwest

PROJECT DIRECTOR: Nnenna Lindsay, M.A.

DEPARTMENT: Counseling Psychology and Community Services

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH

A person who is to participate in the research must give his or her informed consent to such participation. This consent must be based on an understanding of the nature and risks of the research. This document provides information that is important for this understanding. Research projects include only subjects who choose to take part. Please take your time in making your decision as to whether to participate. If you have questions at any time, please ask.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

You are invited to be in a research study about the resettlement experiences and racial identity of Somali refugees because you identify as being a Somali refugee over the age of 19 who is comfortable communicating in English and have lived in the United States for at least five years.

The purpose of this research study is to explore the lived experiences of Somali refugees in order to gain an understanding of how they make meaning of their racial identity and adjust to the racial climate in the United States.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL PARTICIPATE?

Approximately 5-8 people will take part in this study in a private room at the University of North Dakota or at an alternate mutually convenient location.
HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?

Your participation in the study will last approximately 45 minutes to three hours. The interview will be completed during one visit (or two visits, if necessary). The researcher may contact you after the interview to clarify the information that was shared during the interview.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?

During the study you will be interviewed by the primary researcher. The interview will be recorded in order to analyze the responses afterwards. However, they will be password protected and only the researcher will have access to the recording.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?

There may be some risk from being in this study. However, the study poses no more than minimal risk. You may become tired and restless during the interview. You are encouraged to take breaks as needed. Light refreshments will also be provided to make the experience more comfortable.

You may feel uncomfortable discussing your life experiences and challenges. For example, you may experience feelings of sadness and disappointment as you reflect on your life experiences. If you begin to feel uncomfortable, you can choose to stop the interview and discuss your discomfort with the researcher. You can also choose to not answer questions that you would prefer not to answer as well as withdraw from the study at any time.

If you desire to further process your feelings and reactions to this study, you are encouraged to utilize one of the following resources.

Northern Lights Behavioral Health Center 1-701-777-3745

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK(8255)

Variety of Resources: [http://www.activeminds.org/issues-a-resources/mental-health-resources](http://www.activeminds.org/issues-a-resources/mental-health-resources)

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

You may not benefit personally from being in this study. However, it is hoped that you will benefit from being able to share your story with the researcher. It is also hoped that...
clinicians, service providers, educators and other Somali refugees will benefit from the knowledge gained in this study.

**ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY**

You have the right to not participate in this study.

**WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?**

You will be responsible for any costs that result from traveling and parking at the location of the interview. There are no other foreseeable costs to participating in this study.

**WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?**

You will receive a $20 Target or Walmart gift card for participating in this interview project, regardless of whether or not you complete the interview.

**WHO IS FUNDING THE STUDY?**

The University of North Dakota and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

The records of this study will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. In any report about this study that might be published, you will not be identified. Your study record may be reviewed by Government agencies, the UND Research Development and Compliance office, and the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board.

Any information that is obtained in this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child, or you pose a danger to yourself or someone else. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of storing results in a password protected computer file and signed consent forms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the office of the researcher.

If we write a report or article about this study, we will describe the study results in a summarized manner by using pseudo names so that you cannot be identified.
Participants will be asked to come up with a pseudo name that can be used in transcripts of the interview and data analysis. Only the researchers will have a list of pseudonyms that are matched to participants’ real names and this information will be kept in a password protected data file.

**IS THIS STUDY VOLUNTARY?**

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of North Dakota.

**CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS?**

The researcher conducting this study is Nnenna Lindsay, under the supervision of Dr. Rachel Navarro. You may ask any questions you have now. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Nnenna Lindsay at 940-435-8359 or Dr. Rachel Navarro at 701-777-0410.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact The University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279 or UND.irb@research.UND.edu.

- You may also call this number about any problems, complaints, or concerns you have about this research study.
- You may also call this number if you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone who is independent of the research team.
- General information about being a research subject can be found by clicking “Information for Research Participants” on the web site: http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/research-participants.cfm

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study.

Please initial: ____ Yes ____ No

I give consent for my quotes to be used in the research; however I will not be identified.

Please initial: ____ Yes ____ No
Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Subjects Name: ______________________________________________________

__________________________________ ___________________
Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent Date

I have discussed the above points with the subject or, where appropriate, with the subject’s legally authorized representative.

__________________________________ ___________________
Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent Date
APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear ____________.

My name is Nnenna Lindsay and I am a doctoral candidate in counseling psychology at the University of North Dakota. I am writing to request your help with recruiting participants for my dissertation research on the resettlement experiences and identity development of Somali refugees in the Midwest. It is hoped that service providers, educators, and mental health therapists will benefit from learning more about the unique experiences and needs of this population.

I specifically am looking to interview Somali refugees who are at least 20 years old, able to communicate effectively in English, and have lived in the United States for at least five years. I would greatly appreciate you sharing this information with individuals who might be interested in participating in this study. I have also attached a recruitment flyer that I hope you can post at your site.

This study has been approved by the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board (IRB-201604-374). If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me by phone 940-435-8359 or email at nnenna.lindsay@und.edu. You may also contact my dissertation committee chairperson, Dr. Rachel Navarro, at rachel.navarro@und.edu. Thank you very much for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Nnenna Lindsay, M.A.
University of North Dakota
Department of Counseling Psychology & Community Services
231 Centennial Drive Stop 8255
Grand Forks, ND 58202-8225
APPENDIX C
ADVERTISEMENT

Seeking Somali Refugees!

- Are you a Somali refugee?
- Are you at least 20 years old?
- Are you able to communicate in English?
- Have you lived in the United States for at least five years?

If you answered yes to all four questions, you might qualify to participate in a 1 to 3-hour confidential interview about your life experiences! Each person interviewed will receive a $20 gift card for participating in this study.

This study is completely voluntary and you have the right to not take part and/or leave the study at any time. This study has been approved by the committee that protects participants in research at the University of North Dakota.

If you are interested in participating or would like to receive more information about this study, please contact Nnenna Lindsay, a counseling psychology student at the University of North Dakota, at 940-435-8359 or email her at Nnenna.lindsay@und.edu.

Thank you!
Hello, my name is Nnenna Lindsay. Thank you for your interest in my dissertation study. I would like to share some more information about my project to see if you would like to participate and meet the participation requirements.

I am interested in hearing your story of resettlement in the United States as well as learning about the aspects of your identity that are most important to you. The interview will last for approximately one to three hours. Are you interested in participating in this study?

If NO: Ok. Thank you so much for your time. Please feel free to contact me if you change your mind. Enjoy the rest of your day.

If YES: PROCEED

Thank you for your interest. This study is recruiting a particular group of Somali refugees. Is it ok if I ask you a few questions to see if you are eligible to participate in this study? Your answers will be kept confidential.

If NO: Ok. Thank you so much for your time. Please feel free to contact me if you change your mind. Enjoy the rest of your day.

If YES: PROCEED

1. Were you a Somali refugee seeking asylum when you arrived in the United States?
2. Have you lived in the United States for at least five years?
3. How old are you?
4. Are you able to easily understand and speak in English?
5. Are you currently receiving services from a doctor or mental health professional to cope with your experiences as a Somali refugee?
6. Do you experience significant psychological or emotional distress when reflecting and talking about your experiences as a Somali refugee?
7. Are you ok with your interview being audio recorded?
For those who do not meet the participation requirements:
Thanks again for your interest in this study. Unfortunately, you are not eligible to participate in the study at this time. I apologize for the inconvenience. Enjoy the rest of your day.

For those who meet the participation requirements:
Great, you meet the requirements to participate in this study. As a token of my appreciation, you will receive a $20 gift card for participating in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to end the interview at any time.

Let’s arrange the time and location of the interview.
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please tell me about your journey from Somalia to the United States.
   - Tell me about your resettlement experiences.
   - How have your interactions with community members (i.e. with Caucasians, African-Americans, Somalis, service providers) impacted your resettlement experiences?
   - What has your experience with service providers been like?
   - What challenges do you experience in the United States?
   - How do you cope with these challenges?

2. What aspects of your identity were most important to you in Somalia?
   - What were your experiences as a member of the identified group/s?
   - What were your thoughts about race and skin color?
   - What did being a member of your identified racial group mean to you?

3. What aspects of your identity are most important to you now?
   - What are your experiences as a member of the identified group/s?
   - What are your current thoughts about race and skin color?
   - What does being a member of your identified racial group mean to you now?

4. What else would you like to share about your unique story?

*Please note that the bulleted items are prompts and will be asked if further elaboration is needed.*
REFERENCES


Cross Jr., W. E., & Vandiver, B. J. (2001). Nigrescence theory and measurement: 
Introducing the cross racial identity scale (CRIS). In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, 
L. A. Suzuki & C. M. Alexander (Eds.), (pp. 371-393). Thousand Oaks, CA, US: 
Sage Publications, Inc.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the 
research process*. Sage.

Voting*, 7-34

in mental health research on refugee trauma. *Qualitative health research*.


https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/demo/p60- 
249.pdf

Free Press.

Somali adolescent refugees: the role of trauma, stress, and perceived 
doi:10.1037/0022-006X.76.2.184


