

https://dspace.org/

International students from Africa : the impact that living in South Africa has on one's sense of identity.

Zar, Doron

2011-04-11
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/9404

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

International students from Africa:

The impact that living in South Africa has on one's sense of identity

By Doron Zar

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology.

Johannesburg, 2009

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

_____

Doron Zar

Johannesburg, 2009

Abstract

This research report concerns the effect that living in South Africa has on international students' (from Africa) sense of identity. In general, living abroad has been found to be challenging and traumatic in dealing with an unfamiliar environment and a different cultural mentality. In South Africa this may be further complicated by the atmosphere of xenophobia. There has been much research on the problems that international students encounter whilst living abroad, but there is a paucity of research on international students in South Africa, and in general, there is a paucity of research on understanding (from a psychoanalytic perspective) the impact that living abroad has on international student's sense of identity. The present study involved semi-structured interviews with international students from Africa, at the University of the Witwatersrand, asking questions about the difficulties in adapting to life in South Africa, as well as the shifts that the participants perceived in their identity as a result. The analysis was qualitative in nature and both thematic content analysis and interpretative phenomenological analysis were used in order to capture both a naturalistic description, as well as a richer, more interpretive sense of the data in terms of how the participants made sense of their experiences in South Africa. Analysis revealed: a) a range of difficulties in acculturating to life in South Africa, including feelings of loneliness, fear and alienation; b) a number of successful adaptive strategies, such as relying on social support from family members and other international students; c) a range of intrapsychic responses (defined psychodynamically), such as regression and splitting. The latter were discussed within the framework of Erikson's theory of identity development.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people, without whom, this research report would not have been possible:

To my supervisor, Patrick Connolly, for your calmness, patience and support. Your clear thinking and guidance throughout the process was invaluable to me.

To my wife Terri, for all your love, encouragement and support. Thank you so much for your endless patience and for standing by me.

To all those who participated in the study, I am really appreciative of your time, and grateful that you were able to share your experiences with me.

Table of contents:

Chapter One

1. Introduction 1

1.1. Rationale 3

1.2. Research question 4

Chapter Two

2. Literature review 5

2.1. Problems experienced by international students 5

2.2. Psychosocial factors 6

2.2.1. Social support 6

2.2.2. Cultural differences 7

2.2.3. Social relations 8

2.2.4. Language and social norms 9

2.3. Models of understanding the effects of migration 9

2.4. Coping strategies and interventions 13

2.5. Psychoanalytic models applied to migration 14

2.6. Erikson 22

2.6.1. Model of the life cycle 23

2.6.2. Theory of identity formation as a paradigm for understanding migration 24

Chapter Three

3. Method 27

3.1. Research design 27

3.2. Procedure 27

3.3. Participants 28

3.4. Data collection tool 29

3.5. Analysis 29

3.6. Ethics 31

Chapter Four

4. Results 34

4.1. Results obtained through thematic content analysis 34

4.2. Results obtained through interpretative phenomenological analysis 51

Chapter Five

5. Discussion 61

5.1. Discussion of the findings from thematic content analysis 61

5.2. Discussion of the findings from interpretative phenomenological analysis 65

5.3. Conclusion 73

5.4. Limitations 74

5.5. Recommendations 75

Reference list 76

Appendices 81

Appendix A: Ethics clearance certificate 81

Appendix B: Cover letter to the Director and / or Deputy Director of the Wits International Office 82

Appendix C: Consent form for the Director and / or Deputy Director of the Wits International Office 84

Appendix D: Cover letter to the international students 85

Appendix E: Consent form (interviewed) for the international students 88

Appendix F: Consent form (recorded) for the international students 89

Appendix G: Semi-structured interview schedule 90

Appendix H: Demographic questionnaire 91