

**A Narrative Inquiry on the Experiences of Refugee Adult Learners in Community Colleges
in the Southeastern Region of the United States**

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Dedication

To my adult refugee participants, I am eternally grateful for your willingness to share your life experiences with me for the purposes of this research. Without you, this work would be impossible. I dedicate this dissertation to you. Thank you for the opportunity to listen and learn from your narratives.

To my family – I thank you and appreciate you. Without my husband and partner, Matthew, none of this would have been possible. For your patience during years of late night classes and sleepless nights, for your passionate discourse about adult learning theory, practice, and literature, and for your unconditional support and belief in the value of this research, I love you more than words can express.

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Abstract

Each year, refugees come to the U.S. in search of a safe place to rebuild their lives after surviving life-threatening violence, persecution, or environmental dangers. As refugees seek to establish a safe and stable life for their families, education becomes a central focus. However, we do not know what the experience is like for adult refugees who seek education in the U.S. Since education can open pathways to a stable and self-sufficient life for adult refugees, it appears incumbent that the U.S. education system facilitate access and success for this vital student population. The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to seek a better understanding of the experiences of adult refugee learners as they navigate higher education in the Southeastern U.S. The research questions that guided this study were: 1) How do prior life experiences of adult refugee learners influence the transition to higher education in the U.S.? 2) How does the intersection of ethnicity and immigration status of adult refugee learners influence the U.S. higher education experience? and 3) What strategies do adult refugee learners employ to navigate higher education? This narrative inquiry focused on the experiences of nine adult refugee students in community colleges in Tennessee. From the narrative interview data, four themes emerged: a) seek to understand and be understood, b) bird in a cage, c) power of education, and d) there is only hope. Each theme was addressed in detail through narrative excerpts from the participant interviews. This study concluded with a discussion of implications for practice and research and recommendations for future research in the field of adult education.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Imagine arriving in a new country after fleeing your home, career, and all that is familiar to seek safety. How might you rebuild your life while learning a new language within a culture full of new systems and ways of being in the world? Millions of people around the world experience this reality, thousands of whom currently live throughout the United States (UN Refugee Agency, 2018). Currently, of the 25 million refugees worldwide, less than three percent of refugees were successfully resettled into a new home country in 2018 (UN Refugee Agency, 2019). As of June 2019, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Office reported that a total of 654,934 refugees were admitted into the country in the last ten years. In the fiscal year 2018, 22,491 refugees were admitted to the U.S. with the largest number of refugees coming from Africa and South Asia (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

After refugees enter the resettlement country, the national government strives to place families in areas where they will have access to resources that support successful migration (UN Refugee Agency, 2018). The Refugee Act of 1980 established policy and procedures for the admittance of refugees to the U.S., created a systematic branch of the government to organize and manage refugee processing and resettlement, and granted rights for federal services to support refugee resettlement (U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012). However, refugees can struggle to locate and access support services when barriers arise in language acquisition, cultural acclimation, and adjustment to societal differences (Kruczek, 2018; McBrien, 2005; Perry & Mallozzi, 2011,2017).

As of August 2019, the U.S. Department of State reports that over 3.4 million refugees have been resettled in the U.S. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) includes a comprehensive organizational model, designed to maintain efficiency in the resettlement process.

Resettlement refers to the process whereby refugees are moved to a new country by government bodies and provided a pathway toward citizenship in the new home country (U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012). However, due to increasingly large numbers of refugees, the USRAP struggles to keep up with the demand for placement (Mirza & Heinemann, 2012; U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012). When a refugee arrives in the resettlement country, the refugee or refugee family is placed in the care of a federally-funded refugee assistance agency who will guide the resettlement process.

The USRAP and federally-funded refugee assistance agencies are structured to focus on meeting basic needs of newly-arrived refugees in relation to housing, food, and healthcare (U.N. Refugee Agency, 2018; U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012). However, the USRAP and federally-funded refugee assistance agencies lack the resources to accommodate individual needs based on abilities, gender identities, and familial situations (Mirza & Heinemann, 2012; U.N. Refugee Agency, 2018; U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012).

When refugees are resettled in the U.S., it becomes vital to consider the diversity of each person in order to facilitate access to vital public services (Cummings & Hardin, 2017; Mirza & Heinemann, 2012). If refugees' needs for disability services, language acquisition, or religious freedoms are not considered, refugees could continue to struggle to locate vital resources to support their success in a new culture (Cummings & Hardin, 2017). Refugees enter the resettlement process after struggling with varied severe threats to personal safety including, but not limited to war violence, violent civil unrest, religious or ethnic persecution, and starvation (U.N. Refugee Agency, 2019).

Following traumatic experiences such as these, refugees seek safety, freedom, and sustenance through the resettlement process. So, the resettlement country becomes responsible

for meeting not only the basic needs of refugees, but also individual needs of refugees for holistic support to facilitate the quest for freedom and safety (U.N. Refugee Agency, 2019). Using language barriers as an example, the largest percentage of refugees resettled in the U.S. over the last ten years speak languages other than English as their original language including: Arabic, Nepali, Somali, Sgaw Karen, and Spanish (U.S. Department of State, 2019). By facilitating English language acquisition, English as a Second Language (ESL) adult learners' career opportunities, socioeconomic status, and life experience can be enhanced (Padilla, 2006; Perry & Mallozzi, 2011; Phan, 2018).

The level of English proficiency can be linked to the level of welcome individuals feel in an English-speaking environment (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). Further, when refugees leave their home country, prior higher educational experiences, career accomplishments, and social status is often left behind due to ongoing perilous conditions, breakdowns in social order, or threats of violence (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Padilla, 2006; Perry & Mallozzi, 2017). Acquiring English proficiency in the U.S. is a central goal for refugees in order to re-establish a career, economic stability, and social inclusion (Padilla, 2006; Phan, 2018). It becomes clear that ESL education is of key importance to support refugee success and well-being.

When refugees resettle in a new country, they bring with them a wealth of knowledge and expertise that can aid in problem-solving, economic advancements, and promoting social order in the new country (Carlock, 2016; Perry & Mallozzi, 2017). By looking at problems from a different cultural perspective, refugees can add to the existing knowledgebase in their new home country and deepen understandings of pre-existing problems. In this way, refugees can contribute

a wealth of information to help promote socioeconomic stability and technological advancements in their new home country (Carlock, 2016; Perry & Mallozzi, 2017).

However, refugees can also struggle with maintaining a balance between cultural frames of reference (Chen, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Lehtomäki & Posti-Ahokas, 2016). For instance, cultural and societal differences can impose new standards of behavior and expectations for refugees (Chen, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). The way they may see the world and behave in social situations may vary from U.S. cultural and societal norms. This acclimation process can create stress and confusion while refugees strive to re-establish their lives in a new country (Chen, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Lehtomäki & Posti-Ahokas, 2016).

Scholars also show that immigrant and refugee students possess a higher sense of self-efficacy while pursuing education than U.S.-born citizens (Goodnight, 2017; Hudley, 2016). By referring to immigrant students, Hudley (2016) refers to students who were not born in the U.S. but who now live in the U.S. permanently. Hudley (2016) further illuminates that immigrants and refugees are more likely to view higher education as a pathway to success than U.S.-born students. Immigrant and refugee students believe, according to Hudley (2016), that higher education is directly tied to higher socioeconomic status, career opportunities, and quality of life. U.S.-born students disclose more skepticism regarding the power of education to change the trajectory of life and believe that discrimination, familial connections, and other pre-existing biases will negate the positive impact of completing a college degree (Goodnight, 2017; Hudley, 2016).

With this introductory section, I provided a brief overview of statistical data and purpose of the refugee resettlement process, the importance of providing holistic support services to aid

in the resettlement process, and the value cross-cultural knowledge-sharing. Following this introduction to the study topic, this first chapter is intended address the background of the study based on an overview of the related literature, statement of the research problem, purpose statement and research questions, and a discussion of the research significance to the field of adult learning and society at large. Then, I will provide definitions for key terms used throughout the study and an overview of the dissertation.

Background of the Study

As the population of learners within an academic setting changes, teaching strategies must also evolve to accommodate new learner populations, cultural backgrounds, and learner needs (J. Chen, 2014; A. Chen, 2017; Merriam, 2010). As prior research addressed, the pursuit of education can lead to complex challenges for all students; however, the socioeconomic, academic, and cultural challenges can be intensified by competing priorities for adult refugee learners (Chen, 2017; Goulah, 2010; Karimshah et al., 2013; Kim & Diaz, 2013; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Streitwiesser, Loo, Ohorodnik, & Jeong, 2018). Refugee students confront unique challenges as they seek personal, professional, and academic growth in the U.S. They report facing obstacles as they strive to balance educational pursuits with familial obligations and newly encountered American social systems and cultural norms (Edberg, Cleary, & Vyas, 2011; Kim & Diaz, 2013; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015).

Refugee students have persisted through much hardship and trauma to reach the point of participating in educational opportunities in the U.S. The United Nations Refugee Agency (2019) reports on the high level of physical, emotional, and psychological trauma refugees experience. Refugees may have experienced the violence of war, sexual assault, or hostage situations and

starvation firsthand (UN Refugee Agency, 2019). These aspects of the identity of refugees can impact future interactions, expectations, and level of perseverance (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Perry & Mallozzi, 2011; UN Refugee Agency, 2019). The process of resettlement can also be influenced by the prevailing social attitudes of acceptance or discrimination toward a refugee's cultural heritage (Swartz & McGuffey, 2018; Urdan, 2012).

The level of adult refugee personal and professional success in a new culture is impacted by the level of acceptance and mutual respect offered by the local community (Urdan, 2012). Using race as a lens to discuss the intersecting positionalities of students and teachers, Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2008) explore how the coming-together of varied positionalities influences a classroom learning environment. For instance, a teacher's positionality according to race, ethnicity, gender identity, and socioeconomic status may impact teaching philosophies, methodology, and praxis. So, scholars consider how these intersections of varied life experiences and positionalities may further influence the delivery and perception of material in a classroom (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2008; Misawa, 2010, 2015).

Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2008) also show how race and ethnicity are embedded in the U.S. educational system and impact the social perception of individual efficacy. In the U.S. educational system, the social hierarchy and socially accepted norms run counter to some non-Western cultural traditions. An expectation for debate and assertiveness, for example, would marginalize students from Asian cultures who instead value modesty, deep respect for professors, and cooperation (Hans, 2012; Spring 2008). By fostering multiculturalism, respect and understanding of diversity in the classroom, and mediating the impact of implied social norms, scholars encourage that adult educators could better facilitate empowerment for learners and educators (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2008; Misawa, 2010, 2015; Spring, 2008).

Additionally, multiculturalism within education stems from a political agenda, with the purpose of fostering broader understanding and appreciation of diversity (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2008; Misawa, 2010, 2015). While seeking to better understand how diversity impacts education, matters of race, ethnicity, and social class surface to expose contested perceptions of positionality, power, and privilege (Misawa, 2015). For example, if a student is categorized as a specific race, then the student is automatically given the rights, privileges, and baggage that are socially constructed for that classification of race (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2008). This assertion leads me to consider the impact of the U.S. cultural and social environment and issues of power and discrimination in relation to adult refugees' access and opportunity for U.S. higher education.

Discrimination. Historically, it is important for the context of this study to note that the U.S. does not have a positive track record for the consistent acceptance and support of refugees (Gross, 2015). United States history exposes that immigrant and refugee populations were typically welcomed during times of wealth and economic growth, but were ostracized and blamed for taking U.S. jobs during times of economic decline (Abramitzky & Boustian, 2017). Perhaps the most notorious persecution of refugees in the U.S. occurred in 1939, when a ship full of 937 passengers was turned away at the U.S. port in Miami due to the U.S. Government's belief that the passengers included spies disguised as Jewish citizens seeking asylum (Gross, 2015). The passengers were mostly Jewish and were displaced from their homes in Europe due to World War II. After being turned away by the U.S., the ship returned to Europe where more than a quarter of the passengers died in the Holocaust (Gross, 2015).

The complex history of immigrant and refugee exile and discrimination in the U.S. carries forward in the current climate of fear toward refugee populations (McCorkle, 2018).

Through an examination of U.S. history where early to modern American media, policies, and political agendas marginalize refugee populations, it seems that the U.S. socioeconomic perspective toward refugees in the U.S. is marked by fear, violence, and isolation of the “other” (Abramitzky & Boustian, 2017; Gross, 2015; McCorkle, 2018).

Discrimination is one of the most often reported barriers for refugees’ access to resources in education, childcare, fair wage employment, and healthcare (Boas, 2007; Elo, Frankenberg, Gansey, & Thomas, 2015). A perception of “otherness” can be seen as culturally embedded in a society, so that by the time people enter college, stereotypes about races, cultures, sexual identities, and ethnicities can become solidified in unconscious beliefs and actions (Davis et al., 2004; Misawa, 2007, 2010, 2015). These perceptions can perpetuate stereotypes and marginalization, which can also lead to an unwelcoming and demoralizing experience for refugees. Considering the positionality of refugees, it appears inadequate for them to face discrimination within higher education (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). This facet of higher education requires mediation from adult learning practitioners to facilitate safe and positive learning environments.

While studies do not yet exist regarding adult refugee learners in higher education, in a qualitative interview-based study Burkett and Hayes (2018) explored how secondary school administrators perceived student reactions to anti-immigrant rhetoric and immigration policy-change announcements in mass media. They exposed themes of: a culture of fear, importance of relationships, support and advocacy, and the importance of education (Burkett & Hayes, 2018). The participants explained how difficult it can be for English as a second language immigrant, refugee, and non-citizen populations to understand the implications of anti-immigrant speeches and proposed immigration reform due to the complexity of the U.S. immigration system and

legal verbiage of policy documents (Burkett & Hayes, 2018; Kruczek, 2018; Perry & Mallozzi, 2017).

Burkett and Hayes (2018) propose that students will react with trepidation to immigration policy changes, initiatives, or immigrant-related news stories, regardless of their actual immigration status. Even when students are legally protected by their immigration status, the complexity and nuances of immigration-related policies and public discourse creates a culture of fear among the immigration community. This study can help us better understand potential impacts for adult refugees within higher education environments and can inform the direction of future research.

Continuing in this vein of literature, Matthews, Ullrich, and Cervantes (2018) report about the impact of U.S. immigration policy on early childhood education programs. The study showed that immigration status did not factor into the young children's expressions of fear since children did not comprehend the complexities of the immigration process. The environment of fear generated by immigration policy announcements appeared to impact entire communities, regardless of immigration status. Particularly following the 2016 Presidential election and requisite immigration policy announcements, educators noticed a sharp decline in student attendance (Matthews, Ullrich, & Cervantes, 2018). Educators in Burkett and Hayes' (2018) study also reported that families kept children out of school due to a fear of separation or discrimination, while other children became despondent and had difficulty focusing during school.

Prior scholars also conducted substantial work regarding discrimination and requisite impact on student success and social connectedness, recognizing the importance of on-campus student support services and arguing that these services must be comprehensive and flexible to fit

the needs of diverse students (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Hanassab, 2006; Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007; Ramos, Cassidy, Reicher, & Haslam, 2016). Interestingly, the studies discuss how student perception of discrimination may not directly impact students' strategies for cultural acclimation. However, discrimination can impose perceived boundaries between students and faculty which impact social connectedness – a vital part of facilitating well-being and success (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Hanassab, 2006; Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007; Ramos, Cassidy, Reicher, & Haslam, 2016).

In order to engage adult refugee learners, it is important to do more than teach inside the four walls of a classroom, but to also provide opportunities for social and cultural exposure which can increase learner autonomy and transformation. By reaching beyond traditional methodologies for adult learning instruction, educators can facilitate students' journey to find their *voice* in a new language. Finding voice can be understood as the ability to fully express feelings, beliefs, and ideas and communicate personality in a new language or culture (Misawa, 2015; Stewart, 2010). In other words, finding voice can be a breakthrough when a person is able to feel fully oneself in a new environment.

As Aydin and Kaya (2017) and McBrien (2005) explored the educational needs and barriers for immigrants and refugees, they found that in many cases educational systems make assumptions of what students need to facilitate a healthy learning environment. Instead, it is vital to consider how to facilitate resettlement for refugees via educational opportunities that are accessible and sufficient to meet students' needs. Additionally, McBrien (2005) conducted a summative literature review and asked how educational systems could be structured to minimize trauma for refugees. This literature review spans 25 years and includes a focus on the process of acculturation, effects of level of inclusion in society, psychosocial needs, language acquisition,

barriers to success, religious freedom, and family support systems. By gaining a holistic understanding of the refugee experience, McBrien (2005) hopes to facilitate advancement of the training process for teachers so that they may better support refugee students in the future.

Lack of teacher training or teaching resources is an essential piece of a failing educational system (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Campbell, 2017; McBrien, 2005). Teachers must be provided the opportunity for multicultural and intercultural communication training. If the school system fails to provide adequate education to teachers, this lack of understanding can transfer to students which can lead to a segmented and segregated environment (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Campbell, 2017; McBrien, 2005). Kanno and Varghese (2010) also emphasize the importance of considering not just the educational criteria and curriculum, but the whole person – educators must consider each student as an individual with varied life experiences and ways of being in the world.

Looking toward advocacy, Ryu and Tuvilla (2018) noted a significant awareness among their study participants, refugee youth from Burma, of the existence and perpetuation of inequities in society. The participants expressed empathy and a desire to support others who suffer from social injustice, discrimination, or otherwise marginalized populations. It is possible that the participants' experiences with inequity enables them to recognize and inspires them to fight against social injustice. Rather than focusing solely on refugees' struggles and barriers to success, Ryu and Tuvilla (2018) encourage us to validate the strengths of each person's character and praise their resilience and transformation through unique and arduous experiences.

Moreover, in education for empowerment, the first step for educators can be to realize the problem and then seek to understand the roots of students' fear and uncertainty (Prins & Drayton, 2010). Practitioners are tasked to consider how to meet learners' basic needs and

develop support strategies during traumatic experiences, all while facilitating progress toward learners' goals (Prins & Drayton, 2010). Educators in the study by Burkett and Hayes (2018) encourage advocacy by creating a sense of community and offering reliable and consistent support. In Burkett and Hayes' (2018) teaching strategy, developing mutual respect and trust became essential pieces while facilitating a healthy learning environment for students.

According to the preceding literature, a deeper and more holistic understanding of refugee experiences must be explored in order to adequately facilitate social equity, a safe learning environment, and persistence during resettlement (Burkett & Hayes, 2018; Matthews, Ullrich, & Cervantes, 2018; Prins & Drayton, 2010; Ryu & Tuvilla, 2018). Prior literature provides an overview of how mass media outlets, standards of practice in education, and pre-existing biases impact the refugee experience; however, there is a gap when seeking to understand the realities of the refugee experience (Burkett & Hayes, 2018; Campbell, 2017; Matthews, Ullrich, & Cervantes, 2018; Ryu & Tuvilla, 2018). To do this, it is necessary to listen to the voices of adult refugees as they talk about their experiences, so that others can learn from their experiences to advance educational praxis and facilitate social change. In order to push against discrimination and inequities in social systems, refugee voices could hold power to expand sociocultural awareness and open pathways to educational empowerment. As Ryu and Tuvilla (2018) encourage, it is vital to empower marginalized individuals by building on strengths, not focusing only on hardships.

Language proficiency. As previously mentioned, a key issue when discussing adult refugee student education in the U.S. is English language acquisition. Acquiring English proficiency in the U.S. is a central goal for refugees in order to re-establish a career, economic stability, and social inclusion (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern,

2015; Padilla, 2006; Perry & Mallozzi, 2011; Phan, 2018). The United States Census (2018) showed that over 20 percent of the U.S. population spoke languages other than English at home, totaling over 69 million people. Additionally, the U.S. Census (2018) reports that more than 350 languages are spoken by children in U.S. schools. The U.S. Census 2016 offers the most recent measure of adult learners enrolled in formal English Language programs in the U.S. The 2016 Census reports that almost two million adults were enrolled in English language programs at certified English language institutes in the U.S. from 2014-2015. As previously noted, according to the U.S. Department of State (2018), the majority of refugees entering the country over the last ten years also speak languages other than English, which may indicate an increasing need for adult English language learning opportunities.

Importantly, literature reflects a connection between the level of English proficiency and the level of perceived discrimination for students (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). Reflecting on the evidenced need for ESL education for refugees through statistical data and lived experiences, it becomes evident that language proficiency may be one of the greatest barriers during a search for education, social connection, and cross-cultural acclimation. Refugee learners come from diverse backgrounds with a variety of life experiences, varied cultural belief systems, and levels of socioeconomic status. Life experience can be seen as the learners' textbook, from which new knowledge and meaning can evolve (Lindeman, 1926; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). In order to serve the needs of learners, educators must consider the lived experiences of students (Brockett, 2015; Lindeman, 1926).

Higher education and the adult learner. While this study focuses on community college environments, it is important to consider how the overarching landscape of higher education has changed over the past decade into a key locale for adult learning (Merriam,

Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006; Ross-Gordon, 2011). The National Center for Educational Statistics (2018) reported a 35 percent increase in college students aged 25 years or older in the academic year 2016-2017. Additionally, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2019) reports that the average age of community colleges students over the 2017-2018 academic year was 28 years of age, with 54% of students aged under 22, 38% of students between 22-39 years of age, and 9% of students 40 years of age or older. As of 2017, community colleges in the U.S. enrolled 41% of undergraduate students (AACC, 2019). As adult educators consider the changing demographics and expanding field of practice, the field of higher education may hold potential for collaboration when striving to serve the needs of a growing number of adult learners (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006; Ross-Gordon, 2011).

Given the reality that the majority of refugees in the U.S. live below the poverty line within the first ten years of resettlement, it becomes important to consider the financial burden of higher education (AACC, 2019; UNHCR, 2019). Tuition costs at community colleges can be as much as a third of the cost of tuition rates for public and private four-year institutions (AACC, 2019). Additionally, some states in the U.S. have government-sponsored initiatives focused on encouraging adults to complete a college degree.

For instance, in Tennessee, the state government launched the *Tennessee Reconnect* initiative in August 2018 (THEC, 2018). Tennessee Reconnect provides a last dollar tuition scholarship at a Tennessee state community or technical school for adults aged 24 and older who have not completed an Associate degree level of study or higher (THEC, 2018). The scholarship would cover any remaining tuition costs for qualified students after all other forms of federal or state financial aid and scholarships have been applied to the student accounts (THEC, 2018). The scholarship does not cover the costs of textbooks or other related course materials.

Importantly for this study, Tennessee Reconnect is available for adult refugees who meet the criteria for Tennessee Reconnect (TBR, 2017). The eligibility criteria for Tennessee Reconnect includes: students who do not have an associate or bachelor degree, have lived in Tennessee for at least one year, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, and be 24 years of age or older. This initiative has significantly increased adult learner enrollment in community colleges over the past two academic years. After the inaugural year of Tennessee Reconnect, the overall adult enrollment in Tennessee community colleges increased by 1.3%, with overall adult enrollment up by 17.4% (TBR, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Statistical data reflects a growing population of refugees in the U.S. and the number of refugee students studying in U.S. higher education has consistently increased over the past ten years (U.S. Department of State, 2018). However, due to social and economic barriers during the refugee resettlement process, it is increasingly difficult for refugees to access education (UN Refugee Agency, 2018). When refugees arrive to the U.S., it is common for them to need economic assistance from the government and community while they re-establish their life in a new country (UN Refugee Agency, 2018). Additionally, since English may not be the first language for refugees, language and communication barriers must be mediated in order to advance in their resettlement process.

Adult refugees face the challenge of relocating to a foreign country with different cultural and social practices and challenge themselves to learn English while immersed in an academic environment different from what they may know and understand (Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016; Perry & Mallozzi, 2017). Adult refugee learners often live with a feeling that they are constantly in-between cultures. They are working to find a place in a new home, culture, and

society, while remaining loyal and authentic to their heritage culture (Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016; Hans, 2012; Perry & Mallozzi, 2017). As previously discussed, refugees do not want to leave their home country due to personal preferences, but rather are forced to leave to seek safety and well-being (U.N. Refugee Agency, 2019). Because they are forced to leave for survival, refugees often experience homesickness and strive to continue their cultural traditions. When refugees have the opportunity to share cultural beliefs and practices with those in their new home country, refugees can regain self-efficacy and autonomy (Chen, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Lehtomäki & Posti-Ahokas, 2016).

Through an expanding awareness of the refugee experience, adult educators can support the acclimation process and provide a safe environment as refugees negotiate the balance between cultural frames of reference. This indicates that educators must be prepared to expand and develop curriculum that accounts for this population (Chen, 2014; Merriam, 2010). It is also essential that administration, faculty, and staff in academia understand this phenomenon in order to examine the challenges that educators and students face in practice (Phan, 2018). Prior literature discusses adult refugees in relation to their experiences with trauma and requisite physical, psychological, and behavioral impact of trauma and resettlement (Chen, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Lehtomäki & Posti-Ahokas, 2016). In higher education literature, refugees are often grouped in with discussions of immigrant student persistence, needs, and experiences from a faculty perspective (Carlock, 2016; Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016; Phan, 2018). However, refugees have experiences unique from those of immigrants, requiring attention to the specific needs of refugees. There is also a gap in the literature discussing the refugees' experiences from a sociocultural and narrative prospective. Prior

literature does not address the question of how adult refugees navigate the quest for education in the U.S. (Perry & Mallozzi, 2011; Phan, 2018).

The problem surfaces in the gap between what is being done and what should be done to support adult refugee access to and success in higher education. Even with the increasing demand for education from adult refugees, resources are lacking to understand what the students need based on their lived experiences. In order to meet the needs of this critical population, the field of adult education must expand awareness of how refugees view and experience the world. During this time in history, where discussions about refugees and immigrant populations are especially politically-charged and at the forefront of popular media, it is even more vital that scholars seek to expose refugees' voices so that their personal stories can serve as a testament to the importance of social justice and equity (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; McBrien, 2005; Phan, 2018). There is not currently a study on this topic using a narrative inquiry approach. This study addresses this gap in the literature.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to seek a better understanding of the experiences of adult refugee learners as they navigate higher education in the Southeastern U.S. This study specifically focused on adult refugees in the Southeastern U.S. who have completed at minimum one semester of study in a higher education institution. The research questions that guided this study were:

- 1) How do prior life experiences of adult refugee learners influence the transition to higher education in the U.S.?
- 2) How does the intersection of ethnicity and immigration status of adult refugee learners influence the U.S. higher education experience?

3) What strategies do adult refugee learners employ to navigate higher education?

Significance

This study contributes to the practice and research in adult education and society at large in numerous ways. First, by better understanding the lived experience of adult refugees, educators and practitioners can be better informed to negotiate a change to facilitate the needs of refugee students (Perry & Mallozzi, 2011; Phan, 2018). If educators and administrators in academia understand the barriers to success faced by adult refugees, they are able to facilitate additions or adjustments to campus student services in order to better mediate challenges for this critical population of students. Adult refugee learners leave behind successful careers in varied fields, such as engineering, business, education, and agriculture. Therefore, this population has significant potential to contribute to U.S. society, economy, and scholarship as long as higher education is prepared to support and encourage their success.

The globalized society connects varied cultures, ethnicities, and ways of seeing the world; therefore, by expanding awareness of the experiences of adult refugees, a more globalized understanding of society can evolve (Chen, 2014; Merriam, 2010). Through this study's discourse, educators and program planners will be able to make more informed decisions about how to plan curriculum, support services, and programs to enhance the social environment and learning experience for refugees. By understanding the refugee experience, adult education practitioners and community members can also mediate the impact of marginalization for adult refugee learners (Perry & Mallozzi, 2011; Phan, 2018).

In a classroom where refugee students are treated fairly, encouraged, and feel valued, students are more likely to succeed academically and personally (Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016; Hans, 2012; Spring 2008). Whereas, in a classroom where refugee students are marginalized and

unsupported, students show decline in academic and personal motivation (Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016; Stewart, 2010). Diaz, Cochran, and Karlin's (2016) research showed that when students had instructors who were culturally-aware, strict but fair, and who used instructor power to motivate student learning, students valued the learning experience and displayed a growing level of positive self-perception and academic success.

This research not only contributes to adult education practice and research, but also to society at large. By expanding the understanding of refugee experiences within education, community members outside of education may also experience an expansion of cultural understandings. For instance, when U.S.-born college students share a classroom with refugee students and experience an educational environment where multiculturalism is valued, the students' mindsets may begin to expand to better understand and appreciate varied ways of being and doing in the world. As students talk about these new experiences outside of the classroom, cultural understandings and a more inclusive knowledge of diverse cultures may begin to permeate society.

Definition of Terms

Critical Theory. Critical theory addresses the inequities of a capitalist social order where those in power strive to remain in power and those at the margins consistently struggle at the margins of society (Taylor, Tisdell, & Hanley, 2000; Tisdell & Thompson, 2007). Critical research assumes that power relations are omnipresent and must be examined to break down oppressive systems (Brookfield, 2010; Marcuse, 1965; Tisdell & Thompson, 2007). Ideology is a central focus of critical theory, defined as the ideals and beliefs that mass society perceives as rules governing the social norm (Brookfield, 2001). Critical theory encourages a close

examination of power dynamics in society to push against discrimination and marginalization based on personal identity, characteristics, or socioeconomic standing.

Immigrant. Immigrant is used in this paper in reference to individuals who currently live in the U.S. but were born in other countries (U.S. Department of State, 2018). This group can be inclusive of refugees.

Intersectionality Theory. Intersectionality theory facilitates a way to deepen understanding of a concept, social problem, or research question by considering the complexity of humans and human experiences (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Mitchell, Simmons, & Greverbiehl, 2014). Humans are complex beings with many layers of experiences, beliefs, and understandings which construct identities. Intersectionality is also used as an analytical tool to seeks solutions for problems where multiple factors intersect to influence issues such as discrimination, inequality, or inequity (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Misawa, 2010, 2015).

Refugee. Refugee can be understood to refer to people who were forced to flee their home country due to persecution, threats of violence, or other situations that threaten their safety or sustenance. Refugees are part of a multinational government-sponsored system responsible for their protection and relocation (UN Refugee Agency, 2018). According to the 1951 Convention, a refugee is someone who is unable to return to their country of origin due to the threat of persecution for their race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social or political group (UN Refugee Agency, 2019).

Resettlement. Resettlement refers to the process whereby refugees are moved to a new country by government bodies and provided a pathway toward citizenship in the new home country. The Refugee Act of 1980 established policy and procedures for the admittance of

refugees to the U.S., created a systematic branch of the government to organize and manage refugee processing and resettlement, and granted rights for federal services to support refugee resettlement (U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012).

Transformative Learning. Transformative learning refers to a meaning-making process generated by an experience which challenges prior understandings, beliefs, or ways of seeing the world. When prior assumptions are challenged during a meaning-making process, this can spur an emotional journey. A learner begins to question previous ways of understanding and acquires new knowledge that may change fundamental belief system. Some experiences may be powerful to such a degree that they inspire the person to take action for social change (Cranton, 2012; Mezirow, 1978, 1990, 1991, 2000, 2009, 2012; Robinson & Levac, 2018). Transformative experiences are credited with instilling the tools necessary for individuals to successfully navigate modern societal challenges (Hassi & Laursen, 2015; Robinson & Levac, 2018).

Study Overview

This first chapter of the doctoral dissertation included an introduction to the study and addressed the background of the study based on an overview of related literature, with a focus on the positionality of adult refugees within the U.S. social and cultural environment relative to higher education and English as a second language learners. The first chapter also included the statement of the research problem, purpose statement, research questions, and a discussion of the research significance to the field of adult learning and society at large. The chapter concluded with a definition of terms.

Chapter 2 will provide a comprehensive literature review on adult refugee learner characteristics, adult education theories and practices relevant for adult refugee learners, an overview of the U.S. refugee resettlement process, and a discussion about the importance and

role of English language education for adult refugees. Then, Chapter 3 will address the study methodology, including the methods that were used in the study. Chapter 3 will also include a discussion of qualitative research design, researcher positionality and subjectivity, and the researcher's subjectivity statement. Chapter 4 will present the findings from the study and Chapter 5 will conclude this study with a discussion of the findings and implications for practice and research.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Considering the increasing number of adult refugees in the U.S. and the requisite need for educational opportunities in order to establish stability and socioeconomic security, it becomes vital that educators seek to better understand the needs of this student population (Perry & Mallozzi, 2011; Phan, 2018; U.S. Department of State, 2018). By better understanding the lived experiences of adult refugee learners, adult educators can be better prepared to facilitate positive learning environments (Chen, 2014; Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016; Hans, 2012; Spring 2008). As discussed in chapter one, prior literature does not address the lack of equity in access to higher education for adult refugees, nor does it address level of service available for refugees within the U.S. higher education system (Campbell, 2017; Swartz & McGuffey, 2018).

To facilitate a better understanding of adult refugee experiences in the U.S., this chapter will include discussion on the characteristics of adult refugee learners, applicable adult education theory and practice, and best practices for adult educators relative to this population. Then, this chapter will explore the U.S. refugee resettlement process and policies, refugee access and opportunity for U.S. higher education, and the impact of English language acquisition and proficiency. This chapter will end with a conclusion and a chapter summary.

Adult Refugee Learners and Adult Education Praxis

This section of the review of literature will begin with discussion of the foundation of adult learning and adult education and the characteristics of adult learners. Then, I will discuss experience-based learning, situated cognition, and motivation in relation to adult refugee learning facilitation. Educational opportunities open doorways for adult refugee learners as they seek to reestablish their lives in a new country (McBrien, 2005; Perry & Mallozzi, 2011). As

discussed in Chapter 1, refugees come to the U.S. after fleeing perilous situations in their home country (U.N. Refugee Agency, 2019). Refugees leave prior higher education experiences, career accomplishments, and social status behind in hopes of finding safety and stability in another country (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Padilla, 2006; Perry & Mallozzi, 2017). By participating in higher education, adult refugees are able to build a more stable economic future and increase feelings of self-efficacy and autonomy in their new home country (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Padilla, 2006; Perry & Mallozzi, 2017). Through adult learning theories in practice, adult educators can facilitate positive learning environments which aid in building social and cultural capital as refugees strive to reach personal and professional goals.

Characteristics of adult learners. In *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, Knowles (1973, 1984) provided five major assumptions that characterize the adult learner population: a) adult learners are self-directed; b) they have prior experiences that aid the learning process; c) they display an avid readiness for learning; d) they focus on how learning is useful to them and how new knowledge can be applied to solve real life problems; and e) they are set apart from other learners by their intrinsic motivation for learning. Knowles (1980) stressed that adult learners are unique learners and the characteristics of adult learners should be considered during curriculum or learning design. Through a thorough exploration of prior social science theories, Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005) developed the adult learner characteristics to emphasize the value of prior experiences, motivation for learning, and growth potential of adult learners.

Similarly, Bye, Pushkar, and Conway (2007) assert that adults are intentional learners with a focus on learning what is relevant to their lives. This internal drive to learn exemplifies adult learners' strong internal motivation for learning. Adults are also driven by generativity – the legacy they will leave for others (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Rabourn, BrckaLorenz, &

Shoup, 2018). Generativity is included in the human development model offered by Eric Erikson (1968). Erikson (1968) developed one of the most renowned theories of psychosocial development, providing eight stages of development from birth to death. By highlighting the key experiences of crises and guideposts in the human life span, Erickson (1968) focused on the need for connecting and relating to others.

At each stage, humans must manage a successful transition in order to move to the next stage of development (Degges-White, 2017; Erikson, 1968). A focus on willpower and self-efficacy supports Erikson's (1968) model and indicates that adult learners are particularly motivated to learn so that they can pass wisdom to the next generation. Degges-White (2017), while analyzing Erikson's model, proposed that adult learners are looking for ways to give back to the world in efforts to avoid complacency and stagnation in older age.

Considering the prior life experiences of adult learners, facilitators are encouraged to acknowledge and validate that the adult learner is an active participant in the learning experience, not a passive observer (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006). Mutual respect and social support become important factors when building a healthy learning environment for adult learners (Bye, Pushkar, & Conway, 2007; Rabourn, BrckaLorenz, & Shoup, 2018). Adults enter a learning space with prior educational experiences, career experiences, relationships, and possibly trauma. Brockett (2015) and Brookfield (2015) stress that adult learning facilitators need to consider positionality, power, and place in the adult learning classroom. As a facilitator in an adult learning context, the ability to understand and accommodate learners' positionality and sense of place in the classroom becomes integral to an effective co-learning experience (Brockett, 2015; Brookfield, 2015). Teachers of adults emphasize the value of including

students' life experiences in class discussions to illuminate new ideas and ways of seeing the world.

Further, *andragogy*, the science and art of facilitating adult learning, assumes that adults' prior life experiences are a vital resource for learning (Boucouvalas & Lawrence, 2010; Knowles, 1980; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006). Knowles (1980) coined the term *andragogy* and emphasized the centrality of life experience and self-concept in adult learning. The term *andragogy* is debated among those in the field of adult education, where some consider it a model or method of instruction while others debate the proposed focus on the individual, leaving out the impact of context in learning (Boucouvalas & Lawrence, 2010). Life experience is what makes each learner unique and is an integral part of identity and self-concept (Brockett, 2015; McCauley, Hammer, & Hinojosa, 2017; Roessger, Greenleaf, & Hoggan, 2017).

By including learners' prior life experience in the learning dialogue, facilitators can set the stage for optimal learning. Of equal importance is to think about how traumatic life experiences can deter learning and create areas of close-mindedness in learning (McCauley, Hammer, & Hinojosa, 2017; Roessger, Greenleaf, & Hoggan, 2017). In this way, adult learning facilitators also need to be aware of adult learner reactions and resistance in the learning process (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). For example, if a student is a cancer survivor, the student may have definite beliefs about living with disease and may not be willing to consider alternative points of view. It may also be painful to revisit a personal traumatic experience through class discussion. However, these instances can also lead to transformative opportunities. When adult learning facilitators are attentive to adult learner reactions, resistance, and expressions from prior life

experiences, the adult learning environment can become a prime opportunity for deepened learning and growth (Brookfield, 2015).

Bringing adult refugee learners into this discussion, refugees' unique life experiences add further context to consider how prior life experience impacts adult learning. Refugee learners bring unique psychological, physical, and emotional experiences into learning environments. Not only do adult refugees share in the characteristics of other adult learners, but they also bring experiences with trauma, stress of relocation and resettlement, and the complexity of adapting to a new cultural and sometimes linguistic environment (Goulah, 2010; Karimshah et al., 2013; Kim & Diaz, 2013; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Museus & Ravello, 2010). With these additional learner characteristics in mind, facilitators could enhance the learning environment for refugee students by utilizing adult education theory and practice (Kim & Diaz, 2013; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). To begin, experience-based learning theory provides an opportunity to engage adult refugee learners in learning by integrating and valuing prior life experiences.

Experience-based learning. The historical roots of experience-based learning go back as far as Aristotle and Plato, when early civilizations questioned what influenced the human quest for knowledge (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Aristotle believed that theories required testing through real experiences prior to acceptance as new knowledge (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, John Locke and John Stuart Mill's research considered the meaning of lived experience and the integral nature of experience in learning. Lindeman (1926) proposed that everything humans experience in life is learning in action, and thus experience is the greatest

resource for learning (Dernova, 2015; McCauley, Hammer, & Hinojosa, 2017; Roessger, Greenleaf, & Hoggan, 2017).

Lindeman's influential work, *The Meaning of Adult Education* (1926), encouraged adult learning practitioners to focus on the life experience of adult learners to inform practice, rather than relying on predetermined curriculum. Lindeman (1926) also focused on the importance of discussion in an adult learning environment over lecturing and formal classroom designs. Multicultural education also took center stage in Lindeman's (1926) work. He encouraged a move away from a Eurocentric focus to include diverse cultural perspectives (Hammer, & Hinojosa, 2017; Roessger, Greenleaf, & Hoggan, 2017). In his work, Lindeman (1926) also stressed that learning is a lifelong process, where learning never truly ends – meaning that the field of adult education should facilitate learning opportunities with consideration of the full human lifespan. Then, Dewey, one of the most influential educational thinkers, continued this work and stressed the value of linking experience with learning (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006; Dernova, 2015).

Through his scholarship, Dewey (1938, 1963) advocated for the importance of learning from and through experience (Dernova, 2015). The centrality of social interaction in a learning process is a key idea throughout Dewey's (1899, 1938, 1963) work. He believed that human interaction in social environments shapes personal identity, behavior, and belief systems (Dyke, 2017). Dewey (1963) also stressed the value of continuity of experiences, where past experiences guide current understandings and also influence future actions. Brockett (2015) confirmed that integrating the prior experiences of adult learners into classroom discussions is a highly effective instructional strategy. Building on learners' experiences while introducing new ideas helps

learners make personal connections with the content and realize that they already know more than they thought they knew and have much to contribute (Brockett, 2015).

As a protégé of Lindeman, Knowles also advocated that not only is experience a resource for learning, it is also a stimulus for learning. Knowles went further to explain that experience can also be a barrier for learning. At times, it may be necessary to unlearn old ways of doing or seeing in order to adapt according to new ideas or acquired knowledge (McCauley, Hammer, & Hinojosa, 2017; Roessger, Greenleaf, & Hoggan, 2017). Brockett (2015) continued in this stream of thought and discussed the value of learner experiences and advocated that learning from the past helps learners move forward and not remain trapped by the past. By using prior experiences to learn new ways of understanding, history loses power to hinder personal progress.

From a theoretical perspective, Fenwick (2003) proposed five conceptions of experience-based learning. First is the constructivist perspective that focuses on reflection on experience. In this perspective, learners create meaning from reflection on a concrete experience. Learners would construct new knowledge from a lived experience, where the reflection on the meaning-making process is the central focus (Fenwick, 2003; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006).

Next, Fenwick (2003) discussed the situated theory of learning that proposes learning and doing are interwoven. In the situated theory of learning, learners are actively engaged in learning while part of a community experience (Fenwick, 2003; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006). Community of practice become a key theme in this perspective, where the social context of learning is entwined with the learning experience (Ross-Gordon, Rose, & Kasworm, 2016). For example, Gibson (2019) explores on the connection between making and learning in her conceptual paper focused on the transformative learning that occurs in craft and art communities. Through crafting groups, participants learn while making artwork to think critically, problem-

solve, and expand creativity (Gibson, 2019). Communities of learning such as these can also delve into community action for social change, where participants act on shared ideas for social change (Gibson, 2019; Ross-Gordon, Rose, & Kasworm, 2016).

Thirdly, Fenwick (2003) discussed the psychoanalytic approach, concerned with how the subconscious interferes with the conscious experiences. Learners may have competing psychic desires during a learning situation, which can impact the learning that takes place (Fenwick, 2003; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006). For example, if an adult learner is in a college classroom and is thinking about their children's day at school, taking care of aging parents, or if they can make it to work on time after class ends while the professor lectures, the learner may struggle to pay full attention with these competing priorities in mind (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006).

Fenwick (2003) also discussed a critical cultural perspective that deals with the questioning and disrupting of social norms. This perspective focuses on the learning that takes place through experience that motivate learners to act for social change (Fenwick, 2003). Ross-Gordon, Rose, and Kasworm (2016) discuss the influence of experience-based learning in the women's movement in the U.S. Through communities of learning, women became more knowledgeable about inequities in society and were motivated to take action toward social justice (Ross-Gordon, Rose, & Kasworm, 2016).

Finally, Fenwick (2003) discussed the theories that examine the complex interweaving of relationships, contexts, and experiences. This perspective considers the interactive nature of experience-based learning where context, interpersonal interactions, and experiences combine to facilitate learning (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006; Ross-Gordon, Rose, & Kasworm, 2016). By considering how environmental and social factors impact learning through

experiences, this perspective allows for an intersectional approach to experience-based learning (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006; Ross-Gordon, Rose, & Kasworm, 2016). Following this foundational knowledge of the varied theoretical conceptions of experience-based learning, I will now further explore Kolb's constructivist-based theory, the evolution of Kolb's theory according to Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993) and Jarvis (2006), and situated cognition.

Experiential learning cycle. In 1984, David Kolb provided the foundational work for modern experience-based learning with his experiential learning cycle. Kolb (1984) developed a stage-model of experiential learning. The experiential learning cycle includes four stages of the learning process, where experience serves as the core, or engine, of the cycle. The four stages consist of the concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. During the concrete experience, learners must be open and willing to imagine new ways of understanding. Pre-conceived biases or mindsets must be set aside while learners focus all senses on new ideas. Facilitators may utilize role play, demonstrations, interviews, or storytelling to encourage learner engagement during this stage in the learning cycle (Kolb, 1984; Kuk & Holst, 2018; Sisselman-Borgia & Torino, 2017).

In the reflective observation stage of the experiential learning cycle, learners are encouraged to critically reflect on experience from diverse perspectives (Kolb, 1984; Kuk & Holst, 2018; Sisselman-Borgia & Torino, 2017). Journal activities or reflective group discussions can be effective facilitation tools during this stage (Sisselman-Borgia & Torino, 2017). Then in the third stage, abstract conceptualization, films, lectures, flowcharts, or other graphics could facilitate an exploration of how observations could be merged with theories and lead to new ways of understanding through a process of questioning prior assumptions (Kolb, 1984; Kuk & Holst, 2018; Sisselman-Borgia & Torino, 2017). For example, if learners watch a film about

women's suffrage movement after studying feminist theory, perhaps prior assumptions about women's rights and social equality are questioned and learners have the opportunity to construct new ways of understanding (Kuk & Holst, 2018).

Finally, in the fourth stage, active experimentation, learners begin to put new ideas into practice to solve problems. Through "what-if" scenarios or action planning, learners can apply new ideas to real situations and explore varied outcomes. This stage can lead to an awakening where learners begin to see opportunities for outcomes previously unimaginable (Kolb, 1984; Kuk & Holst, 2018).

Kolb's (1984) model also suggests four basic styles of learning, including: diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating. In the experiential learning cycle, each style of learning would blend concepts of the adjacent learning abilities. For instance, the divergent learning style would bring in concepts from concrete experience and reflective observation to enable learners to view situations from multiple perspectives. In this way, divergent style learners would excel during brainstorming sessions, where new ideas are generated considering multiple viewpoints (Kuk & Holst, 2018; Sisselman-Borgia & Torino, 2017).

Building from Kolb's EPC model, Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993) identified a set of assumptions about learning from experience, including: experience forms basis and motivation for learning, learners construct experience, learning is a holistic process, learning is socially and culturally constructed, and learning is influenced by the social and emotional context where learning takes place. Boud, Cohen, and Walker's (1993) work emerged from a key criticism of Kolb's EPC model that the theory did not consider the influence of learner experience and learning context. Critics asked how the context of learning could impact the learners' aptitude for and style of learning (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006).

Consequently, Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993) offered distinctive, context-sensitive, characteristics of experience-based learning. First, they proposed that experience-based learning occurs when a learners' mind, senses, and feelings are involved. This holistic learning style is exemplified through role-play activities, where intellect, senses, and physicality are involved. Secondly, experience-based learning integrates learners' prior life experiences into the learning process. For instance, allowing space and time for a learner to explore how new content relates to personal experiences can facilitate the meaning-making process. Thirdly, Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993) indicated that experience-based learning includes critical reflection, where a learner contemplates how new information interacts with prior understandings to reinforce or change the way the learner sees the world. In this way, learners analyze new experiences through critical reflection in context of prior life experiences (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993). This turn to consider context and prior life experiences more explicitly paved a path for experience-based learning to evolve and expand in praxis.

Then in 2006, Jarvis proposed a model for experience-based learning using Kolb's experiential learning cycle as a foundation, and then included ways to consider learners' reactions to new experiences during learning – how a learner transforms through experiences with reflection on actions (Dyke, 2017; Jarvis, 2006, 2012). Jarvis asserted that Kolb's (2006) cycle, while beneficial, oversimplified the learning process (Dyke, 2017). Jarvis (2006) focused on the influence of sensations, context, reflection, and learner identity on the learning process. Jarvis (2006) also studied how experience-based learning could lead to a transformation of the learner, where new experiences have lasting impact on how a learner understands and interacts in the world (Dyke, 2017; Jarvis, 2006, 2012; Kuk & Holst, 2018). Dyke (2017) proposes that the central theme in the work of Jarvis was to delve into the sociological impacts on learning.

Further, Jarvis (2012, 2013) proposed that the experiential learning process is non-linear, where learners can move between stages of learning according to personal experiences, learning styles, and contextual influences. While Jarvis (2006) valued Kolb's (2006) work, he believed that Kolb's focus on the outcomes of learning was narrow and did not account for the complex nature of human experiences (Dyke, 2017). Jarvis (2006, 2012) further defined learning as a transformative process where experiences aid to construct knowledge, skills, and attitudes. His philosophy of learning remains focused on the influence and interaction of social context on individual knowledge-building (Dyke, 2017). Jarvis (2012, 2013) also emphasizes the importance of constantly evolving social contexts – where learning never stops and may be impacted by varied cultural and social interactions.

Additionally, as Kuk and Holst (2018) analyze Michelson's (1996, 2015) critical work with experiential learning, further discussion on reflection and assumptions in experience-based learning arise. Michelson (1996, 2015) focuses on the analysis of assumptions embedded in experience based learning theory. If reflection on an experience leads to learning, then individuals would also learn according to personal values, prior life experiences, and culture (Kuk & Holst, 2018; Michelson, 1996, 2015). Therefore, scholars posit that individuals' varied perspectives on experience would result in varied interpretations and assumptions regarding the same experience (Kuk & Holst, 2018; Michelson, 1996, 2015).

Further, research indicates that positionality, power, and place cannot be separated from a learning experience (Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Kuk & Holst, 2018; Michelson, 1996, 2015; Misawa, 2010, 2015). Michelson's (2015) emphasis on the mind-body connection during learning exposes the potential impact of social, personal, and cultural differences on learning through experience. Individual differences such as gender, ethnicity, race, or culture could pose

significant differences in how adults experience the world and interpret experiences (Kuk & Holst, 2018; Michelson, 2015; Misawa, 2010, 2015). A key idea in this scholarship is the inherent value of considering the physical, psychological, and social facets of experience during experiential learning processes (Kuk & Holst, 2018; Michelson, 1996, 2015).

Considering the learning process for adult refugee learners, Jarvis' (2006) model in connection with Michelson's (1996, 2015) research are highly relevant. By accounting for the influence of contextual understandings and perceptions, learner identity, and the role of emotions in the learning process, Jarvis' (2006) model could serve as an effective framework for facilitation of learning for adult refugee learners. Further, the importance of a multidimensional understanding of experience-based learning could facilitate an inclusive learning environment for multicultural students (Michelson, 2015). For instance, Stewart's (2010) research focused on instructional methodologies for adult immigrant learners centered on experience-based learning practices.

As an instructor of English as a second language courses, Stewart (2010) noticed a gap between students' verbal and written abilities. As an example, when a student talked with the class about her experience moving to a new country, the student was expressive, articulate, and communicated clearly. However, when the same student attempted to write an essay for an assignment, she faced barriers in expression due to fear of making grammar or spelling errors (Stewart, 2010). Noting this disconnect, Stewart (2010) developed an instructional method focused on developing a *voice* in writing. Her goal was to facilitate empowerment for her learners to take control of their story, or voice, in written form. Stewart's (2010) method increased student success in English composition, as they were able to practice writing in a safe environment while drawing from personal experiences. As also highlighted in this example,

situated cognition promotes the centrality of context and social interaction during the learning process.

Situated cognition. Situated cognition indicates that learning takes place when people interact with others within a specific context, using the tools available at the time (Hansman, 2001; Hansman & Wilson, 1998; McLellan, 1996; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006). Such tools may include the objects, scenery, language, or symbols present in the context. For instance, situated cognition helps to understand how an adult refugee prospective student might discover how to apply to a higher education in the U.S. Perhaps the prospective student would travel to a campus and seek advice from the institution's admissions office – using signage, visual cues, language, and contextual scenery as guideposts.

Wilson (1993) stresses that context not only influences adult learning, but context is also central to understanding adult learning processes. Additionally, Wilson (1993) advocates that adult learning practice should be situated in the activities of the learners. In other words, to facilitate positive learning environments, adult learning practitioners should bring practice into the field where adult learning is required. Wilson (1993) proposes the concept of authentic activity learning, meaning that learning environments should be structured in reality – where actual learning must take place to accomplish a task or solve a problem.

Further, as Hansman (2001) discusses, it is important to realize that in situated cognition, context and social norms are culturally and politically defined. When discussing situated cognition, it is also necessary to discuss and reflect on what behaviors and actions are considered appropriate or expected under the social and political constructs in the specific context (Hansman, 2001; Hansman & Wilson, 1998; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006). Additionally, it is vital to think about how a learner's identity as a multicultural or multinational

student may impact the learning experience (Kim & Diaz, 2013; McBrien, 2005; Perry & Mallozzi, 2011). Returning to consider the previous example of an adult refugee seeking admission to a U.S. college, it is helpful to build understanding by reflecting on ways cultural and social norms may differ between the refugee's home country and the U.S. This gap in expectations could lead to a disconnect between the student and campus administration, faculty, or staff.

Experience-based learning facilitates a space in education where adult learners are valued and active members of a learning community (Hansman, 2001; Hansman & Wilson, 1998; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006). By integrating learners' prior experiences into a learning environment, facilitators can enable students to learn from their past and then move forward, rather than remaining trapped by history or old ways of doing and knowing (Brockett, 2015). Utilizing experience-based learning models, adult educators can facilitate a positive learning environment where multiple perspectives are valued and critical reflection on past experiences are invaluable parts of the learning process. Now I will turn to an exploration of motivation for learning theories and seek to make connections between experience-based learning and motivation theories for learning.

Motivation for learning. Motivation can be defined as that which compels individuals to strive toward achieving a goal or completing a task (Courtney, 2018; Sogunro, 2015; Wlodkowski, 2008). Even though actions may not always be attributed to motivation, motivation serves as the underlying thread that pulls learners forward. When pondering why people do what they do, motivation provides the core that ties individuals' thoughts and actions together toward achieving a goal (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017). In 2006, Ahl conducted a critical analysis of motivation theories in adult learning, where she analyzed five classic motivation theories:

economic/rational, social/human, behaviorist, need-driven, and cognitive. Ahl (2006) argued that current motivation theories in the field of adult education stigmatized “unmotivated” learners and create biases in learning environments. Additionally, Ahl (2006) proposed that motivation should not be viewed as something within learners, but rather as something that is constructed through social interaction. Examining this history of motivation facilitates a deeper understanding of the evolution of the field and encourages consideration of the varied perspectives on how adults are motivated to learn, as well as what motivates continuous learning.

Economic/rational motivation theory assumes that humans are motivated by rewards and punishments (Ahl, 2006). Adam Smith and Frederic Taylor, the forefathers of this school of thought, proposed that humans are extrinsically-oriented, wanting the highest economic outcomes from maximizing self-interests (Ahl, 2006). For instance, instead of pursuing a passion for dance, a student may study engineering to guarantee a higher paying career upon completion.

Next, social/human motivational theory looks beyond economic factors and proposes that humans are motivated by social norms. Mayo’s (1933) Hawthorne Studies concluded that humans are social beings and are motivated by working conditions and positive group relationships. This humanist philosophy built the foundation for Human Resources and Organizational Development fields, while also serving as a building block of andragogy, self-directed learning, and social learning within Adult Education (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Ahl (2006) then discussed how behaviorist motivational theory became the dominant theory of motivation in the 1960s and remains influential in modern learning and training programs. Pavlov, Thorndike, and Skinner are among the more renowned foundational scholars of behaviorist motivational theory, believing that behavior and learning depend on providing stimulus to obtain desired response (Sogunro, 2015). In other words, the learner can be

conditioned or trained through a system of rewards and punishments (Courtney, 2018; Rocco & McGill, 2018).

Then, building from Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, need-driven motivational theory asserts that humans are partially motivated by extrinsic factors but that intrinsic human needs are the main forces behind human behavior (Ahl, 2006). These intrinsic human needs are the gas that propels humans toward goals. Maslow (1954) stated that humans are not motivated by basic needs that are already being met, but rather are motivated by higher order needs, such as a sense of belonging or recognition, and by cognitive and aesthetic needs.

Maslow (1954) categorized human needs into five levels on a hierarchy of needs. Lower-level needs included physiological needs (sustenance and shelter), moving up to needs for safety and protection, then up to the middle of the hierarchy to a sense of belongingness and love. At the fourth level, Maslow (1954) includes needs for self-esteem, such as achievements, approval, or recognition. At the top of the higher-level needs hierarchy are self-actualization needs, including the realization of a greater cause or purpose and the potential for meditative insight (Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014).

The environment and social context held great influence on the progression in Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. If the environmental factors required to satisfy needs are not present, then movement stops in his hierarchy of needs with the assumption that learning also stops (Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014). This leads to one of the main criticisms of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy model, that since individual needs are actually vast and diverse, Maslow's hierarchy excludes cultural, socioeconomic, or political factors that may impact individuals' needs and availability of resources (Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014; Wlodkowski, 2008). This criticism is especially relative when considering multicultural learning environments, where access and

opportunity for public services and assumptions regarding basic human needs may vary in perception and understanding (Wlodkowski, 2008; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2007).

Ahl (2006) then examined cognitive motivational theory that began with the work of Lewin and Vroom. Cognitive motivational theory promoted a philosophy that assumes multiple realities. Considering how human thought influences behavior, cognitive motivational theory believes that perceptions of reality will vary between individuals (Ahl, 2006; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). For instance, a reward offered for meeting a learning goal will have different importance to each individual based on prior life experiences. Knowledge is fluid and depends on learning – what you learned today will change how you interpret the past, present, and future (Sogurno, 2015; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017).

Turning point for motivation in adult learning. Stemming from Ahl's (2006) critical analysis of the foundations of motivation theory, I now turn to Houle's (1961) *The Inquiring Mind*, that sparked the exploration of motivation in adult learning. Houle (1961) discusses an interview-based study involving 22 adult participants who engaged in continuous learning. Through his analysis of the interviews, he exposed three types of learning orientations.

First of his orientations are goal-oriented learners, who are extrinsically and economically motivated to learn – much like the economic/rational motivational theory. In this case, learners are seeking education in order to reach a specific goal, such as a new job or promotion. The second orientation he identified is activity-oriented learners, who participate in learning with a goal of meeting other people and learning about a topic of personal interest (Houle, 1961; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017).

For instance, activity-oriented learners may enroll in a weaving class because they want to talk to other like-minded people and learn about something they enjoy, similarly discussed in

the social/human motivation theory. The final orientation Houle (1961) exposed was learning-oriented learners. This group of learners will take on the task of learning for the sake of learning. They may be interested in jazz music, so they seek out every resource they can about this genre and learn as much as they can about the topic. They want to learn because they want to know more and expand their understanding (Courtney, 2018; Rocco & McGill, 2018; Sogunro, 2015; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017).

Scholars encourage that motivation is not a linear process and that motivation for learning may include multiple goals and can evolve over time (Courtney, 2018; Rocco & McGill, 2018; Sogunro, 2015; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017). Further, motivation theory expands understanding of what drives people to learn, but does not address the barriers that can affect access to learning opportunities (Jenkins & Alfred, 2018; Osam, Bergman, & Cumberland, 2016). Due to financial restrictions, familial obligations, language proficiency, and many other socioeconomic and sociocultural factors, having the motivation for learning is only the beginning of this conversation (Osam, Bergman, & Cumberland, 2016). Brockett (2015) added that facilitators cannot “motivate” learners, but they can work to create a learning environment that facilitates learner motivation.

Motivation is based on need – defined as a gap between the current situation and the desired situation (Brockett, 2015). McClusky (1970) identified barriers to learning specific to adult learners’ life development stages, such as: unemployment, illness, relocation, fear of ability, and lack of self-efficacy. In an integrative literature review regarding adult learners’ barriers to higher education, Osam, Bergman, and Cumberland (2016) added the barriers of transportation, childcare, difficulty navigating the institutional system and policies, and inconvenient class schedules to this list.

Barriers for adult learners. In respect to barriers for adult learning, McClusky's (1963) theory of margin, also called the power-load margin (PLM), explores the complexity of life situations that can influence an adult's ability to learn. McClusky's (1963) conceptual model addresses motivation as a measure of how adults can cope with the level of demands of life that can potentially diminish learning opportunities. He asked how many resources (*power*) a learner has in order to balance the demands (*load*) involved in a learning environment (McClusky, 1963; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006). In this model, power consists of coping mechanisms such as allies, positionality, abilities, or prior experiences. Power is finite, can vary among individuals, and can change over time (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Load, on the opposite end, includes personal and social requirements that must be met in order to maintain autonomy (Brockett, 2015). Margin, in this model, is the relational outcome of load to power.

McClusky (1963) believed in the unlimited potential of humanity, but he also asserts that people need enough margin available to handle life's challenges. For instance, he believed that adulthood centers on change spurred by development, which also contributes to adults' responsibilities and desires (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006). This is a relatively unknown model, most likely since he did not develop an instrument to study his theory (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). However, Stevenson (1982) later developed an instrument relative to his model and conducted a study in the Nursing field, identifying six key areas that can be used to measure load: self, family, religiosity/spirituality, body, non-familial relationships, and environment. A criticism of McClusky's model emerges from contextual experiences, where learners can also be motivated to learn by stress (load); therefore, learners could potentially gain motivation (power) for learning from stress rather than the stress inhibiting learning (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006).

However, Hiemstra and Sisco (1990) showed the relevancy of McClusky's model to teaching and learning by discussing the impact of teacher expectations in an adult learning environment. By not acknowledging the adult learners' prior life experiences and facilitating an environment of mutual trust and respect, teachers can create a surplus of load and hinder the learning process (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990). Brockett (2015) also encourages that, while a learner's motivation may flux over time based on a learner's level of confidence relative to context, this is where a facilitator can utilize strategies to enhance learner confidence and belief in the value of learning.

Wlodkowski (2008) asserts that motivation is a key defining characteristic that can influence the potential and level of academic success. When a learner has low motivation, the potential for learning also decreases (Pintrich, 2003; Wlodkowski, 2008; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017). For instance, if two individuals with the same level of aptitude and ability are presented with the same learning opportunity under identical conditions, the level of motivation in each person will define who is most successful (Sogunro, 2015; Wlodkowski, 1999).

Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (2017) also introduce the connection between neuroscience and motivation. Through an exploration of how neurons connect during the learning process, scholars illustrate how motivation, learning, and prior life experiences are connected through neuropathways developed over time (Barrett, 2017; Montague, King-Casas, & Cohen, 2006; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017). This mind-body connection becomes especially relevant when considering the importance of prior life experiences and motivation in adult learning (Brookfield, 2005; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017).

Additionally, integrating experience-based learning and motivation for learning, Na, Park, and Han (2016) studied the influence of a community-based dance program for North

Korean women refugees' psychological and educational development. The participants shared an interest in dance and community learning based on prior educational experiences. The group also shared a hope that participation in a dance-based learning environment would facilitate the healing process due to traumatic experiences during their journey as refugees. Since the dance program integrated the participants' prior educational experiences, cultural backgrounds, and shared motivation for healing, the students reported extensive emotional, psychological, and intellectual growth (Na, Park, & Han, 2016).

Through this exploration of experience-based learning, situated cognition, and motivation for learning theories, it becomes possible to realize new conceptualizations for facilitation of learning for adult refugee learners. By pulling ideas from each theory together, adult learning facilitators can work to create learning environments that consider the complexity of students' life experiences. The experience-based learning theory crystalizes the value prior learner experiences hold for enhancing learning methodologies. A key theme in this praxis to facilitate learning that encourages learning from life history, but not remaining trapped by past experiences, ways of understanding, or habitual responses (Brockett, 2015).

Motivation for learning aids in the understanding of why adults learn and what learning style best facilitates learning for each person (Courtney, 2018; Jenkins & Alfred, 2018; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017). Then, by seeking to deepen understanding of adult learning, it becomes easier to understand the importance of maintaining a balance between learner responsibilities, expectations, and barriers for learning. As Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (2017) advocate, developing a culturally-responsible educational practice can facilitate a healthy learning environment and encourage motivation in learners. The convergence of these Adult

Learning ideas establishes a web of knowledge that can aid adult educators in facilitating a positive learning environment for adult refugee learners.

The field of adult education has a long history of valuing prior life experiences in the learning process. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle situates life experiences as the engine that fuels the learning experience. The experiential learning cycle encourages consideration of experiences and then strives to inspire learners to experiment with new ideas and ways of interacting in the world (Kolb, 1984; Sisselman-Borgia & Torino, 2017). Adding Jarvis' (2006) inclusion of emotion, reflection, and identity in the experiential learning cycle model could further intensify learning and add a deeper dimension to the learning process.

Considering motivational theories in adult learning, Ahl's (2006) analysis of the history of motivation theory offers a strong foundation of understanding from which adult educators can scaffold deeper knowledge and praxis. For refugee adult learners, Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs and scholarship regarding barriers for adult learning become essential elements of instructional strategy as they encourage facilitators to consider the complexity of the adult refugee learner population – and requisite value of the learners' experiences to enhance the learning process and the motivation for learning (McBrien, 2005; Osam, Bergman, and Cumberland, 2016; Ryu & Tuvilla, 2018).

The field of adult education provides ample resources for adult educators to facilitate learning for all adult learner populations. However, it is vital that practitioners examine the field's history, development, and theoretical foundations and question what more can be learned and how theoretical applications could vary depending on the diversity of the learner population. Experience-based learning, situated cognition, and motivation for learning theories offer a starting point where facilitators can consider the depth of the impact that prior life experiences

have in a learning environment, as well as how to facilitate learning with recognition and reflection on the learners' past experiences and associated needs.

Theoretical Literature

This section of literature review will discuss what adult learning theories are in general. Then, I will identify and discuss four adult learning theories most relevant to adult refugee learners, including: intersectionality theory, critical theory, social cognitive theory, and transformative learning theory. In general terms, adult learning theories can be understood as explanations of what occurs when adults learn (Degges-White, 2017; Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

As adult educators question what we think we know, how we justify what we know, and how knowledge informs practice, theories become mechanisms to better philosophize about adult learning beliefs (Brookfield, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Brookfield (2010) further delves into how theories evolve and what justifies a theoretical framework. According to Brookfield (2010), a framework is theoretical when it is generalizable beyond a single case, is replicable, and is inclusive of an entire category of events – motivation for learning, for example.

Adult educators constantly make decisions about facilitating learning, influencing learning environments, and building connections with learners to enhance understandings (Brockett, 2015; Brookfield, 2015). These decisions, however, are not made in isolation nor are they isolated occurrences. Decisions about how adult educators practice are informed by comparative analysis, building from prior experiences, and rooted in adult learning history (Brookfield, 2010, 2015; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). In this way, adult learning theories permeate the field and become essential parts of adult learners' experiences.

Protests within the field emerge when adult educators argue that they are practitioners, not theorists (Brookfield, 2010). However, Brookfield (2010) advocates that adult learning theories provide a window into better understanding both adult learners and ourselves as educators. Working from a theoretical foundation, perhaps adult educators can more clearly see the world and how adult educators are situated within cultural and social structures (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Brookfield (2010) encourages adult educators to utilize theoretical frameworks to critically reflect on foundations of knowledge and methods of practice. Through this process of critical reflection, the learning experience can benefit from an environment of mutual trust and respect (Brockett, 2015; Palmer, 2007).

Intersectionality theory. Within an adult learning classroom, varied life experiences, personal histories, cultural beliefs, and ways of seeing the world converge. Intersectionality theory provides a way to better understand and analyze the complexity of the environment (Collins & Bilge, 2016). The roots of intersectionality include the relationship between ideas and practice - centered on solving social problems (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Mitchell, Simmons, & Greverbiehl, 2014). Historically, African American women were the first to use intersectionality to deal with systemic oppression with social and political activism.

Intersectionality today is most often used as an analytical tool to solve social problems where multiple factors intersect to influence issues such as discrimination based on race, ethnicity, age, gender, or sexual preference (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Misawa, 2010, 2015). Intersectional analysis magnifies the multiple identities of individuals and considers how varied aspects of identity impact experience and positionality. Additionally, Collins and Bilge (2016) emphasize the importance of considering all potential influential factors in order to gain a holistic understanding of how to approach social problems.

Collins and Bilge (2016) discuss six core themes that emerge from intersectional analysis: inequality, relationality, power, social context, complexity, and social justice. These themes are exposed in various forms and in different contexts during research but can provide common threads to promote mutual understanding and shared resources to encourage bridging research into praxis. Further, Vervliet, De Mol, Broekaert, and Derluyn (2014) explain how intersectionality provides a pathway for research to be pushed beyond constructed barriers to delve into the reality of a group's experience.

According to Collins and Bilge (2016), the year 2000 presented a shift in intersectionality's global usage. While U.S. intersectional research continued, momentum grew among scholars and policymakers in promoting a globalization of intersectional analysis, inquiry, and praxis (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Primarily within international human rights governance systems and within international diplomacy centers, intersectionality began to serve a new global purpose to broaden understandings of inequalities, layered dimensions of social and political issues, and facilitate problem-solving by understanding the multiple identities and sides to every issue (Alves & Faerstein, 2016; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Misawa, 2010, 2015; Rigoni, 2012).

However, some critics of intersectionality consider it a divisive tool rather than inclusive method of social analysis (Alves & Faerstein, 2016; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Critics propose that intersectionality focuses on the characteristics or ideals that set a group of people apart from others, serving to separate them from the mainstream (Alves & Faerstein, 2016; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Rigoni, 2012). Proponents of intersectionality contest this criticism and emphasize that it assists in building collective social movements to push back against divisiveness in society. They propose that by recognizing the diversity among groups of people they can honor uniqueness

while also finding common ground that encourages unity rather than separatism (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Mitchell, Simmons, & Greverbiehl, 2014).

Critical theory. Critical theorists are concerned with facilitating and actively taking action to enact social change in unjust or unequal systems (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018). Gadamer (1975) and Ricoeur (2005) discuss how humans are always *doing* in relationship to others. Every story involves more than one person and each person's telling of a story may vary based on prior experiences, assumptions, and ways of seeing the world. New meanings of a story are revealed upon each telling and reading (Gadamer, 1976). So, critical theorists consider the various individuals and systems involved in or affected by a problem in efforts to seek understanding building toward enacting effective change.

Critical theory is rooted in the work of the Frankfurt School of Critical Social Theory. The Frankfurt School originated in the Weimar Republic in German territory and included intellectuals, academics, and political outsiders who did not fit into the social constructs of the 1930s (Friedman, 1981; Held, 1980). Within the Frankfurt School, Horkheimer's (1975) scholarship laid the foundation for critical theory, which began as a means to consider individual subjectivity and human experience in the world in research contexts. This way of thinking about research contradicted traditional theory of the time, as traditional theory was based in scientific activity without a noticeable connection to or interaction with daily life or societal factors (Horkheimer, 2012). In other words, critical theory delved into the lives of individuals in relationship to power structures, ideologies, and the politics and power relationships omnipresent in everyday life (Foucault, 1984; Friedman, 1981; Giroux, 2007; Held, 1980; McLaren, 2005).

The second wave of critical theory was marked with Habermas' emergence from the Frankfurt School in the 1970s. Through Habermas' work, critical theory became a globalized

movement and eventually influenced European and American academia (Habermas, 1971). One of Habermas' impacts on the development of critical theory was a focus on facilitating critical self-awareness among socialist student organizations (Brookfield, 2001; Habermas, 1971). Perhaps one of his most significant contributions to the evolution of critical theory was to incorporate ideals from pragmatism, anthropology, and semiotics with Marxism and critical social theory – thus, bridging a divide among scholarly communities and establishing a place for critical theory in the global academic stage (Brookfield, 2001; McLaren, 2005).

As activists and scholars explore and critique the intersections and impact of positionality, individualism, and power, critical theory provides an overarching theoretical framework to unpack the layers of social and economic constructs that influence society and culture (Brookfield, 2005; Taylor, Tisdell, & Hanley, 2000; Tisdell & Thompson, 2007). Critical theory encompasses a broad prospective of marginalization and oppression in society that delves into the question of the origins, contexts, and understandings of power and political discourse (Brookfield, 2001, 2005, 2010). Critical research assumes that power relations are omnipresent, and must be examined to break down oppressive systems (Brookfield, 2010; Marcuse, 1965; Tisdell & Thompson, 2007).

Building from Horkheimer's scholarship, Brookfield (2001) discusses the roots of critical theory in the dualism between social class and economy. At its' core, critical theory addresses the inequities of a capitalist social order where those in power strive to remain in power and those at the margins consistently struggle at the margins of society (Taylor, Tisdell, & Hanley, 2000; Tisdell & Thompson, 2007). Tensions in society are generated by the capitalist order where some of the people desire liberation while others are striving to prevent their awakening to

this desire (Brookfield, 2001, 2005, 2010). Brookfield (2001) explains that critical theory is concerned with providing people with knowledge that can empower them toward emancipation.

Further, ideology is a central focus of critical theory, defined as the ideals and beliefs that mass society perceives as rules governing the social norm (Brookfield, 2001). Brookfield (2001) emphasizes that in adult learning, critical theory must be rooted in an understanding of how adults learn, more specifically how adults learn to recognize the influence of ideology in daily life. Critical theory in adult learning must also address how adults learn to challenge ideologies that benefit the few at the expense of the well-being of others (Tisdell & Thompson, 2007).

Tisdell (2001) also advocates for critical theory as a means to promote an inclusive society through a focus on the interlocking systems of gender, race, and class oppression. Through a focus on positionality, identity, and spirituality, Tisdell (2001) stresses the value of reflexivity in adult education as facilitators strive to create an inclusive learning environment that promotes an unpacking of the “self.” By claiming and embracing authentic self, learners can begin to see the systems of power as woven into perceptions of positionality and power relations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Tisdell, 2001).

Social cognitive theory. As I turn to consider social cognitive theory, the theory is grounded in the importance of social interactions and recognizing the impact of social engagement on behavior (Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014). Through observing others’ behaviors and actions, people learn social norms of behavior, interaction, emotional reaction, and value systems. Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory is rooted in these assumptions of learned behavior and asserts that individuals behave in ways consistent with personal belief and value systems. Bandura expanded on the work of Miller and Dollard (1941) that primarily focused on

animal learning and behavior to explore how social models influenced human behavior (Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014).

Before Bandura developed and broadened the scope of social cognitive theory, early Greek philosophers and scholars theorized about the influence of social environment on human behavior (Rosenthal & Zimmerman, 1978). In the early 1900s, James (1890) and Tarde (1903) focused on the human tendency toward imitation as a pathway to social inclusion and societal progression. Thorndike (1912) also emphasized the importance of imitation as an instinctual phenomenon that was integral to teaching and learning environments.

In a study of simulation learning environments for adult learners in nursing programs, Rutherford-Hemming (2012) offers examples of the benefits of leaning through experience in social settings. Not only did the students gain knowledge about how to practice nursing in real-world environments, the students constructed a learning community while engaging one another and learning from others' behaviors (Rutherford-Hemming, 2012). Similarly, McMullen (2016) conducted a study grounded in social cognitive theory to explore how a culinary nutrition program could enhance learner self-efficacy at a higher education institution. The participants studied in groups and took part in shared learning activities throughout this program. McMullen (2006) found that learners' self-efficacy for good nutrition management increased after they acquired new culinary skills and healthy nutrition knowledge.

Piaget (1962) and Skinner (1953) continued this research thread and posited that imitation as a form of learning behavior matures along with a person's development, where learned behaviors are integrated into a person's mindset after reinforcement intercedes (Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014). So, one may learn to behave a certain way in social situations through imitation, but then the behavior will become a part of the person's identity if their behavior is

positively reinforced. Bandura (1986) argued that reinforcement does not influence a person's ability to learn a behavior, but rather supports the performance of the behavior itself.

Social cognitive theory considers how human learning and behavior occur as reactions to motivational processes (Schunk, 1996). Key variables of social cognitive theory include *self-efficacy* and *self-regulation* (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in their ability to perform or complete a task with a certain level of success. Self-regulation refers to a person's ability to control their personal behaviors and progress toward achieving a goal or completing a task (Courtney, 2018; Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014; Zientek, Fong, & Phelps, 2019).

Self-efficacy impacts the attempt, persistence, and effort applied to a task (Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014). Bandura (1986) explains the relationship between level of self-efficacy and expected outcome by providing example behaviors that may result from attempting a task. For instance, according to Bandura (1986), a person with high self-efficacy who anticipates low outcome results from a task will react with protest, social activism, and perhaps petition for change. On the other hand, a person with low self-efficacy with the same low expectations for the outcome of a task may react with apathy and withdraw from social situations (Zientek, Fong, & Phelps, 2019). Further, a person with high self-efficacy who expects high outcomes from a task will be more engaged in the task and confident in their actions. Whereas, those with low self-efficacy who also anticipate high results will react with depression and self-devaluation (Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014; Zientek, Fong, & Phelps, 2019).

In social cognitive theory, a person with high self-efficacy will make strides towards achieving a goal and when they observe progress, their self-efficacy will be bolstered as they continue to work toward the goal. Additionally, social cognitive theory asserts that the greatest

challenges result in the highest level of motivational benefits (Ratsameemonthon, Ho, Tuicomepee, & Blauw, 2018; Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014). In adult learning environments, Davis (2009) encourages facilitators to maintain consistent feedback, actively involve learners in discussion and content, and help learners to feel valued in the learning community by taking a personal interest in their success and participation in order to encourage self-motivated learning. Further, the level of learner commitment to a goal is integral to the level of outcome success. When learners are enthusiastic about a goal, persistence comes more fluidly than when learners are not interested in a goal – enjoyment supports higher levels of motivation (Ratsameemonthon, Ho, Tuicomepee, & Blauw, 2018; Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014).

The trait of persistence becomes especially relevant when considering the willingness and ability to strive past social, personal, or culture-based barriers to remain enrolled in education and persist to graduation (Ishitani, 2016; Ishitani & Reid, 2015). As Ishitani (2016) discusses, the level of social integration, quality of campus environment, and racial and ethnic profiles of students can impact retention and persistence to graduation.

Transformative learning. Transformative learning involves making meaning of experience. When prior assumptions are challenged during a meaning-making process, this can spur an emotional journey. A learner begins to question previous ways of understanding and acquires new knowledge that may change fundamental belief system. Some experiences may be powerful to such a degree that they inspire the learner to take action for social change (Cranton, 2012; Mezirow, 1978, 1990, 1991, 2000, 2009, 2012; Robinson & Levac, 2018). Transformative experiences are credited with instilling the tools necessary for individuals to successfully navigate modern societal challenges (Hassi & Laursen, 2015; Robinson & Levac, 2018).

The transformative learning theory opened pathways to facilitate meaningful educational experiences for countless individuals (Chen, 2014; Robinson & Levac, 2018; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Mezirow introduced this theory in 1978 and scholars continue to support and challenge it today. Scholars propose that transformations become a reality when learners are encouraged to challenge long-standing beliefs, explore new ways of thinking, and engage in critical self-assessment through reflection (Chen, 2014; Robinson & Levac, 2018; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). For instance, self-reflection during an experience of otherness in a cultural environment could open the pathway to a new level of understanding (Robinson & Levac, 2018).

Some criticize the transformative learning theory for exclusion of cultural and social perspectives in learning; however, Mezirow continued to develop his theory of transformative learning in order to progress and expand the theory with consideration of varied aspects and perspectives of an individual's experience (Cranton & Roy, 2003; Lange, 2018; Mezirow, 2000, 2009, 2012). Through the examination of existing literature, it is possible to see how Mezirow's theory serves as a building block for a holistic perspective on the impact of transformative learning and instruction (Cranton & Roy, 2003; Lange, 2018; Mezirow, 2000, 2009; Robinson & Levac, 2018).

As Paulo Freire posited, one could transform social oppression by first seeking personal transformation (Freire, 1970, 1998; McCloskey, 2016). Through a transformative experience, one may be inspired to actively engage in improving social or political issues. Transformative learning is concerned with individual change as well as how individuals can impact and transform their world – much like critical theory (Baumgartner, 2001; McCloskey, 2016; Robinson & Levac, 2018).

This learning can begin at the individual level where one can recognize, reassess, and rethink understandings in order to modify ways of thought, and then build into a process where individuals can also rethink their place in and impact on the world (Hyland-Russell & Syrnyk, 2015; Robinson & Levac, 2018). For instance, Robinson and Levac (2018) examined best practices in designing a course to engage adult learners in a thoughtful examination of the influence of privilege and oppression in their lives and society while encouraging global citizenship. Global citizenship can be defined as acting in such a way to facilitate equity and social justice for fellow citizens through a process of recognizing how power and privilege impact socioeconomic status (Lehtomäki, Moate & Posti-Ahokas, 2016; Robinson & Levac, 2018). Lehtomäki, Moate and Posti-Ahokas (2016) stress the value of critical engagement of citizens to promote a sustainable democratic culture.

Additionally, Lange (2018) highlights the richness of interdisciplinary scholarship in an examination of transformative learning through ontologies of relationality. Through a convergence of quantum physics, ecology, and indigenous philosophy, Lange (2018) considers the scope of transformative learning in relation to social, cultural, and political systems. By considering the value and interconnectedness of interpersonal relations contextual environs, transformative learning might facilitate a greater scope of impact beyond the individual (Lange, 2018).

Theory-Based Best Practices

Taking into account the value of adult learning theories, several best practices in adult education emerge in connection to adult refugee learners. Using the four theories I discussed, I will address recommended best practices including: inclusive learning environments, English language acquisition, cultural context and transitions in academia, critical reflection, and positive

reinforcement. I will also explain how the theory-based best practices relate to adult refugee learners.

Intersectionality urges educators to consider the whole person during facilitation (Bye, Pushkar, & Conway, 2007; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Misawa, 2010, 2015). This inclusive learning environment can assist in the adjustment process for new refugee students (Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2012; Larrotta, 2010). One of the key issues when discussing education for adult refugee learners in the U.S. is English language acquisition. As Padilla (2006) stresses, when leaving the refugee's home country, prior higher educational experiences, career accomplishments, and social status is often left behind. Acquiring English proficiency in the U.S. is a central goal for refugees in order to re-establish a career, economic stability, and social inclusion (Padilla, 2006). According to the U.S. Department of State (2018), the majority of all refugees entering the country over the last ten years speak languages other than English. This data exemplifies the need for ESL education for adult refugee learners.

Ullman's (2010) literature review regarding the intersection of ESL programming and cultural adjustments explains that a goal for adult refugee learners during language acquisition is to find a balance between cultural heritage and the new cultural environment. Ullman (2010) stresses that a vital component of successful ESL instruction includes a facilitator who is open to blending students' cultural backgrounds and personal experiences with the language acquisition process. Through this open-minded approach to ESL instruction, refugee students could be empowered to find a way to enact a personal presence in their new society and cultural environment (Ullman, 2010). This praxis could translate to any learning environment where facilitators strive to build an inclusive learning space, fostering mutual trust and respect.

In order to facilitate learning for adult refugees, aspects of critical theory can also become integral to instructional strategies. Critical theory in praxis would include three key areas: a) critical theory as philosophy, where learners critique social conditions, question power structures, and challenge dominant ideologies; b) critical thinking, including reflection on assumptions and beliefs while examining personal ways of seeing and being in the world; and c) critical action, promoting informed action, monitoring and questioning the process of change, while consistently justifying actions (Brookfield, 2005). Subsequently, a critical learning environment would facilitate activities to first understand power relations, then to foster critical reflection, followed by experiential, or lived experience, learning (Tisdell & Thompson, 2007).

In relation to adult refugee learners, critical theory in the classroom can facilitate a nuanced understanding of U.S. cultural, political, and societal systems. For example, an activity based on best practices of adult learning is to ask learners to create a mind map of power relations in their lives and then share it with a small group (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Through this activity, learners can explore how they are influenced by power relationships – whether sources of power are familial, educational, political, social, or global in scale. This activity can also build cohesion among learners that can facilitate a safe learning environment for critical reflection and action moving forward.

If learners are supported and encouraged by adult learning practitioners in a safe and trusting environment, the students will be more likely to persist (Ishitani, 2016; Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014). Social cognitive theory lends several applicable examples of learning activities to foster persistence in adult refugee learners. For instance, Bandura's (1986) theoretical framework assumes *triadic reciprocity*, the reciprocal relationships with personal, behavioral, and environmental factors. In this model, a person's behavior is influenced by

interactions with the environment: what is observed, what is desired, and what is expected. For instance, teacher feedback can significantly influence a learner's motivation and future behavior. If a teacher provides positive feedback or encouragement, then the learner is more likely gain self-efficacy and continue with positive performance (Carlock, 2016; Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016).

In a classroom where multicultural students are treated fairly, encouraged, and feel valued, students are more likely to succeed academically and personally (Carlock, 2016; Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016). Whereas, in a classroom where multicultural students are marginalized and unsupported, students show decline in academic and personal motivation (Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016). Diaz, Cochran, and Karlin's (2016) research showed that when students had instructors who were culturally-aware, strict but fair, and who used instructor power to motivate student learning, students valued the learning experience and displayed a growing level of positive self-perception and academic success.

Pulling from critical theory and social cognitive theory, Carlock (2016) posits that ESL instructors are challenged to create a learner-centered classroom focused on student engagement and real-life problems in order to prepare students with the social capital and sense of self-efficacy to be active members of society. By moving beyond the skills-based instruction common among ESL practitioners, adult refugee learners may be empowered to engage and make their voice heard in society (Carlock, 2016; Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016). Scholars demonstrate how community-based ESL programming can build a learning community that fosters an increase in student self-efficacy, ability to take civic action, and opportunities for professional employment (Carlock, 2016; Stewart, 2010).

Transformative learning instructional strategies. Adult educators can utilize many strategies to encourage transformative learning. Educators can enhance a learner's problem-solving skills and increase a learner's sense of self-efficacy through deep engagement with content, collaborative activities, and individual goal-oriented assignments within a learning environment. These changes in a learner's self-perception provide a pathway to transformation (Chen, 2014; Hassi & Laursen, 2015).

For instance, educators can encourage students to reflect on course content and take their thinking as far as they desire to go by relating the material to their personal experience. By giving students this opportunity, students are able to discover the ability to take responsibility for their learning and realize their impact on the world around them. Through this practice of reflection and self-assessment, lives can be transformed as students are empowered to take responsibility for personal ways of thinking and acting. Learners begin to open their minds to other ways perceiving the world and their role in society (Chen, 2014; Hassi & Laursen, 2015).

This practice can help students relate course material to their personal lives, thus bringing new depth and meaning to their academic experience (Chen, 2014). Activities based on life experience can enhance students' internal control, facilitate a higher sense of self-efficacy, and foster an ability to determine the path of their own learning (Hassi & Laursen, 2015). In relation to refugees, it appears that the experience of self-reflection in a learning environment such as this could empower refugees to realize their internal power and could further motivate them to use their strengths as they strive for social equity.

Adult educators also understand that a person's life experience, beliefs, and culture impacts an educational experience. During a learning experience, when a personal frame of reference might be shaken by a presentation of new ideas, experiences, or concepts, many

different emotions can rise to the surface and motivate the learner to critically assess preconceived assumptions and understandings (Chen, 2014; Coryell, 2013). Mezirow (1978) calls this period a *disorienting event*. When an individual is pushed to think past the normal mindset, strong emotions are often exposed. These emotions can serve as a driving force for self-reflection, where individuals can reach new understandings and integrate new knowledge and beliefs into their daily lives (Chen, 2014; Coryell, 2013; Fleming, 2018).

For refugee students, this disorienting event can trigger especially painful and traumatic memories and feelings. In such a time, it becomes even more essential that educators are prepared to support students and maintain an environment of mutual trust, respect, and understanding (Halic, Greenberg, & Paulus, 2009; Robinson & Levac, 2018). Outside of Western culture, many people function in terms of community, rather than self. The greater good of the community is valued over personal desires, and individuals are encouraged to defer to the opinions and practices of those in higher positions or in positions of power (Lange, 2018; Merriam & Ntseane, 2008).

A large majority of refugees come from such cultures, which can add difficulty to the transition into the American classroom and culture where individuality is valued and personal expression is encouraged (Chen, 2014; U.S. Department of State, 2018). By accounting for the cultural context of learning, a student has the opportunity to fully engage with the experience and examine the spiritual, intellectual, communal, and personal meaning-making processes (Merriam & Ntseane, 2008). One of the goals is for learners to make meaning of their experiences at a personal level which can then empower them to take action for a cultural or societal change (Chen, 2014).

Facilitation with culture in mind. As an adult educator working with refugees, multiculturalism and inclusivity become essential teaching strategies. Coryell (2013) posits that adult educators must broaden and enhance their knowledgebase and instructional methodologies so they transcend Western cultural influences. In order to take into consideration the multicultural and diverse population of adult learners, educators must embark on a transformative journey to first understand their own culture and how this impacts their practice and then consider how other cultures function in social and educational environments (Coryell, 2013; Cranton, 2012; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Coryell (2013) encourages educators to contemplate how culture may influence learning and consider what connections could be made among student experiences that could facilitate expanded mutual understanding.

Intersectionality encourages educators to stress the importance of understanding the complexity of students' sense of identity in order effectively facilitate and support learning (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Without engaging with students in such a way to gain a deeper insight into how they experience their world, educators may find a noticeable gap between instruction and a meaningful learning experience for their students (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Coryell, 2013). This gap can become especially prevalent with refugee students, given the complexity of their experience. It is keenly important to develop a mutual understanding and an environment of trust within this setting. Scholars stress that the learning environment is directly connected to the depth of learning that occurs (Chen, 2014; Palmer, 2007). Research suggests that working as allies with underprivileged or disadvantaged students is key in order to help them address and resolve social, institutional, and cultural barriers that can interfere with their learning and growth (Goulah, 2010; Hyland-Russell & Syrnyk, 2015).

Scholars in the adult education field are calling for innovative and critical new approaches to address inequalities in cross-cultural learning (Coryell, 2013; Goulah, 2010; Hyland-Russell & Syrnyk, 2015). Whether the inequalities exist due to a lack of knowledge, racism, or ethno-centricity, scholars are seeking ways to mitigate these issues in order to foster an inclusive learning environment where transformation and deep learning occurs (Coryell, 2013). Collaborative inquiry is one approach scholars support as a method to facilitate this transformation. Collaborative inquiry involves learners exploring their personal questions within a group environment by means of collective action research (Coryell, 2013; Goulah, 2010; Hyland-Russell & Syrnyk, 2015).

Literature indicates that collaborative inquiry can be an effective method of learning to foster mutual and cross-cultural understandings of inequality, cultural or ethnic prejudice, and to promote behavioral growth and social action (Coryell, 2013; Goulah, 2010; Hyland-Russell & Syrnyk, 2015). Critical reflection facilitates the process of realizing, embracing, analyzing, and questioning existing biases or negative positions regarding cultural equality (Coryell, 2013). Through this exploration of theory-based best practices in adult education for refugee learners, new ways to facilitate positive learning environments to support success and persistence are realized. Using the practices and activities discussed, adult education practitioners have the opportunity to impact adult refugees' lives in deeply meaningful and lasting ways (Coryell, 2013; Cranton, 2012; Goulah, 2010; Hyland-Russell & Syrnyk, 2015). As adult refugees seek active participation and inclusion in their new community, a higher education experience that is relative to their experience can offer life-changing impact.

U.S. Refugee Resettlement: Policy and Process

In order to better understand the participants' experiences in this research, it is vital to understand the history and development of the refugee resettlement program in the U.S. During the uprising of the Nazi party in Germany, private citizens around the world took on the responsibility to relocate endangered Europeans to the U.S. (Migration Policy Institute, 2017). Throughout history, times of international conflict have increased the need for refugee support services. For example, after the Vietnam War, the U.S. faced a challenge to relocate thousands of Vietnamese citizens displaced and endangered within their home country. These mass relocation efforts influenced the U.S. government to construct the Refugee Act of 1980 (UNHCR, 2017).

The Refugee Act of 1980 established policy and procedures for the admittance of refugees to the U.S., created a systematic branch of the government to organize and manage refugee processing and resettlement, and granted rights for federal services to support refugee resettlement (U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012). As of October 2018, the U.S. Department of State reports that over 3.4 million refugees have been resettled in the U.S. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) includes a comprehensive organizational model, designed to maintain order and democracy in the resettlement process.

The top tier of the model includes the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) from the Department of State (DOS), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Moving down the organizational model, there are five international or nongovernmental organizations operating Resettlement Support Centers (RSC) worldwide under the supervision and funding of the (PRM). Then, there are nine domestic nongovernmental organizations with a total of about 350 affiliated offices across the U.S. who aid in the

resettlement process. At the bottom of the model are thousands of private citizens who volunteer time and skills to help refugees resettle and acclimate to U.S. life and cultural systems (U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012).

As with perhaps many complex and government-run organizational models, the demands of reality can interfere with even the best laid plans. With such large numbers of refugees seeking asylum, the system continuously struggles to keep up with the resettlement demand (U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012). Additionally, the refugee population is increasingly more diverse with varied needs based on abilities, gender identities, and familial situations (Mirza & Heinemann, 2012). When refugees are resettled in the U.S., it becomes vital to consider the intersectionality of individual needs in order to facilitate access to vital public services (Mirza & Heinemann, 2012). When refugees' needs for disability services, language acquisition, or religious freedoms are not considered, refugees could continue to struggle to locate vital resources to support their success in a new culture.

Application and case processing. In order to better understand the refugee experience, it is helpful to explore the process refugees experience when seeking admission to the U.S. The U.S. Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) supports and manages nine Resettlement Support Centers (RSC) worldwide. After negotiating through numerous government-sponsored refugee referral agencies, the refugee receives an eligibility decision and, if approved, begins the screening process (UN Refugee Agency, 2018). The screening process for applicants can be an intense and lengthy process, typically taking from one to six years – but can take over ten years to complete (UN Refugee Agency, 2018). After arrival to the U.S., refugees are further interviewed prior to release to an assigned refugee assistance agency.

The refugee assistance agency provides temporary housing, food, and transportation. The agency also provides guidelines for locating employment and obtaining required identification documents – such as a social security card. Depending on the level of service, some refugee agencies provide English as a second language (ESL) instruction and further guidance to locate public assistance for permanent employment, housing, and transportation (UN Refugee Agency, 2018). Although the resettlement process is complex and multidimensional, this foundation of understanding will facilitate an examination of relative adult learning theories. The screening process for applicants can be an intense and lengthy process, as exemplified in Figure 2.1.

The UNHCR was established in 1950, after the Second World War, with a mission to help millions of Europeans who were displaced. Still today, the UNCHR works worldwide to protect, advocate for, and assist refugees. Their purpose is not only to safeguard the well-being and rights of those forced to flee their home countries, but also to strive toward lasting solutions for displacement (UNHCR, 2018). Today, there are over 20 million refugees worldwide and these numbers are only increasing due to war, crime, poverty, and other violations of human welfare. The UNHCR is a vital part of the refugee resettlement program in the U.S., as they strive to protect the rights of refugees and secure fair and equitable treatment of refugees during the resettlement process.

Refugees' Access and Opportunity for Higher Education

Dryden-Peterson and Giles (2010) address the paradox presented when considering access to education as a basic human right, according to the United Nations (1948), while realizing that a majority of the refugee population worldwide does not have access or opportunity for education. The study presents this issue as a broken pipeline for education – where the refugee context and positionality does not facilitate access to continuous educational access.

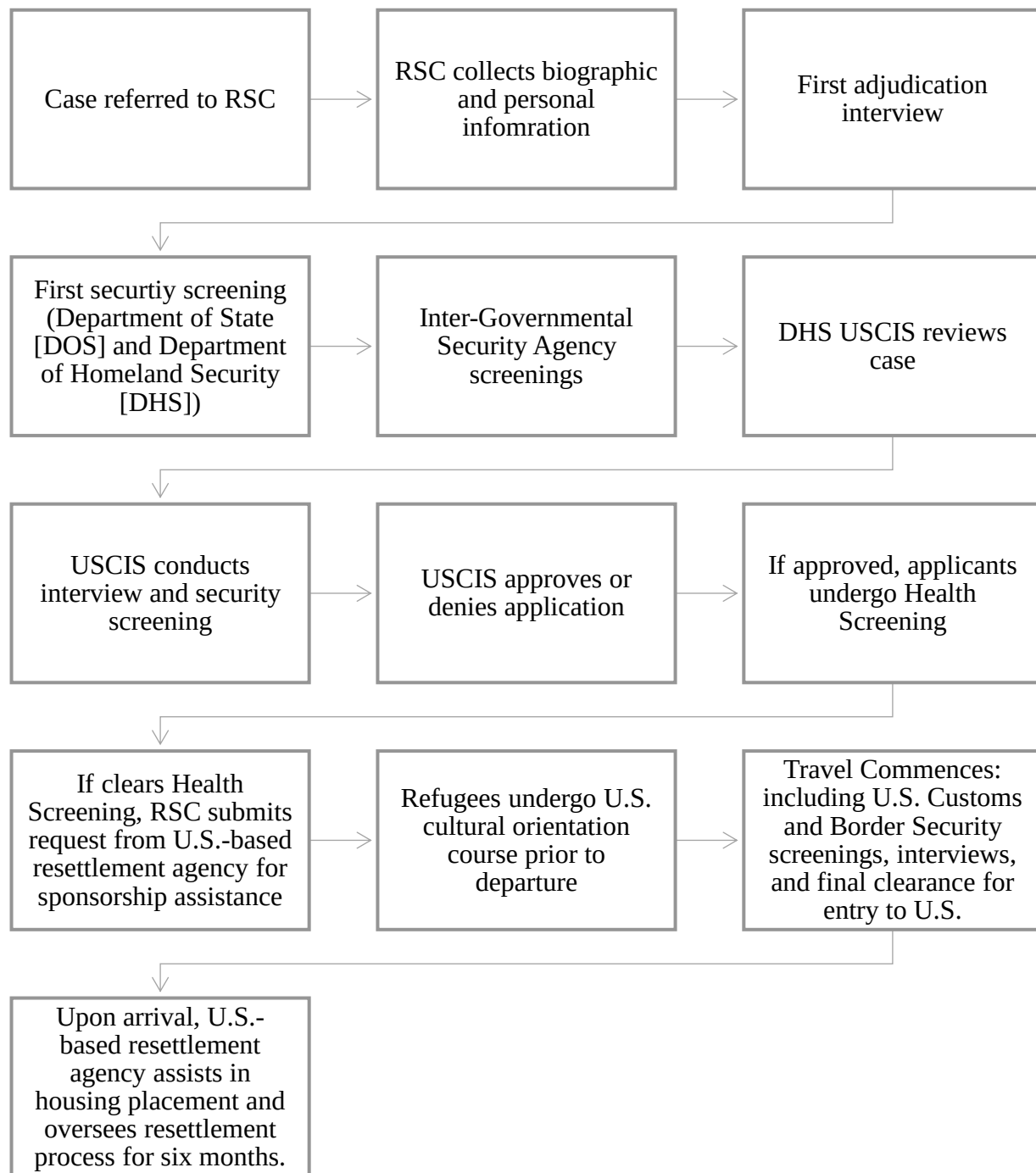


Figure 2.1. Flow chart to exemplify the screening process for applicants to the refugee program in the U.S. (Migration Policy Institute, 2017; UNHCR, 2018).

According to the UNHCR, only 1% of refugees have access to higher education, while access to education is considered a basic human right (McBrien, 2005; Phan, 2018; UNHCR, 2018).

However, while the United Nations (2019) recognizes access to education as a fundamental human right in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the reality of access and opportunity to education varies based on national government processes and policies.

While Dryden-Peterson and Giles (2010) presents the metaphor of a broken pipeline of education among refugee populations, further scholarship illuminates additional issues in access to education within the U.S. In the United States, educational law does not explicitly outline a basic human right to education (Marope & Kaga, 2015; Urchick, 2007). There is a contentious history of legal challenges to the level of educational equity in the U.S., where the level of access and equality has been regularly challenged (Marope & Kaga, 2015; Urchick, 2007). The U.S. Department of Education (2019) acknowledges that federal civil rights laws enacted over the past four decades have facilitated more open-access and equal opportunity to education for minority groups, women, individuals with disabilities, and the elderly population. However, the U.S. government charges each state government with managing educational access and opportunity policies (Marope & Kaga, 2015; Urchick, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Therefore, the reality of access to educational opportunities will vary depending on the location, state laws, and the positionality of the prospective learner.

Phan (2018) advocates to include community colleges as a pathway to higher education for refugees as part of the resettlement process due to the assumption of easier access for community colleges versus universities. Importantly in relation to this study, Dryden-Peterson and Giles (2010) discuss the barriers created by required documentation during the common college admissions process. For instance, it can be difficult for a refugee who resettled in the

U.S. after fleeing from a humanitarian crisis, perhaps after living in a refugee camp for over ten years, to produce documentation such as an original high school transcript or birth certificate.

Dryden-Peterson and Giles (2010) persist that higher education holds significant potential to facilitate empowerment for displaced populations. Higher education presents opportunities for personal, sociological, and psychological development, which could further facilitate a resettlement process for a marginalized population of students. Further, experience in higher education can assist in critical thinking, socioeconomic advancement, and a broader understanding a new social and cultural environment (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010; McBrien, 2005; Phan, 2018).

Additionally, Stebleton, Soria, Huesman, and Torres (2014) seek to understand the relationship between campus climate and sense of belonging for immigrants who attend large public research institutions in the United States. Although a limitation of the study is that it focuses on the entire immigrant population and does not distinguish between refugee and non-refugee immigrants, the research provides important information relative to my research initiatives. However, by not distinguishing between refugee immigrants and non-refugee immigrants, Stebleton, Soria, Huesman, and Torres (2014) dismiss the unique and diverse experiences that refugees encounter which can impact the refugee experience in higher education.

Stebleton, Soria, Huesman, and Torres (2014) administered the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey to 145,150 undergraduate students across six participating research university in the U.S. With a response rate of 40% (58,017), Stebleton, Soria, Huesman, and Torres (2014) then conducted factor structure and reliability measures on the SERU core items to measure the students' perception of campus and community climate, satisfaction, and

engagement. The population was selected based on the self-reported country of birth location of student, parents, and grandparents.

The findings suggested that immigrant students' sense of belonging on campus was influenced by faculty and staff interactions, peer interactions, and overall sense of campus climate of welcome. The most determinant factor for immigrant student success and persistence was peer interaction (Stebbleton, Soria, Huesman, & Torres, 2014). The study further suggests that the results show the need for campus faculty and staff to become more familiar with the specific needs of immigrant students in terms of campus support services, language proficiency, and ways to facilitate students' persistence to reach academic and personal goals (Stebbleton, Soria, Huesman, & Torres, 2014).

Importance of English Language Acquisition

One of the key issues when discussing education for adult refugee learners in the U.S. is English language acquisition. As Padilla (2006) stresses, after leaving the refugee's home country, prior higher educational experiences, career accomplishments, and social status is often left behind. Acquiring English proficiency in the U.S. is a central goal for refugees in order to re-establish a career, economic stability, and social inclusion (McBrien, 2010; Padilla, 2006, Perry & Mallozzi, 2017). As previously discussed, according to the U.S. Department of State (2018), the majority of all refugees entering the country over the last ten years speak languages other than English. This data exemplifies the need for ESL education for adult refugee learners.

History of ESL education for refugees. The history of ESL education in the U.S. is aligned with political movements social developments connected with settlement, economics, and uprisings (Cavanaugh, 1996). Going back to the colonization of the Americas, history exposes a multinational and multilingual population. American Indians saw an influx of English,

Spanish, German, French, Scottish, Irish, Hungarian, Polish, and Swedish refugees in North America (Cavanaugh, 1996; Heller & McElhinny, 2017). As the new immigrants began to colonize North America, a governing system evolved with a focus on creating one shared culture and belief system (Cavanaugh, 1996; Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Ullman, 2010).

In 1642, the General Court of Massachusetts led a push toward establishing national literacy (Cavanaugh, 1996; Heller & McElhinny, 2017). At this point, most of the colonists began learning and living in the English language; however, the German settlers in the Northeast of America held onto their right to German language education (Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Ullman, 2010). Then, in 1753, Benjamin Franklin supported a policy for the Americanization of citizens through education (Cavanaugh, 1996; Heller & McElhinny, 2017). Franklin's assertion that English should be the language of America became the driving force of his policies and politics (Cavanaugh, 1996; Heller & McElhinny, 2017).

Following the American Revolution, a renewed push for a common education experience led to the Ordinance of 1787 which mandated common schools (Cavanaugh, 1996; Heller & McElhinny, 2017). This was not a quiet implementation of policy. During the 1800s, as more and more refugees settled in America, parochial schools became a popular alternative to the state mandated education system of common schools. In this way, a number of German and Irish settlers avoided the common school experience and maintained an education system that allowed for heritage language and cultural instruction (Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016; Ullman, 2010). Political influence of key lawmakers and officials won in 1889, when the Compulsory Education Law passed, mandating that English would be the only language of instruction in schools throughout the country (Cavanaugh, 1996; Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Warriner, 2007). Among the early generations of Americans, establishing a

common belief system was central to development of the nation (Cavanaugh, 1996; Heller & McElhinny, 2017).

Even though the early Americans were refugees themselves, by the 1900s, anti-immigration rhetoric became prominent in society (Cavanaugh, 1996; Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016). As refugees continued to enter America, numbering over 8 million, the education system was not prepared to work with such numbers of non-English speaking children (Cavanaugh, 1996; Ullman, 2010). German-Americans pushed again for the inclusion of German language in school systems to alleviate the burden of English language education for all children and new refugees (Cavanaugh, 1996).

However, after World War I began, the push for German language education in American subsided (Cavanaugh, 1996; Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016). Following World War I, in the early 1920s, mainstream educational agenda re-centered on the mandate for all current and new citizens to learn English – this time, with a reasoning focused on national identity (Ullman, 2010). In order for Americans to be united under one belief system and national identity, this Americanization Movement promoted the need for all to be able to read and follow the U.S. Constitution in the English language (Ullman, 2010).

Sociologists led an argument for cultural pluralism; stating the importance of encouraging refugee *integration* and not *assimilation* (Cavanaugh, 1996; Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Leki, 2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016). Integration would involve a development of mutual cultural understandings and fostering a social environment open and welcoming of diverse cultural ideas and ways of being. Assimilation, on the other hand, is focused on tamping down diversity and aligning all citizens to shared beliefs, behaviors, and ways of being (Leki, 2017; Ullman, 2010).

At the same time, adult ESL education was developed as part of the resettlement process for new refugees (Perry & Mallozzi, 2017; Ullman, 2010). The endeavor to include English language education for adult refugees was a piece of a larger process to assist refugees as they settle into a new home (Perry & Mallozzi, 2017; Ullman, 2010). Ethnic community centers also emerged as leaders in bi-cultural and bi-lingual education (Ullman, 2010). Weekend or evening classes in English language and American culture organized through ethnic community centers fell outside the mandated common education system, thus allowing freedom in curriculum development and content (Cavanaugh, 1996; Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016).

As the Great Depression caused chaos throughout the U.S., the passionate debate regarding refugees and refugee education subsided (Cavanaugh, 1996; Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016). Then, World War II began and sparked a renewed fear of immigration and refugees (Cavanaugh, 1996; Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016). As history demonstrates, politics and world events continued to cast a shadow over development of a multicultural-sensitive and inclusive English language education program.

Ullman (2010) states that adult ESL instruction is interwoven with concepts of national identity and nation-building. From inception, adult ESL education was linked with ideals of integration of home culture and language with a new culture and language (Lardiere, 2017; Ullman, 2010). However, not all policies echo this ideology and seek instead for assimilation of culture and language – and herein lies the paradoxical meaning of ESL education (Lardiere, 2017; Leki, 2017; Ullman, 2010).

Impact of English language acquisition for adult refugees. Scholars in higher education insist that institutions must provide English language learning programs that not only educate for language proficiency, but also focus on preparing students for cultural adjustments with a goal to set students on a path toward higher education attainment (Kim & Diaz, 2013; Warriner, 2007). Scholars posit that English language programs serve as socialization programs, that teach students English while also teaching students how to use English appropriately in various social settings (Lardiere, 2017; Leki, 2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016). For example, Eun (2016) examined the benefits of utilizing a sociocultural approach to ESL education. Eun (2016) stressed the importance of encouraging ESL learners to use personal strengths or interests to supplement language acquisition. Mediated learning techniques were used in this model to supplement instructional activities (Eun, 2016). For instance, cultural discussion or references were blended into an instructional unit based on ESL students' home country's culture. This practice enables students to feel more connected to the lesson, which is thought to facilitate the learning process (Eun, 2016; Lardiere, 2017).

Language and culture are often intertwined, which can lead to cultural misunderstandings or conflicts when a foreign language is introduced into an existing cultural setting (Lardiere, 2017; Urdan, 2012). For example, if a student's family does not speak English, they may not be able or willing to support the student's English language acquisition since they do not understand how it relates to the family's established culture (Lardiere, 2017; Urdan, 2012). Scholars posit that the motivation for learning English stems from students' recognition of the potential value of English fluency as students seek higher education, career opportunities, and the value it holds to assist students' integration into American culture by understanding cultural nuances in film, literature, and music (Lardiere, 2017; Leki, 2017; Padilla, 2006; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016).

In terms of accessing quality education, Warriner's (2007) qualitative study seeks to understand the African refugee experience with accessing high quality ESL instruction. Without access to adequate language instruction, the refugees' ability to access equitable resources and opportunities in the U.S. are challenged on a daily basis. When educators lack the prior experience or cultural knowledge to link classroom content to the lived experiences of students, learning is stunted and hindered by a lack of mutual understanding (Uribe-Florez, Araujo, Franzak, & Writer, 2014).

Learning English as a second language for adult refugee learners is a priority to facilitate economic stability, integration into society, and autonomy (Lardiere, 2017; Larrotta, 2010; Leki, 2017; Padilla, 2006). Larrotta (2010) explains that refugees who have a working knowledge of and ability to use English are better paid and more often employed than refugees who struggle with English language acquisition. English language acquisition for refugees can be viewed as a bridge from a state of uncertainty and instability to a future of opportunities, autonomy, and social efficacy.

While exploring the importance of ESL education for adult refugee learners, research demonstrates that language learning can be a complex and layered process (Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016; Leki, 2017). Not only do adult refugees face the challenge of integrating into a new society and culture, but they are also challenged to learn English while immersed in a new academic environment (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016).

ESL education environment for adult refugee learners. Adult ESL classrooms host a diverse group of learners, which indicates that instructors must be flexible and sensitive to the needs of each learner while working to establish a learning community where students can share ideas and experiences in order to grow and develop (Atkinson, 2014). A *learning community*

“unites a group of individuals in investigating and constructing a shared understanding of their world” (Carlock, 2016, p. 108). By fostering a learning community in ESL classrooms, a diverse population of learners can unite and find common ground on which to build new learning.

As Larrotta (2010) explains through a literature review of ESL classroom environments, ESL courses can occur in a variety of settings and with varied program objectives. Courses may be offered in public or private settings, with an emphasis on social survival skills, vocational preparation, improving literacy for academic or professional advancement, or on improving skills in preparation for the U.S. citizenship and naturalization test (Larrotta, 2010; Leki, 2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016). Meanwhile, adults’ prior history of learning, cultural values and beliefs, and personal learning styles impact how adults acquire a second language (Larrotta, 2010; Leki, 2017; Padilla, 2006; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016).

Larrotta (2010) proposes that by using a sociocultural approach to ESL instruction, teachers can facilitate community building, thus strengthening the language acquisition process. When students are encouraged to participate in social activities and group work, American cultural practices and ways of being in society are integrated into the learning process. This integration of culture and curriculum can assist in the adjustment process for new refugee students (Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2012; Larrotta, 2010; Leki, 2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016).

ESL learning implications for refugees. The instructional design for ESL classes can impact the level of student self-efficacy and autonomy (Leki, 2017; Padilla, 2006). Padilla (2006) describes several forms of traditional ESL instruction that focus on the technical and grammatical acquisition of the English language. The key variant is the amount of instruction conducted in English. For instance, immersion classes are taught entirely in English while

multilingual courses are taught with a balance of English and the original language of the students (Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2012; Padilla, 2006). The level of ESL immersion can often vary depending on the course objectives. If the course is a survival skills program, then the goals for the class may be to teach students how to complete basic social tasks in English; however, if the course is focused on building English language proficiency to lead toward fluency, the program will likely include more detailed grammatical and linguistic practices (Padilla, 2006).

Additionally, Padilla (2006) suggests that the speed of language acquisition is impacted by the age, prior educational experiences, and level of motivation of the learner. Urdan (2012) further examines factors that potentially impact the level of motivation for English language acquisition for refugee students. Family, school, and social contexts present some of the highest levels of challenge for adult refugee learners (Urdan, 2012). A refugee's family dynamic can flux and change when the family moves into a new cultural setting. For instance, studies show that some Latino refugee families experience a difficult adjustment to the U.S. cultural norms in terms of familial relationships (Lardiere, 2017; Leki, 2017; Padilla, 2006; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016).

In traditional Latino culture, children remain with the family in closely-tied family community, consistently showing great respect to the head of the household (Urdan, 2012). In America, Latino refugees report familial conflict when children wish to move out of their home and develop conflicting priorities between family obligations and relationships with friends (Urdan, 2012). According to Urdan's (2012) research, some families interpret these changes in behavior as negative consequences of acculturation, often blaming English language acquisition as pulling the children away from home.

Adding to this familial struggle, children of refugees also tend to acquire English language skills more quickly than parents, leading to feelings of isolation and exclusion for refugee parents (Lardiere, 2017; Leki, 2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016; Urdan, 2012). A lack of English proficiency among adult refugees can lead to less involvement with their children's lives in the U.S., which can decrease levels of confidence and autonomy (Lardiere, 2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016; Urdan, 2012). Adults who were socially active and politically informed in the country of origin may experience significant struggles as they strive to find similar social status and cultural understanding in the American system and culture (Leki, 2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016).

ESL curriculum design in social context. Carlock (2016) posits that ESL instructors are challenged to create a learner-centered classroom focused on student engagement and real-life problems in order to prepare students with the social capital and sense of self-efficacy to be active members of society. By moving beyond the skills-based instruction common among ESL practitioners, adult refugee learners may be empowered to engage and make their voice heard in society (Carlock, 2016; Lardiere, 2017). As discussed, the goals of English language acquisition for adult refugee learners vary. They may wish to be more active members of their child's education, achieve better employment opportunities, or enhance their abilities to function on a daily basis in an English speaking community. Carlock (2016) demonstrates how community-based ESL programming for adult refugee learners can build a learning community that fosters an increase in student self-efficacy, ability to take civic action, and opportunities for professional employment.

Carlock (2016) investigated a community-based organization (CBO) that offered ESL instruction focused on promoting civic engagement for adult refugees. The participants in the

study were diverse in country of origin, original language, prior educational history, and length of time living in the United States. The research exposes that, while the agencies supporting ESL programming promote a focus on vocational training and preparation for postsecondary education, ESL instructors express a desire to create an increasingly learner-centered approach to English instruction (Carlock, 2016; Park & McHugh, 2014).

Traditionally, ESL instructors were trained to focus primarily on language and grammar skills in order to prepare students for standardized testing requirements (Carlock, 2016; Ewert, 2013). Instructors propose that English competency will be enhanced and strengthened by integrating the individual learners' goals, personalities, life histories, and culture into the classroom experience (Carlock, 2016; Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Lardiere, 2017). By dividing the focus in the classroom between grammar and skill-based acquisition with real-world problem solving and civic engagement instructors advance the notion that students will be better prepared for a socially-active, self-sufficient, and inclusive life experiences in the U.S. (Carlock, 2016).

Resources for ESL adult refugee learners. As discussed previously in this chapter, the needs of adult refugee ESL students may vary from other ESL learners (Carlock, 2016; Park & McHugh, 2014; Urdan, 2010). A key study by Janis (2013) discusses the increase in community college ESL enrollment in connection with the need for improved student services to fit the needs of diverse populations. Through the study of community colleges as pathways for ESL students, Janis (2013) explores why adult refugee and ESL students have lower grade point averages (GPAs) and lower completion levels than non-refugee adult students. Participants discussed a lack of intercultural communication skills on campus, a need for culturally-sensitive student resources, and the diverse needs of adult refugee and ESL students (Janis, 2013).

In a related study, Kanno and Varghese (2010) conducted a qualitative interview-based study seeking to understand the experience of first-generation refugee and refugee ESL students' experiences. Using Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory, Kanno and Varghese (2010) proposed that the students' access and participation in higher education was limited not only by language barriers, but also by the personal situations of the students' experiences. For instance, refugee students, and other ESL students, could face significant struggles in terms of financial resources, socioeconomic barriers, and limited levels of self-efficacy (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). By assessing the needs of ESL refugee and refugee students, Kanno and Varghese (2010) sought to expand literature to include an examination of the specific struggles of this population of students and proposes a shift in educational policy to include more holistic consideration of the adjustment needs for ESL and specifically refugee and refugee students.

Both Kanno and Varghese (2010) and Janis (2013) expose connections between ESL student success and availability of student support services on campus. Scholars also highlight the necessity for multiculturalism in ESL learning spaces, in order to facilitate an inclusive and positive learning environment (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2008; Janis, 2013; Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Misawa, 2010). Additionally, Goodnight (2017) considers this connection and adds the variable of academic self-confidence.

Goodnight (2017) conducted a multivariate regression study to examine the language related academic self-confidence (LRASC) of noncitizen students. In relation to a higher education environment, Goodnight (2017) examined how LRASC impacted academic engagement and assertiveness. Goodnight's (2017) study showed that noncitizen status is a positive factor in students' assessment of their personal academic abilities. Goodnight (2017) argued that even with the growing number of non-U.S.-born students in higher education, there

was insufficient research regarding student needs, motivation attributes, and the interrelationship of immigration status and academic achievement. Importantly, Goodnight (2017) also advocated for a nuanced and culturally-appropriate examination of self-efficacy, self-concept, and self-confidence within academic research which involved international, noncitizen, or refugee students.

Impact of ESL teacher power. Student perception of teacher power is one aspect of the educational landscape in the U.S. that hinders the learning of adult refugee learners (Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016; Stewart, 2010). Scholars explain an issue an issue of a lack of teacher training provided to equip educators with skills to integrate ESL learners into a U.S. classroom (Campbell, 2017; Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016; McBrien, 2010). If teachers are not aware of how varied cultural traditions impact a learning environment, students from other cultures may not be accounted for in the landscape of instructional and classroom design (Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016; Lardiere, 2017; Leki, 2017).

Teachers demonstrate power to students when learning objectives and expectations are expressed (Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016; Stewart, 2010). Further, teachers can show power over students when a teacher's behavior influences the motivation and goals of learners (Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016; Leki, 2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016). Diaz, Cochran, and Karlin (2016) provide examples illustrating the negative outcomes of unprepared ESL educators. For instance, an instructor who does not allow for vocabulary building opportunities for ESL students can cause frustration, embarrassment, and fear among ESL students. ESL students display high levels of motivation to understand and to be understood in English; however, if instructors do not provide encouragement and guidance, students can feel discouraged and lost in

a classroom where they are already struggling to find their place (Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016; Lardiere, 2017; Leki, 2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016).

To supplement the examination of instructor power, Stewart (2010) exemplifies a method of ESL instruction focused on the empowerment of adult refugee learners. As an instructor of English as a second language courses, Stewart (2010) noticed a distinct difference between students' verbal and written expressions of their immigration stories. While a student may talk about immigrating to the United States using passionate and expressive language, the student was not able to relate the same emotional journey in written form. Stewart (2010) developed an instructional method focused on developing a voice in writing aimed to empower ESL students to express themselves in written and oral forms, thus taking control of their voice in society.

Writing with voice, integrating personal perspective into writing, provided ESL students a way to enjoy writing in English more as they were able to express themselves more clearly and with pleasure. This practice enabled students to define themselves to others, take control of their story and role in society, and begin to excel in acquiring English language fluency (Leki, 2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016; Stewart, 2010). The students were writing to be heard in society, empowering them to take on an active and positive role in society. Stewart (2010) expressed a desire to continually evaluate her instructional methods in order to ensure her teachings are relevant to her ESL students' lives. Stewart (2010) encourages that ESL students have a distinct and important perspective to contribute to society and one of her goals is to empower students to find their voice in society in order to enter into dialogue with confidence.

Through a broadened understanding of the history of ESL education and varied teaching and learning methodologies, the landscape of ESL education for adult refugee learners becomes clearer in its layered content and context (Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016; Lardiere, 2017; Leki,

2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016). By understanding the roots of ESL education, the progression of teaching practices, and the specific needs of adult refugee learners, the future research in the field can become more meaningfully and intentionally focused. In the next section, I will discuss the impact of discrimination and stereotypes on ESL education for adult refugee learners.

Language proficiency and inclusion practices. In respect to the specific needs of immigrant and refugee students, literature reflects a connection between the level of English proficiency and the level of perceived discrimination for students (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Hirano, 2015; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). Reflecting on the evidenced need for ESL education for refugees and international students through statistical data and lived experiences, it becomes evident that language proficiency may be one of the greatest barriers during a search for education, social connection, and cross-cultural acclimation. In order to serve the needs of learners, educators must consider the lived experiences of students (Kim & Diaz, 2013; Lindeman, 1926; Perry & Mallozzi, 2011; Phan, 2018).

A particularly powerful example of the students' academic difficulty is centered on a lack of historical and American cultural knowledge (Hirano, 2015). For instance, during a discussion of Martin Luther King, Jr. and his work with social movements in the U.S., one of the participants felt lost and confused by the direction of the class discussion. The professor realized that no background information was given in regard to the era of segregation to provide context for the class discussion. Given the relationship to trauma and marginalization that many refugee students face, this class discussion had potential for lively interactions. However, since the context was not explained for the student, the opportunity for a meaningful learning experience was missed (Hirano, 2015).

As Lindeman (1926) advocates, prior life experiences serve as a vital resource in adult learning practice. Building from this foundation, it is essential to seek to know more about adult learners so that learning environments become accessible, applicable, and exciting spaces for sharing and growing in knowledge. As the non-English speaking population continues to grow in the U.S., it seems essential for educators to work to provide accessible resources for ESL learners so that educational and employment equity can be established (NCES, 2018; Zarrabi, 2018). Not only does ESL learning increase employment opportunities for ESL students, it also increases individual well-being while navigating a primarily English-speaking culture (Zarrabi, 2018).

Conclusion

Even with the increasing need for ESL and higher education from refugee students, the landscape of higher education lacks the resources to understand what the students need based on their lived experiences (Chen, 2017; McBrien, 2005). Prior scholars expose that higher education is of the utmost importance to refugee adults' resettlement process (Chen, 2017; Kim & Diaz, 2013; McBrien, 2005; Perry & Mallozzi, 2011). By exploring prior literature, adult educators and higher education practitioners can better understand the refugee experience – thus, be better prepared to facilitate the needs of refugees for the access and opportunity of higher education in the U.S.

Refugee students have persisted through much hardship and trauma to reach the point of participating in educational opportunities in the U.S. (McBrien, 2005; Perry & Mallozzi, 2011; U.S. Refugee Agency, 2018). It appears that it is incumbent upon educational professionals to strive to mediate injustices and persistent marginalization for this population of students. The process of resettlement can also be influenced by the prevailing social attitudes of acceptance or

discrimination toward a refugee's cultural heritage (Urdan, 2012). Urdan (2012) proposes that adult refugees' level of personal and professional success in a new culture is impacted by the level of acceptance and mutual respect offered by the local community. Considering the history of the refugee program and policies in the U.S., the influence of English language acquisition and cultural adjustments, along with concerns regarding social justice and equity for refugees, it is vitally important that literature addresses the need for a better understanding adult refugee experiences.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 included a literature review aimed to facilitate a better understanding of refugee experiences in the U.S. This chapter began with a discussion of adult refugee learners' characteristics, adult education theory and practice relative to this population, and theoretical literature framing this study's design. Then, I reviewed literature regarding adult education best practices relative to diverse student populations, paying particular attention to the refugee adult learner population. Then, I explored the U.S. refugee resettlement process and policies, refugee access and opportunity for U.S. higher education, and the impact of English language acquisition and proficiency for adult refugee learners. This chapter ended with a conclusion.

The next chapter will address the study methodology including the following major areas: theoretical framework, research design, trustworthiness, and subjectivity. I will also provide my subjectivity statement in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Based on the prior life experiences and positionality of adult refugee learners in the U.S., access to higher education holds potential to significantly enhance the socioeconomic status, cultural integration, and autonomy for this marginalized population. The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to seek a better understanding of the experiences of adult refugee learners as they navigate higher education in the Southeastern U.S. The research questions that guided this study were:

- 1) How do prior life experiences of adult refugee learners influence the transition to higher education in the U.S.?
- 2) How does the intersection of ethnicity and immigration status of adult refugee learners influence the U.S. higher education experience?
- 3) What strategies do adult refugee learners employ to navigate higher education?

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the theoretical framework and research design for this study, including a description of my participants and an explanation of my sampling strategies. Then, I will continue with a discussion of the data collection and analysis processes. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of trustworthiness, positionality, and subjectivity in relation to this study and end with a conclusion.

Research Design

Stemming from roots in history, philosophy, and anthropology, qualitative research seeks to understand the meanings people construct based on interactions with the world (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018). While exploring qualitative research methodologies in relation to research design and implementation, it becomes vital to consider how particular methodologies, methods, and theoretical frameworks may align or run askew to the research purpose. Until the

late 19th century, qualitative research was only used for social science inquiries. Then, in the 1960s a paradigm shift led to a critique of science and how scientific methods are constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) propose seven moments, or phases, in the evolution of qualitative research. The traditional period refers to the period in the U.S. up to World War II focused on the exploration of foreign cultures or phenomenon outside the social norm (Flick, 2009). This period is aligned with the Chicago School in sociology and characterized by use of mainly ethnographic and life history methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Flick, 2009).

The next moment, the modernist period, takes us through 1970s and notes substantial efforts to formalize qualitative research, leading to numerous qualitative textbook publications (Flick, 2009). The blurred genres period follows and lasts until the 1980s, characterized by a time when varied theoretical models were explored in tandem. Scholars in this period sought ways to blend theoretical models in order to more fully understand phenomena (Flick, 2009). Through the fourth to sixth moments, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), scholars shifted along a continuum of exploring new ways of analyzing data, considered the varied ways of obtaining and interpreting narratives, and reflected on the influence of researcher positionality and power. In the seventh and eighth moment in the history of qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) discuss the impact of having successful scholarly journals of qualitative research established in the early 2000s, as well as the progression of research methods to focus on the postmodern and exploratory frameworks, while also looking forward to new methods and practices on the horizon.

Characteristics of qualitative research. With this brief overview of qualitative research development in mind, I now turn to explore the characteristics of qualitative studies. Qualitative research acknowledges that multiple realities exist, allowing for varied interpretations of reality centered on human experience and social interactions (Greene, 2007). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) summarize the many definitions of qualitative research by stating that qualitative researchers seek to understand the meaning people construct in their reality; further, that qualitative researchers are interested in how people make sense of their experiences. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) offer five general characteristics of qualitative research including: (a) the natural setting is a direct source of study and an essential study component, (b) researchers focus on words and images for data collection, (c) qualitative researchers are concerned with how things occur, (d) a belief that knowledge is co-constructed in interactive experiences, and (e) includes a special interest in the participants' thoughts and beliefs.

Building on Bogdan and Biklen's (2007) characteristics of qualitative research, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) propose that scholarship in the field indicates four key characteristics of qualitative research, along with additional characteristics that may vary based on the particular research study. The four key characteristics include: (a) focus on meaning and understanding, (b) the researcher as the primary instrument, (c) an inductive process, and (d) producing rich descriptions of data and findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A focus on meaning and understanding refers to the purpose of qualitative research to reach an understanding of how people make sense of their life experience and how they interpret their meaning-making process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

For instance, qualitative scholars seek to gain understanding of how individuals perceive their life experiences with consideration of the specific context and interactions in the participant

environment (Given, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this way, qualitative work is not attempting to predict the future, but rather is intentionally exploring the intricacies of the individual experience – what happened and why according to the person who lived it. According to scholars, qualitative research also situates the researcher as the primary instrument (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Riessman, 2008).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasize the value of having a human as the primary instrument in qualitative research. When the primary purpose of research is to gain understanding, having a human collect the data enables an interactive process – where the researcher is able to react and be responsive to the participant during the data collection process (Given, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For example, during an interview process, the researcher can use verbal and non-verbal cues to strive to best understand what the participant intends to express. The researcher can ask for more details about a particular comment or can ask the participant to clarify ideas if non-verbal cues indicate more feelings are present than what is initially expressed. These methods of clarification during an interview process are unique to qualitative research and facilitate the quest to understand lived experiences (Ellis & Patti, 2014; Given, 2016; Riessman, 2008).

The next characteristic of qualitative research, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) is that it is an inductive process. Instead of stating a hypothesis and then testing the hypothesis, as is found in positivist research, qualitative scholars analyze data from interviews, observations, and artifacts to build concepts or theories (Clandinin, Caine, & Lessard, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). So, in qualitative research, theories are constructed through field work, rather than proving a theory through testing.

Producing rich descriptions of data and findings is the next characteristic of qualitative research described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). In qualitative research, scholars provide detailed and illustrative description of the research context, participants, and research activities. It is also common to find interview quotes, excerpts or images from research artifacts, or research field notes in qualitative work. These details support the research findings by providing rich descriptions to portray the feelings and beliefs of the participants (Given, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This focus on the depth of data, rather than breadth of data, is one of the key characteristics that sets qualitative work apart from quantitative work.

Additional characteristics, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), that vary based on the project include: study design is emergent and flexible, the sample selection is purposeful, and the researcher spends a substantial amount of time in the field, or natural setting, of the study. By reflecting on Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) characteristic analysis, scholars can build a foundational knowledge about qualitative research. This exploration of qualitative research characteristics also enables scholars to design qualitative research with intentionality and purpose, as these characteristics provide a framework with key points essential to consider throughout a research process.

When considering qualitative research design in light of this foundational understanding of qualitative methodology, Crotty's (1998) research framework facilitates an overarching view of research design. This view of research design aids in gaining perspective of methodology's central place and connection to all aspects of a study. First, Crotty (1998) considers epistemology, which is grounded in considering how you know what you know. Then, the theoretical perspective reflects the philosophical stance of the scholarship, which also influences the methodology and provides context for the research process (Crotty, 1998).

My epistemology is grounded in constructivism, which emphasizes that truth and meaning are constructed through social interactions in the world (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018). This perspective fosters a drive to learn about lived experiences directly from those who live the experience (Lee, 2012). So, considering how meaning emerges, a constructivist epistemology promotes that meaning and understanding evolve through social interactions and observations. When I talk with others about their experiences, I begin to construct knowledge regarding aspects of their experiences in the world. This knowledge is also subjective, since my construction of knowledge is based on my perceptions of their experiences. Therefore, the construction of knowledge and the reflection on how knowledge is constructed are intricately tied during the research process in order to maintain authenticity to the participant experience.

A constructivist epistemology aided in the narrative inquiry process, as this study sought to understand the experiences of adult refugee learners by talking directly with participants from this population. Further, through the interview process, I paid attention to how the participants constructed meaning from their experiences. Through this interactive process, this study exposed new ideas and understandings about adult refugee learner experiences.

Theoretical framework for this narrative inquiry. I utilized critical theory, intersectionality, transformative learning, and social cognitive theory to guide this narrative inquiry. These adult learning theories aid in a deep exploration of the adult refugee experience through this study. Figure 3.1 illustrates my theoretical framework and how the literature review provided the foundation of understanding for this narrative inquiry.

I used intersectionality theory, critical theory, social cognitive theory, and transformative learning theory in this study. Each theory serves as a way to gain a deeper understanding of how adult refugee learners experience their world. Reflecting on the experience of adult refugee

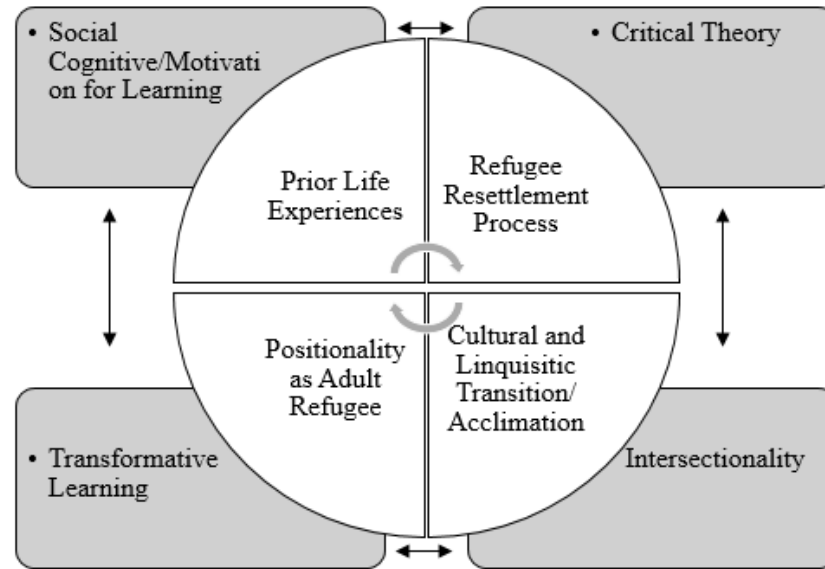


Figure 3.1. This relationship figure exemplifies the theoretical framework for this study and illustrates how the literature review is integral to the overall research design.

learners, intersectionality theory illuminates the importance of considering learners' holistic identity when facilitating learning (Collins & Bilge, 2016). As an example, by exploring the intersections of adult refugees' ethnic background, immigration status, and education experiences, adult educators could construct programming to better fit the needs of this population of learners. Intersectionality reveals a multidimensional framework that facilitates a deeper understanding of refugee students' concerns (Alves & Faerstein, 2016; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Misawa, 2010, 2015).

Intersectionality is also utilized in international law and policy development and in inequality studies particularly concerning oppression and marginalization of minority groups. Further, intersectionality is often cited and utilized by feminists in the European Union as they address issues of gender and ethnic inequalities and policymaking (Bose, 2012). Considering the effective global use of intersectionality theory and the key focus on addressing multilayered social problems, intersectionality theory becomes an ideal theory to use when examining adult

refugee access to and opportunities in U.S. higher education (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Mitchell, Simmons, & Greverbiehl, 2014).

Moving to consider the role of critical theory in this study, critical theory aims to change the world, not stopping at the interpretation of the world. As critical theorists envision a fair, just, and compassionate future, the focus becomes creating conditions where this vision can be realized (Brookfield, 2001, 2005, 2010). Critical research is intended to empower marginalized groups by encouraging questioning of traditionally accepted norms (Brookfield, 2001; Elias & Merriam, 2005; Tisdell & Thompson, 2007). In research concerned with adult refugees, critical theory can be utilized to explore the experience of access and opportunity for higher education in the U.S. in efforts to counter marginalization and oppression within society. Critical theory can facilitate a better understanding of systemic barriers that might exist while adult refugee learners seek higher education opportunities.

Critical theorists seek to expose the social constructs that are commonly accepted as truth, but that perpetuate unjust social conditions (Brookfield, 2010; Marcuse, 1965). These commonly accepted truths, or dominant ideologies, maintain the status quo where those in power retain power and those on the margins continue to be marginalized. Critical theory facilitates an exploration of what social systems are in place that limit access and opportunity for higher education for refugees. Further, critical theory provides a framework to critically examine social conditions, challenge dominant ideologies, and seek to eliminate oppression (Brookfield, 2001). For instance, Delgado and Stefancic (2017) discuss the evolution of critical theory and the widening scope of analysis into immigration law, impact of globalization, and pervasive racial profiling of specific ethnic populations.

As members of a dominant ideological society, educators must also consider how they practice. As learners are sorted into pre-determined categories within higher education classrooms, admission records, and campus social structures, the diversity of each learner can be disregarded and educators risk missing key facets of a person's experience that could impact the ability to access and persist in higher education (Butterwick & Egan, 2010; Swartz & McGuffey, 2018). By better understanding the refugee experience from an intersectional framework grounded in critical theory, a more holistic understanding of how destructive or marginalizing ideologies persist is exposed – and perhaps how they may be weakened and eventually broken down.

Now, turning to consider social cognitive theory in relation to adult refugee learners, social interaction and social engagement are central facets impacting behavior (Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014). Considering the experience of adult refugees, some might experience confusion when previously engrained social behavior no longer results in the expected outcomes within a new society. This confusion may result in lowered self-efficacy while striving to navigate a new cultural landscape. Self-efficacy is a central motivational factor in social cognitive theory, particularly applicable to an exploration of adult refugee access to higher education in the U.S. (Courtney, 2018; Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014; Zientek, Fong, & Phelps, 2019).

After persisting through the process of resettlement, adult refugees may possess an aptitude for persistence, resilience, and hope (Perry & Mallozzi, 2011). As I consider social cognitive theory in relation to adult refugee learners, cultural and social norms of behavior become key variables to consider in praxis. Keeping in mind precepts of critical and social cognitive theory, empowerment can be understood as an emancipation from power structures

where an individual is able to escape oppressive systems and regain power over life, take control of destiny, and gain access to desired and necessary resources (Hassi & Laursen, 2015). In the case of refugee students, empowerment is a key motivation for learning. The desire to take control of life and find a personal identity within a new culture is at the heart of this motivation (Chen, 2014; Perry & Mallozzi, 2011).

Transformative learning also facilitates a way to better understand the experiences of participants in this study. A prime example of how transformative learning can help in this study emerges from an example of a refugee's experience resettling in a new country and striving to understand new cultural and societal systems. When given the space and time to reflect on cultural behavior and thinking, this can expose conflict between beliefs, habitual behaviors, and pre-existing understandings of the world. This realization is what some scholars see as a vital step in order to foster social and personal change (Chen, 2014; Fleming, 2018; Hess, Isakson, Nelson, & Goodkind, 2018; Lange, 2018; Robinson & Levac, 2018).

When focusing on the learning experiences of refugee adult students studying in the U.S., it stands out that the learners come to a new environment with a personal history and baggage full of life experience, cultural artifacts, and prior learning. Life experience can be seen as the learners' textbook, from that new knowledge and meaning can evolve (Lindeman, 1926). This could be an emotionally charged time for the learner, where the learner may experience confusion, internal conflict, frustration, and discomfort. An objective for transformative learning is to realize the potential for an uncomfortable experience to become a positive event since it can lead to transformation (Chen, 2014; Hess et al., 2018).

For instance, by focusing on the experience of adult refugees studying in the U.S., transformative learning can be exemplified by the realization that one is able to take control of

life regardless of socioeconomic status, prior language or cultural knowledgebase, or level of self-efficacy. Through the experiences of refugees, scholarship can expose the depth of impact transformative learning holds to empower a person to strive for social change and seek equity. Intersectionality urges educators to consider the whole person during facilitation (Bye, Pushkar, & Conway, 2007; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Misawa, 2010, 2015). This inclusive learning environment can assist in the adjustment process for new refugee students (Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2012; Larrotta, 2010).

Each of these adult learning theories can facilitate a better understanding of the adult refugee learner experience. Intersectionality encourages educators and students to realize the complexity life and lived experiences (Alves & Faerstein, 2016; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Misawa, 2010, 2015). Multidimensional identities can be unpacked through intersectional analysis to discover new ideas and new approaches to social problems, as well as to learn more about layered human experiences (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Misawa, 2010, 2015). Additionally, critical theory teaches that inequality is pervasive in society, but individuals can learn to challenge dominant ideologies to promote social change (Brookfield, 2001; Elias & Merriam, 2005; Tisdell & Thompson, 2007). By seeking to better understand the impact and processes of systemic social and economic structures that shape societies, a broader worldview emerges.

Through social cognitive theory, learners develop a more attuned sense of self and higher level of self-efficacy to facilitate proactive social behaviors (Chen, 2014; Perry & Mallozzi, 2011). Social cognitive theory also aids in self-discovery and heightens awareness of the centrality of social interactions in shaping experiences and learning. Further, transformative learning theory aids learners in understanding the complexity of life changes, and to navigate change with trust in the process of development (Chen, 2014; Fleming, 2018; Hess, Isakson,

Nelson, & Goodkind, 2018; Lange, 2018; Robinson & Levac, 2018). This theoretical framework facilitates a deeper understanding of adult refugee learner experiences. The next section expands on the research design process for this study.

Qualitative research methodology. Methodology, or the strategy for research, considers the design of a study and links the choice for research design to the methods and desired study outcomes – what a scholar seeks to know (Crotty, 1998). Finally, the methods of a study include the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to the research question(s) (Crotty, 1998). Methodology is the design used to tell the story of your research. Bhattacharya (2017) calls methodology the blueprint for a study and the master plan guiding every aspect of research. The study dictates the choice for a research methodology, as it is vital that the methodology fits the research problem (Crotty, 1998; Flick, 2007; Polkinghorne, 2005). As the blueprint for a study, the research methodology frames the study and guides how research is conducted. When considering methodology, researchers strive to align a study's theoretical basis and objectives. In other words, researchers ponder how they will communicate the research to others (Cranton & Merriam, 2015; Polkinghorne, 2005).

Since methodology serves as the master plan for a study, if the methodology does not align with the study's research questions, methods, or theoretical framework, then the study becomes disjointed and creates barriers rather than opening new pathways for understanding (Cranton & Merriam, 2015; Given, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Polkinghorne, 2005). Additionally, the methodology serves as a guidepost for the duration of a research project. At each turn in the research process, the researcher should address and consider the overarching methodology and align actions accordingly (Crotty, 1998; Flick, 2007; Polkinghorne, 2005).

Narrative inquiry. As one of the qualitative research methodologies, narrative inquiry has roots in the biography component in Mills' (1959) sociological work on the trilogy of biography, history, and society (Chase, 2013). By maintaining key interest in life experiences of others and learning through the narratives of those who live them, narrative researchers encourage people can learn about anything, from history to modern technological advances (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Chase (2013) further defines narratives as a particular type of discourse involving meaning making through the retelling or remembering of experiences. Through this method, humans can glean deeper meaning relative to emotions, actions, or potential consequences of actions (Chase, 2013; Riessman, 2008).

Narrative inquiry utilizes stories, conversations, and artifacts such as photos, journals, or poetry to seek to understand how people make meaning of experiences (Riessman, 2008). Riessman (2008) particularly emphasized the value of exploring narratives through visual images. She stressed that visual images permeate every moment, so gaining a better understanding of images could facilitate a deeper understanding of how humans communicate meaning. In a narrative study of Muslim American women after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack in New York, Kwan (2008) used visual images to expose the realities of the participants' daily lives after an event that altered the social and political order in the U.S. By having the women video-record their daily lives and through narrative interviews, Kwan (2008) created a powerful visual record of the participants' shifting positionalities and experiences with anti-Muslim discrimination following the September 11, 2001 events. There are varied methods used in narrative inquiry, alongside multiple approaches, that I will explore later in this section.

Sample steps for narrative inquiry include: identify phenomenon for exploration, develop research question(s) and purpose statement, recruit participant(s) for the study, conduct

interviews and/or observations, obtain ethics approval, conduct relevant literature review, organize and analyze interview transcripts according to the selected form of data analysis, and report on findings (Cranton & Merriam, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Importantly, the steps to design research studies are not necessarily sequential in nature, as much depends on the nature and context of the researcher and the study (Cranton & Merriam, 2015; Crotty, 1998).

Development of narrative inquiry. Adding to an ongoing discussion in the field of human sciences, Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) approach the history of narrative inquiry by identifying themes among existing historical accounts. Considering prior scholars extensive work tracing the development of narrative inquiry, Pinnegar and Daynes' (2007) thematic analysis provides a rich and textured foundation to encapsulate the turn, or change in direction, to narrative-based research. This analysis reflected on prior historical accounts (Bruner, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Martin, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988) and identified the following four themes: (1) a change in the relationship between the researcher and the participant, (2) a shift from using numbers as data to using words as data, (3) a change in research context from the general to the specific – or global to local, and (4) a broadening acceptance of alternative ways of knowing, or epistemologies (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) begin this analysis by discussing a change in the relationship between the researcher and the participant. This first turn toward narrative inquiry involves the move from the researcher as an objective, distanced observer to the researcher as seeking to understand meaning and interpret experiences through interaction with participants (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). A key facet of this turn is the evolution of the participant identity from an object of study to being considered real and independent from the researcher's design (Pinnegar &

Daynes, 2007; Riessman, 2008). This turn involves the researcher becoming more involved with the participants and considering the context and culture of the participants.

The researcher recognizes their role and potential influence in the data collection and analysis process and strives to examine and bracket personal subjectivity throughout the research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). A key idea from this turn toward narrative inquiry is the recognition among scholars that participants are living the phenomenon of inquiry, thus conditions are not static and participant beliefs may evolve over time (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) identify the next turn toward narrative inquiry as a shift from using numbers as data to using words as data.

This evolution of research is characterized by a recognition that numbers, which were traditionally used to explain phenomenon, were not sufficient means to capture experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Scholars began to seek ways to establish authenticity in research when representing the participant lives – this is where stories enter into the spotlight (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). By looking to the participant stories as data, rather than numerical data collection, scholars believed that they could account for the meaning, value, and integrity of research data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

Importantly, the next turn toward narrative inquiry involved a change in research context from the general to the specific – or global to local (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). This turn shows a move from the generalizability of research to a focus on gaining a deeper understanding of specific experiences in certain contexts in order to better understand the human experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). As social scientists sought to understand cultural and social changes, particularly during the major historical events such as the civil rights and women's movement in the U.S., research turned to focus on individual,

contextual stories to better understand sociocultural experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). This turn toward narrative inquiry highlights the power of story to offer a window into the life of others in order to better understand diverse experiences, as well as to promote individual transformation.

The final turn toward narrative inquiry, as Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) explain, involves a broadening acceptance of alternative ways of knowing, or epistemologies. This period focuses on a growing understanding of the existence and value of multiple ways of understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Rather than insisting on a single answer, scholars recognized the evolving nature of knowledge and recognized the role of context, culture, and multiple frames of reference (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) also emphasize that this turn to the narrative is not restricted to the academic world. Through observation of popular culture, Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) cite the emergence of reality television and the popularity of podcasts as instances where this turn toward valuing story is emerging throughout public and private spaces. A further examination of the philosophical roots of narrative inquiry can add depth to this discussion.

The philosophical roots of narrative inquiry include postmodernism, social constructionism, constructivism, and feminism (Cranton & Merriam, 2015; Elias & Merriam, 2005). Postmodernism calls for an ideological critique of foundational knowledge and a questioning of the commonly accepted grand narratives of reality (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018). Social constructionism views knowledge and knower as interdependent and embedded within social context (Lee, 2012; Walker, 2015). In other words, knowledge is co-constructed and cognizant of multiple realities. Further, constructivism is based on the idea that reality is created by individuals through social interactions and therefore viewed and interpreted in varied

ways based on personal experiences and belief systems (Guterman & Rudes, 2008; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018; Walker, 2015). Finally, feminism examines power issues within research with a goal of reaching equality. Feminism is concerned with facilitating a platform where voices of the marginalized can be heard in the hope to motivate social change (Cranton & Merriam, 2015; Tisdell, 1998, 2006).

With these philosophical roots in mind, narrative inquiry requires that scholars maintain trustworthiness among research participants, remain open to ambiguity, maintain *reflexivity*, and remain critically engaged for the duration of the research process. Reflexivity can be understood as having an ongoing conversation about experiences and data, while remaining simultaneously engaged in the moment (Hertz, 1995). Through narrative inquiry, it becomes possible to explore what people believe are important aspects of the human experience – their human experience in relation with others.

Huberman and Miles (2002) encourages scholars to reflect on work and remember that “we cannot give voice, but we do hear voices that we record and interpret” (p. 220). Through written and oral narratives, such as poetry, plays, novels, and stories, the taboos, beliefs, cultural traditions, social order, and ideologies of generations are exposed (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). Huberman and Miles (2002) also discuss the interdisciplinary nature of narrative inquiry, as it is used among varied academic fields as a way to make meaning from and through storytelling. This uncovering of meaning through storytelling is concerned with how participants’ power is evident within a narrative. This foundation of understanding helps us more deeply understand how the participants make sense of their life experiences.

Approaches in narrative inquiry. In a pragmatic or applied narrative inquiry approach, scholars focus on what peoples' stories are about and consider the quality of the participants' life experiences (Chase, 2013). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) are prominent scholars within this approach and propose that research should focus on everyday experiences and ways that research could facilitate improvement in the lives of participants. This approach most often avoids application of theoretical concepts on narratives, opting for a pure focus on the content of the narrative. The applied approach also extends to the psychology field as a way to apply narrative inquiry during psychological counseling to facilitate well-being (Adler & McAdams, 2007; Chase, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Another approach to narrative inquiry is to study a narrative as lived experience and a form of social action (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Scholars in this approach are interested in how a story is told, as well as the contents and context of the story. Chase (2013) explains that narration, in this approach, is understood as a construction of meaning – a building of identity. Riessman (2008) and Bell (2009) discuss the centrality of the in-depth interview transcript during the analysis process from this standpoint. In this approach, researchers seek to understand the interaction between the narrator and the listener; they are considering the meaning of pauses, word choice, and laughter, for example (Chase, 2013). A key belief in this approach is the importance of the placement of the narrative within cultural discourses and how narratives may challenge social, cultural, or political norms.

Using this approach, narrative inquiry scholars are compelled by the possibility to facilitate change toward social justice (Chase, 2013). And so, by listening to the voices in the narrative, details about lived experiences are exposed that inform practice toward social action.

Additionally, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stress the value of narrative inquiry in keeping the humans and the stories simultaneously visible during the research process.

Becoming more focused on the narrative environment, other narrative scholars practice *reflexive interplay* (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). In defining research from this approach, Gubrium and Holstein (2009) propose that reflexive interplay means that individuals' narratives are influenced by and also influence the individuals' environments. Here, narrative inquiry explores what is and is not said and why individuals make narrative selections to define a story. This approach is bolstered by an ethnographic lens, where researchers study the environment where the narrative takes place alongside the narrative itself (Chase, 2013). By seeking to better understand the context of a narrative, the researcher hopes to optimize the depth and breadth of narrative understanding.

The final approach I will discuss here includes researchers who turn the focus to their personal life experience, including their experience in research, as a required aspect of narrative inquiry (Chase, 2013). Myerhoff (1994) led this approach with her study of elderly Jewish immigrants in California. This approach encourages that researchers be explicit about their experiences and how they may alter the interpretive lens during narrative inquiry (Chase, 2013). In these projects, researchers will discuss personal experiences and/or relationships with the participant or with the participant's context to explore interwoven spaces of experience that may emerge in or influence the research (Chase, 2013).

Purpose and perspectives in narrative inquiry. As mentioned previously, narrative scholars are compelled by the potential for their research to facilitate social change (Chase, 2013; Riessman, 2008). Chase (2013) contemplates the sense of urgency embedded in narrative inquiry – an urgency to share a story, urgency to be heard, urgency to expose collective experiences, and

an urgency to bring stories to public discourse. This section will facilitate an exploration of key narrative inquiry scholars' perspectives in order to gain a more holistic view of the varied interpretations and understanding of this field of inquiry.

Huberman and Miles (2002) discuss how humans tell stories to construct and claim identity of the self and others. Individuals then become immersed in this construction of identity and reality and become the narratives they tell about their lives. Also, when telling a story about a difficult experience or situation, trauma, or life transition, individuals can sense-make along the way. Making a sequential telling can uncover order where nothing seemed to make sense before – and in this way new meaning can emerge (Huberman & Miles, 2002). As participants tell their stories, researchers seek to better understand their experiences while perhaps they also have the opportunity to uncover new meanings from their experiences.

Further, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind that narratives are representations of participant experiences, and in this way stories are remembered and retold according to these memories. It is not only difficult to tell a story, but also to retell it in such a way to allow growth and change – it is a reflective process shared with participants. This process is a constantly evolving landscape of experiences, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Additionally, as new experiences occur, past experiences can be reinterpreted based on these new understandings of the world. So, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) encourage us to honor that narrative inquiries are formed around wonder – wonder about an experience, a social problem, or research puzzle. In other words, narrative inquiries are not seeking to find a solution or ultimate answer, but do seek to better understand human experiences so that the work can lend to social change and growth.

Considering that humans are always in the midst of a story, both of personal lives and lives in relationship with others, it becomes clear that a narrative space is perpetually available, to some degree, based on willingness and opportunity. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasize that narrative inquiry is done *with* people, not *on* people. In these collaborative spaces, both the teller and the listener are exposed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In such a space, an interviewer (listener) cannot maintain an idealized, objective entity – as humans are embodied beings.

Cassell and Symon (2011) highlight narrative inquiry as a means to make sense of social context through the life stories of others. Simultaneously, it is important to be mindful that life stories also reflect the status quo – the current political, economic, and social environment – the existing power structures (Cassell & Symon, 2011). As Riessman (2008) explains, in narrative research the story becomes the data used for analysis. So, the stories serve as the phenomena of inquiry that aid the quest for meaning (Cranton & Merriam, 2015; Polkinghorne, 2005; Riessman, 2008).

An assumption in narrative inquiry is that people seek to share their experiences through stories (Cranton & Merriam, 2015; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2012). Bhattacharya (2017) proposes that narrative research "offers a lens, a framework to the study of storied lives" (p. 93). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that narrative inquiry has a foundation in the earliest form of communication among humans - storytelling. From historic cave drawings to modern art, film, or music, narrative inquiry provides ways of understanding others' experiences and ways of seeing the world (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Importantly, narrative inquiry requires a collaboration between the researcher and the participant, as the participant shares stories from their life. Active listening is an important tool for narrative researchers, as the story-sharing process requires attentiveness and mindful listening

to the details of the story (Ellis & Patti, 2014; Given, 2016, Riessman, 2008). Additionally, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) point out the importance of considering culture and social context throughout the narrative inquiry process. Scholars must attend to where the stories are shared and what environmental and sociocultural factors could facilitate and open and trusting space (Ellis & Patti, 2014; Given, 2016, Riessman, 2008).

Of equal importance is a consideration of criticisms of narrative inquiry. For instance, Gottlieb and Lasser (2001) discuss the possibility that narrative inquiry opens the door to privilege some voices over others. They propose that the nature of narrative inquiry includes a tendency to focus on participants who are able to clearly convey their ideas and who have access to an academic audience, while simultaneously neglecting opposing perspectives on experience from those who may not be as accessible or able to clearly communicate life stories (Gottlieb & Lasser, 2001). These are important considerations for narrative scholars in order to support equity and equality through research endeavors.

Merriam, Johnson-Bailey et al. (2001) also emphasize the importance for scholars to consider power, positionality, and the insider/outsider dynamics when doing research across cultures. Scholars must consider common experiences, varied perceptions of experiences, and diverse experiences according to cultural traditions and norms. This aspect of the insider/outsider perspective remains vital for scholars to remember and reflect upon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Chase (2013) reminds that narrative inquiry is still a field in progress; new developments within praxis continue to emerge to enrich the approach.

This study used narrative inquiry to seek to understand the experiences of adult refugee learners. Since I was interested in gaining an understanding of the experiences adult refugee learners, narrative inquiry was an ideal fit for this study. Narrative inquiry allowed me to

document the life experiences of adult refugee learners as they shared their stories. As Clandinin and Rosiek (2012) discuss, narrative inquiry serves as a window into the lives of participants, allowing researchers to better understand varied perspectives and ways of seeing the world. This narrative inquiry aids to inform the field of adult education about the life experiences of adult refugee learners, thus helping adult learning practitioners respond to the specific needs of this learner population and integrate the adult refugee learner perspective into the learning environment, which can serve to further enrich and deepen the learning experience.

Participants of the current study. The participants were recruited from a mid-size Southeastern U.S. city and several adjacent smaller cities which are part of the same academic institutional system. Participants were recruited who were adult refugees and had who completed at least one semester of study at an accredited institution of higher education in the region of this study. In this study, perspective participants were considered adults if they were 24 years of age or older or if they were the head of their household. The final participants in this study consisted of nine adult refugee learners who attended at least one semester of study at a community college.

The goal for this study was to recruit between eight to twelve participants. In qualitative research, the appropriate sample size for a study is ambiguous to some extent. Qualitative scholars advocate that the sample size can vary depending on the focus of the study (Dworkin, 2012; Given, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The consensus among qualitative scholars is that the sample size should be justified by having the ability to gather sufficient data to examine the phenomenon in question, or achieve data saturation (Dworkin, 2012; Given, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While the sample size in qualitative research is often smaller than quantitative studies, this is further justified by the reality of conducting qualitative work (Dworkin, 2012).

As previously discussed, qualitative work is focused on in-depth data collection to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon and better understand the meaning – the how, why, where, and what (Dworkin, 2012).

In order to select my participants, I reflected on my interactions with adult refugees during my professional role working in a Southeastern U.S. community college and during my volunteer work with a regional center for refugee resettlement assistance. In other words, I used network selection in order to identify my potential participants (Roulston, 2011). Network selection can be defined as a way to locate a sample population for research participants when the study population is rare or difficult to find (Roulston, 2011). Network selection utilizes acquaintances or contacts of the researcher to begin identifying potential participants (Saldaña, 2016). After identifying potential participants, I informally discussed the goals of my research project with each individual. I explained my research interests and goals to the potential participants and provided sample questions from the proposed interviews, such as: Tell me about your experience seeking admission to college after arriving in the U.S.? From these conversations, I answered questions from potential participants before solidifying participation.

Then, I met with the participants to review the outline for my study and provide a copy of the Informed Consent Form for their review (See Appendix A). Since English is the second language of the participants, I met with them in person to talk about the study in order to ensure clarity and to facilitate an open setting for questions and discussion. After confirming willingness to participate, I set a time and date for the interview that was convenient for the interviewee.

Given the sensitive and personal nature of my research topic, I turned to Ellis and Patti (2014) for additional guidance regarding compassionate interviewing. Ellis and Patti (2014) emphasize that the approach of compassionate interviewing is not only an interview technique,

but it is also a meaningful and intimate process. By allowing space and time for participants to delve into emotional and deeply personal experiences during the interview process, a collaborative journey of understanding emerges. Ellis and Patti (2014) discuss the importance of allowing interview conversation to go in the direction most natural, and in this way, interviews can become opportunities to uncover meanings that may otherwise be buried indefinitely.

Through a practice of deep listening, where the interviewer and participant are engaged in a mutually trusting, supportive, and open conversation, barriers between what participants may plan to discuss and the perhaps deeper emotional experiences can be broken down. This process allows for a more holistic understanding of the participants' experiences to be understood – or voiced (Ellis & Patti, 2014). This compassionate interview space facilitates a mutually safe space for interviewer and participant – where both can delve into intimate and emotional discussions with feelings of security and trust.

Research context. This study took place in a mid-sized Southeastern U.S. city in Tennessee and included participants who live directly in the city or in one of the adjacent cities that shares the same academic institutional system. Within this area, there are seven accredited academic institutions of higher education. Among these opportunities for seeking higher education, there are two community college, one public university, and four private universities or colleges. All of the institutions offer at least some level of ESL academic programming and adult learner support services. The participants in this study each attend a community college with enrollment averaging 11,000 students a year.

Additionally, a federally-sponsored refugee resettlement center operates in the main city center to aid in the resettlement process for newly-admitted refugee families. Thus far in the fiscal year 2019, Tennessee received 266 refugees for resettlement (U.S. Department State,

2019). The center also provides support to refugees in their first six months in the U.S. as they apply for government assistance in the form of a social security card, food stamps (if required), housing, transportation, and employment.

Data collection. Data collection in qualitative research is a process of gathering information that aids in deepening understanding regarding a research question (Given, 2016; Saldaña, 2016). As qualitative researchers wonder about observed or experienced social problems, for example, a scholar may develop a study focused on gathering information to help better understand the problem in order to facilitate change (Ellingson, 2013). Varied data collection methods exist and co-exist within qualitative research (Saldaña, 2016).

A study can utilize one method, such as interviews, or a study can employ multiple methods depending on the research design and how best to gain the information needed to answer research questions. Interviews, for example, are designed according to the research topic, questions, and purpose (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview conversation may also naturally uncover unanticipated insights to promote further inquiry (Ellis & Patti, 2014). Qualitative interviews are identifiable by the overall nature of the interview process (Saldaña, 2016). The format for a qualitative interview can vary from highly structured, where a pre-determined set of questions are asked in a specific order, to unstructured, where the interviewer begins with a list of topics for potential exploration during the interview conversation (Ellis & Patti, 2014; Given, 2016, Riessman, 2008). The objectives of qualitative interviews are to gather detailed information from the participant about the participant's feelings, experiences, and interpretation of personal experiences (Ellis & Patti, 2014; Riessman, 2008; Saldaña, 2016).

Utilizing a narrative framework, I conducted semi-structured narrative interviews with a sample from the relevant population. A semi-structured interview is characterized by flexibility

and a conversational nature (Ellis & Patti, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview was guided by a list of questions, but the questions and wording were flexible in the case that a specific topic warranted further discussion. For instance, the interview questions sometimes prompted the participant to begin discussing a particular situation relative to the question. In this case, I had the flexibility to pursue the line of discussion further to gain a more holistic understanding of how the participant made meaning of the experience.

Narrative interviews are intended to elicit participant stories about life experiences (Roulston, 2013). A goal is to gather information about what the participant feels is most important or meaningful about their life experience. Ideally, a narrative interview will facilitate an environment where participants can elaborate on how they make meaning of their experiences and how this has impacted their life (Ellis & Patti, 2014; Roulston, 2013). Given the sensitive nature of this research topic, I anticipated that participants might talk about emotionally-charged and sometimes traumatic experiences. In order to make every effort to ensure the well-being of the participants, I created a handout with a list of support services to give to the participants at the end of the interview (See Appendix C).

The semi-structured narrative interviews in this study were conducted face-to-face during one, one-on-one 60-90-minute session. During the interviews, I took field notes and reflective memos and audio-record the meetings in order facilitate an accurate analysis of the data (Roulston, 2013). I constructed an interview guide (See Appendix B) and an informed consent form (See Appendix A) to conduct the interview according to institutional IRB policies. In the interview guide, I began with general demographic questions such as: where were you born, what is your gender identity, and how old are you? Then, I started asking questions about their experience coming to the U.S. as a refugee and about their educational journey in the U.S. The

interview guide included nine questions, with several supporting prompts that could be used with each question to further discussion during the interview. I asked questions such as: Tell me about how you came to live in the U.S.? I will also ask follow-up questions, as needed, such as: what was the experience like? And, how did that make you feel? All research was conducted according to the University of Tennessee Knoxville (UTK) IRB approval.

Data analysis. Saldaña (2016) encourages that data analysis can flux during the research process from the factual, conceptual, and interpretive. Since qualitative research methods involve an emergent process, where research processes may shift to accommodate new understandings and ideas gleaned from the research process, the process of data analysis may also develop past the initial research design – dependent on what emerges from the data (Ellis & Patti, 2014; Given, 2016; Riessman, 2008; Saldaña, 2016). Saldaña (2016) points out that the world is full of patterns - from the flowers in the natural world all the way to the information collected during a research study in the interview transcripts, research field notes, and documents.

A discussion about data analysis stems from this metaphor and builds on the natural human desire for creating order and seeking to understand patterns in the world (Saldaña, 2016). Ellingson (2013) encourages researchers to wonder and accept ownership of the research process. As scholars consider the research process, Ellingson (2013) emphasizes the value of reflective thinking about decisions regarding content, language, and style and advocates that scholars remain open to exploring new ideas, opportunities, and relationships, while always maintaining a respectful awareness of the complexity of the process.

One way to analyze data is through a coding process, where patterns of ideas, language, or content are identified and categorized to expose common themes within data. Importantly, the same research data may be coded in a multitude of ways depending on the researcher

positionality, research purpose, and academic focus (Ellis & Patti, 2014; Given, 2016; Riessman, 2008; Saldaña, 2016). In other words, there is not a single right way to code and analyze data. In fact, scholars encourage researchers to reach beyond traditional methods of data analysis with the goal of achieving the highest quality, accuracy, and integrity in research (Ellis & Patti, 2014; Given, 2016; Riessman, 2008; Saldaña, 2016).

In this study, after completing the interviews, I transcribed the audio recordings and conducted a narrative analysis of the interview transcripts in order to expose threads or themes in the telling which can facilitate better understanding of the participants' experiences (Riessman, 2008). Narrative analysis can include varied methods, including thematic, structural, or performative. A common thread is that the story and the storyteller are central to analysis (Riessman, 2008; Saldaña, 2016). Narrative analysis involves a focus on the temporal and contextual nature of storytelling (Polkinghorne, 1988; Saldaña, 2016).

During the data collection process, I transcribed interviews within one to two days of the interview. I transcribed the first three interviews and hired an academic transcription service to assist in the transcription of the final six interviews. This allowed me to begin the initial two rounds of coding as I continued with additional interviews. As qualitative scholars support, it can be helpful to begin coding throughout the interview process so that the researcher can determine when data saturation occurs (Dworkin, 2012; Given, 2016; Riessman, 2008; Saldaña, 2016). Data saturation refers to a point when no new information or redundant information is coming from participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Dworkin, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Saturation can also be considered when the researcher notes that data is becoming repetitive or when new data does not spark any relevant theoretical or conceptual insights (Dworkin, 2012; Riessman, 2008). In this study, after beginning the coding process for participant number eight, I began to

notice that no new themes or ideas emerged. I continued to interview one more participant to ensure that I achieved data saturation in this study in order to fully explore the phenomenon in question.

I utilized a four-stage narrative coding process, including the following steps: 1) Initial review of data and in vivo coding; 2) Open coding with temporal and structural coding; 3) Chunk coding, linking streams of similar ideas; 4) Review of data making additional memos. From this coding process, I identified themes from the narratives which address the research questions. In the initial review process, I read the interview transcripts and made notations about statements that stand-out to me in the transcript. I looked for text where participants appear to make clear statements about how they were feeling or how an experience was meaningful. I also used in vivo coding, where I noted specific phrases the participant used to make powerful or meaningful statements. This coding process highlighted the interaction between the participant experience and the re-telling of experience to consider how the participant chooses to retell their story through emotional language, linguistic style, or expressive gestures.

Then, in the second coding process, I re-read the transcripts and noted when the participants indicated a change in their life stage or developmental process. In this stage, I made notes when participants discussed an experience that made them aware of their role in their family structure or societal system. This type of notation, for instance, could refer to a change in employment, leadership role in a family unit, or a change in educational level. This coding process facilitated a better understanding of how participants view themselves in their environment.

In the next round of coding, I re-read the transcripts while chunk coding, where I strove to link streams of similar ideas (Saldaña, 2016). In this chunk coding phase, I identified chunks

of text from the transcripts which reflected overarching ideas or experiences shared in each interview. During this phase, chunk coding helped to illuminate main ideas regarding the participant's meaning-making process. I looked for phases which reflected main ideas from each participant as they shared their narrative.

In the final stage of coding, I re-read the transcripts and notated any remaining connections found between the participant narratives and the research questions for this study that helped to better understand the participants' life experiences and how they constructed new ideas and meaning from experiences. I also paid attention to prior coding notations to consider possible alternative views of data with consideration of the context and positionality of the participant. Through this exhaustive coding process, this study was able to gain in-depth data to facilitate a rich description of the participants' experiences and meaning-making process.

After assembling the notations and memos collected through the coding process, I compared and contrasted the data from each interview transcript to find common threads or themes among participant narratives. I also looked for inconsistencies among the interview data, as these differences can also help to understand the impact of the intersectional nature of human experiences. From this construction of themes in the data, I again reviewed the data to consider ways that the themes may relate to each other. The themes that emerged became key points in the research findings. Throughout this process, I continuously reflected on the research questions and context. This attentiveness to the research questions facilitated a focused analysis of data.

One of the benefits of narrative analysis is that it is flexible to be used as a method to identify and interpret themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As Braun and Clarke (2006) discuss, a theme isolates key facets from the data in relation to the research questions. By familiarizing myself with the interview transcripts via multiple readings, memo-ing, and the

coding process, the thematic analysis facilitated an in-depth exploration of my research data. I also followed the advice of Braun and Clarke (2006) as they emphasize the importance of returning to the initial research questions throughout the analysis process, in order to make connections and sense-make throughout the process.

Considering the experience of adult refugees as they seek access to education, it is important to acknowledge the possibility for multiple realities. Reality can flux and change over time and among diverse individuals (Derrida, 2004). Qualitative research methods are an ideal framework for this study as they allow for an in-depth analysis of individuals' experiences. Narrative inquiry provides a method of sense-making as this study seeks to illuminate the life experience of adult refugees as they seek access to education. Cassell and Symon (2011) highlight narrative inquiry as a means to make sense of social context through the life stories of others. Simultaneously, it is important to be mindful that life stories also reflect the status quo – the current political, economic, and social environment – the existing power structures (Cassell & Symon, 2011).

Using narrative inquiry, this study focused on the ways that refugees in the Southeastern U.S. communicate their experiences through storytelling. As Bhattacharya (2017) explains, in narrative research, the story becomes the data used for analysis. So, the stories serve as the phenomena of inquiry which I will use to seek to understand the refugees' experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ellis & Patti, 2014).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness can be understood as the level of quality and authenticity in qualitative research (deMarrais, 2004). Trustworthiness is vital in qualitative research in order to establish credibility (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; deMarrais, 2004). While developing a research study, it

is important for researchers to be methodical in each step of research design. By demonstrating the intentionality of each step of research design, trustworthiness begins to build in the study since the researcher can show how each part of the research design was thoughtfully and carefully considered in relation to the goal of the study (Yin, 2015).

In discussing qualitative research trustworthiness, scholars seek to determine the credibility of research findings. Credibility refers to how confident the researcher is in the truth of the study findings (Given, 2016). Credibility can also refer to being able to demonstrate the authenticity of data sources (Yin, 2015). Further, in qualitative research, trustworthiness can sometimes be determined by providing rich descriptions generated from data (deMarrais, 2004).

These rich descriptions can facilitate a deeper understanding of the participant experience, while also demonstrating the authenticity of data sources. The researcher is also seeking to show transferability, which refers to how the study findings could relate to similar phenomena, places, people, or contexts (deMarrais, 2004; Given, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In other words, the researcher is interested in showing how the study could be relevant to a broader population or serve to aid in a better understanding of a certain experience to further sociocultural growth (Given, 2016).

Additionally, since qualitative research seeks to understand human experiences, researcher bias is a key topic of debate (Polkinghorne, 1988; Saldaña, 2016). While attending to researcher subjectivity during the research design process, a central goal is to mediate the impact of bias during a study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, by considering the researcher subjectivity, the data analysis process becomes more transparent since the researcher can discuss subjectivity clearly in the context of the study (Polkinghorne, 1988; Saldaña, 2016). To strive for trustworthiness in this study, I utilized triangulation, member

checks, researcher field notes and memos, and peer debriefing. I also reflected on my subjectivity statement to consider my assumptions and positionality in regard to this study.

Triangulation. Triangulation in qualitative research is a practice of seeking quality by combining different perspectives and considering them against the theoretical foundation, context, and purpose of a study (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, & Neville, 2014; Flick, 2007; Patton, 1999). Essentially, triangulation refers to developing converging lines of inquiry to add credibility to research findings (Yin, 2015). Typically, triangulation refers to the use of three sources to verify information (Flick, 2007; Yin, 2015). For example, a study may gather data about a particular phenomenon from a document, a personal interview, and an image so that the accounts can be compared to verify consistency and inconsistencies in the account. In this way, a more accurate report of the phenomenon is reported.

Triangulation goes beyond what is possible to verify when using a single approach or method to interpret data and ideas (Flick, 2007; Given, 2016). Further, triangulation aids to expand the scope of data that is gathered to gain a more holistic picture of the phenomenon studied (Given, 2016). In this study, I used triangulation by comparing interview data from the participants, examining documents relative to the participant experiences, analyzing interview transcripts, and studying my research field notes.

Member checks. I also conducted member checks following each interview transcription. After each interview was transcribed, I sent a password protected file to the participant and asked for their review of the data within seven days. If I did not have a response from them within seven days, I informed the participants that no response would be understood as approval of the transcript. I asked the participants to confirm if they believe I captured our conversation accurately during the interview. While member checks are often relied to establish

trustworthiness in qualitative research, specific standards of practice are not consistent across literature (Kornbluh, 2015; Saldaña, 2016). Therefore, it becomes important to consider the characteristics and context of a study in order to promote trustworthiness through a member check system appropriate for the specific study population and context (Kornbluh, 2015).

In the context of my study, it was important for me to offer to talk with the participants again in person if they had questions about the interview transcript. Since English was not the first language of the participants, some terminology or vocabulary could create confusion in this process. In order to mediate this potential issue, I offered to meet with the participants again in person to review the transcripts during the member check process. I received responses from five of the nine participants, each verifying that they agreed with the transcript of our conversation.

Field notes. Another method used for trustworthiness was to maintain field notes throughout the research process (Given, 2016; Roulston, 2013). Field notes have been an aspect of qualitative research since the 1900s, when early researchers conducted ethnographic research in anthropology (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Historically, field notes were seen as the private thoughts and experiences of the researchers – thus, the notes were kept private and apart from the data analysis process (Given, 2016). Then in the 1980s, nurses began using their patient notes as an extra layer of data considered useful to analysis a research problem (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). From this point forward, field notes have served a key tools in qualitative data analysis to provide rich descriptions of participant experiences. Field notes also add contextual data by offering researcher observations about the environment including the sights, smells, and sounds present (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

Field notes also aid to encourage the researcher to reflect on subjectivities and biases in relation to the study (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). I wrote about my perceptions and

experiences related to adult refugees in the form of memos. By noting my reactions, thoughts, and ideas during the research process, I was able to understand what ideas are coming from me and when ideas are directly linked to data collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Roulston, 2013).

Through my field notes, I kept record of participant facial expressions, gestures, and body language which added to the context of the interviews (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). I also used field notes to reflect on my subjectivity throughout the interview process. I recorded my thoughts and reactions to participant expressions in the form of research memos, which helped me realize when ideas were coming from me and my beliefs and when ideas stemmed directly from the participant narratives. Through this reflective practice, I maintained awareness of my subjectivity and how my beliefs, experiences, and values may impact my research process (Given, 2016; Roulston, 2013).

Peer debriefing. Peer debriefing involves a collaboration between the researcher and peers who are not invested in the research topic in order to consider the role of researcher subjectivity in the data analysis process (Hoover et al., 2018; Lub, 2015; Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Additionally, peer debriefing can follow a systematic process, where the peer or peer group objectively reviews the research design in relation to the data analysis to identify inconsistencies (Lub, 2015). Through the perspective of outsiders to the research, research findings can be evaluated based on the collected data without the interference of personal investment in the research findings (Hoover et al., 2018; Lub, 2015).

During the data analysis process in this study, I collaborated with my dissertation committee chair to ask for his review and feedback about my coding process. A goal for this peer debriefing process was to further check the influence of my subjectivity and to evaluate my data analysis process for accuracy and consistency.

As Morrow (2005) encourages, attention to trustworthiness in qualitative research is vital to ensure credibility in the field. Through use of triangulation, member checks, research field notes, and peer debriefing I paid careful attention to subjectivity, accuracy, and credibility in order to establish trustworthiness (Given, 2016; Roulston, 2013).

Positionality and subjectivity in narrative inquiry. Several concepts of qualitative research are also important to understand prior to moving forward in research, including the *insider/outsider* phenomenon and *subjectivity*. The insider/outsider, or emic/etic, phenomenon of qualitative research is an essential consideration when undertaking a qualitative study (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Emic, or insider, perspective refers to the perspective of the researcher as a cultural insider in the study context. On the other end of the spectrum is the etic, or outsider, perspective referring to the researcher perspective as a cultural outsider in the study context (Ellis & Patti, 2014; Given, 2016; Johnson-Bailey, 2004).

The emic perspective facilitates a deep exploration of a culture from the perspective of someone who is a member of the participants' culture, thus adding an internalized perspective that may only be possible to obtain as someone from within the context. The etic perspective, on the other hand, allows a researcher to add insights about the context that would only be possible as someone who is an outsider to the culture (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). This dynamic could also be understood by considering the difference in how you would tell a story if you were a part of the storyline, versus how you would tell a story if you were watching the story happen, or gazing upon the story in progress without participating in the story (Johnson-Bailey, 2004).

The emic/etic spectrum of researcher perspective can also shift and flux throughout the research process. Bhattacharya (2017) discusses how taking on the role of 'researcher' positions the researcher as an outsider, at least to some extent, even if the researcher is a member of the

participants' culture. This dynamic can create an imbalance in perceptions of power that could influence data collection and observational outcomes. Therefore, it is essential to consider and reflect on the emic-etic spectrum throughout the research process.

Another important concept to explore when designing and conducting research is subjectivity. Subjectivities offer an opportunity for the researcher to explain the research context from a particular lens while also informing how the researcher constructs knowledge and understanding about a phenomenon (Peshkin, 1988). Subjectivity statements describe the researcher's positionality, which also informs the research work (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Subjectivities, according to Schwandt (2015), are created from life experience, including conscious and unconscious assumptions about reality.

Peshkin (1988) adds that subjectivities also vary based on timing, new experiences, and reflection on prior experiences. Although subjectivities are not static, they are omnipresent throughout the research process (Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Peshkin, 1988). Therefore, researchers need to be consistently seeking out their subjectivity so that the research is not shaped by subjectivity over research content (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Peshkin, 1988).

With an understanding of the cyclical interaction and influence of the personal and collective experience, a qualitative researcher can seek a holistic understanding of a person's lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). As previously discussed, the researcher is an instrument, meaning that the researcher can utilize personal experiences or perceptions in order to interpret information gathered from interviews, observations, and so on (Stake, 2010). By considering my subjectivity in relation to my desire to seek to understand lived experiences, it is essential to consider my personal and my participants' context, power structures, and positionality.

Reflecting on the importance of considering the emic/etic spectrum and subjectivity during research, I now offer my subjectivity statement in relation to my research focus.

Subjectivity statement. Reflecting on my 17-year career in International Education along with my experiences living outside the U.S., I critically reflect on my positionality on the emic/etic spectrum in relation to my research. Since I am personally invested in working toward a more equitable social, economic, and academic environment for international and immigrant populations, I am cognizant of the need to search out my subjectivity for the duration of my research. My research purpose is to seek a better understanding of the experience of adult refugee learners as they navigate higher education in the United States. I propose to explore the influence of adult refugees' prior life experiences, immigration status, and ethnicity on the transition to higher education following resettlement in the United States. By better understanding the refugee experience, adult education practitioners and community members could potentially better mediate the impact of marginalization on refugee adult learners.

As I consider my life experiences in order to better understand my research perspective, I revisit a time of exploration, realization, and globalization of my worldview. I was raised by a single mother, in a lower-middle class household in the Southeastern U.S. We did not have a lot of material goods, but my mother's persistence and hard work as an elementary-school teacher ensured that our basic needs were met. My childhood experiences instilled a sense of independence and belief that I can survive through hardships as long as I persevere and am resourceful. Since my mother's family lived abroad during her youth, she also wanted to broaden her children's understanding of varied cultures and belief systems.

Our home was often a stop along the way for international students, scholars, and refugees who visited our city. Through our visitors' storytelling and shared spaces, I was

learning more than I realized at the time about our connection as human beings in the world.

With these values at my core, I have always been passionate about advocating for those whose voices are silenced or marginalized in our society. These prior life experiences also further my intercultural understandings and afford me insight into how to facilitate success and well-being for multicultural students.

Further, I understand that I am fortunate in my education, as I have had consistent access to higher education in my adult life, both professionally and personally. This participation in the higher education environment affords me certain insights and knowledge that impacts and supports my research process. As I continue in my research, I remain aware of my prior knowledge and how it may influence my perceptions. I feel significant empathy and compassion for refugees and am passionate about advocating for social justice and educational equity for marginalized populations. Given how these personal motivations intertwine with my academic identity, I delve intentionally into prior literature and scholarship in order to gain a more holistic understanding of the refugee experience in relation to my research agenda.

I am a college-educated, working class, American female. I am a wife, a daughter, a student, and an ally. I am a piece of all those who raised me. I believe people are made of many pieces, layers built upon our life experiences, framed by our histories and beliefs. I believe in equity; whereas, every person should have equal opportunities and people should strive to build mutual understandings and remain open-minded to new ideas and sharing ideas. Each person is an individual, part of a culture system, with varying beliefs and ways of seeing and experiencing the world. I do not wear blinders to the truth; I want to see what is unjust in our world in order to know what barriers exist and better understand how to productively resist. My epistemology is grounded in social constructivism, as I believe that humans construct knowledge about reality

through social and structural interactions. As a scholar, I believe it is vital to consider varied perspectives and seek to understand each version of reality while striving to gain a holistic understanding of the implications of diverse perspectives.

Fahie (2014) discusses the importance of considering the researcher's interests and well-being alongside the participant's interests and well-being. When conducting research on sensitive or emotionally-charged experiences, researchers are challenged to remain professionally distanced from the content (Fahie, 2014). As Fahie (2014) relayed, scholars may walk a tightrope between our passion for the topic, belief in the importance of the participant's voice, and need to maintain an ethical and professional distance from intervening in the participant's life.

Scholars must develop and refine self-awareness in the context of qualitative research. I believe that I can do my best to interpret what I learn from others, but my interpretations can never be completely objective. Scholars' experiences influence data interpretations. As I consider my subjectivity in relation to my research focus on adult refugees' life experiences, I find a web of relationships that expose a pattern weaving my personal, professional, and academic personas into a research agenda.

Limitations

Limitations for this study include the restriction to a specific region of the U.S. Since educational access and social support services may vary among states, adult refugee learners in other states may have experiences that vary from the participants in this study. This study took place in Tennessee, where the public community college system offers free tuition for adults who have not previously obtained a college degree. This program can impact the ability for adult refugees to access and persist in a college degree program. Consequently, the participants in this study may provide data that is region-specific.

Another limitation of this study is my positionality as a professional within the higher education system in the same region where the study took place. To avoid a conflict of interest or possible tainting of the research data, I did not include certain adult refugee students in the study due to pre-existing and on-going academic and personal counseling interactions. Due to the support and guidance I provide to this cohort of students, I was concerned about introducing a conflict of interest during the research process. This exclusion may have caused the study to miss additional rich data that could have added to the research findings.

Chapter Summary

This chapter addressed the study methodology, including the methods that will be used for participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 3 also included a discussion of qualitative research design, trustworthiness, researcher positionality and subjectivity, and the researcher's subjectivity statement. Chapter 4 will present the study findings. Then, Chapter 5 will discuss the research findings, implications of the study, and make recommendations for future research.

Chapter 4

Findings

This study focused on the experiences of adult refugee learners in community colleges in the Southeastern U.S. The previous chapters provided a background of the study with an overview of related literature, including a focus on the positionality of adult refugees within the U.S. social and cultural environment relative to higher education and English as a second language learners. The second chapter provided a comprehensive literature review on adult refugee learner characteristics, adult education theories and practices relevant for adult refugee learners, an overview of the U.S. refugee resettlement process, the importance and role of English language education for adult refugees, and a discussion of social equity and justice in reference to adult refugee learners. Then, Chapter 3 addressed the study methodology, including the methods that will be used for participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 3 also included a discussion of qualitative research design, trustworthiness, researcher positionality and subjectivity, and the researcher's subjectivity statement.

This chapter begins with a review of the data collection and analysis process. Then, a narrative introduction of each participant provides an overarching view of the positionality of each participant. These introductions will facilitate a deeper understanding of the prior life experiences of each participant and aid in understanding the context for adult refugee students. Then, this paper will discuss the study findings. This chapter will end with a study conclusion.

Summary of Data Collection and Analysis

Using network selection, I interviewed nine participants for this study. After discussing the purpose and structure of the study with participants, we agreed on a time and place to meet for the interview. The interviews took place in a private study room at a library convenient for

each participant. With a narrative framework, I conducted semi-structured narrative interviews using the interview guide in Appendix B. The interviews were one-on-one and face-to-face. The average interview time was 60 minutes, with the shortest interview taking 45 minutes and the longest interview lasting 80 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded and I took field notes throughout each session. The field notes included observations of the participant gestures, facial expressions, and non-verbal emotional cues – such as deep breaths, sighs, crying, laughter, and other similar expressive actions.

Before starting the interview recording, I initiated small-talk with the participants with a goal to foster a welcoming and trusting space for the interview. As Roulston (2013) encourages, narrative interviews are intended to elicit participant life stories. Ideally, a narrative interview will facilitate a space where participants can remember and share life experiences while considering how they make meaning of the experiences. Narrative interview spaces become conducive for participant reflection and meaning-making on how experiences have impacted their lives (Ellis & Patti, 2014; Roulston, 2013).

After conducting member checks and reviewing field notes and interview transcripts after interview nine, there was evidence of data saturation. At that point, I focused on the data analysis process. As discussed in Chapter 3, I utilized a four-stage narrative coding process in this study, including the following steps, as recommended by Riessman (2008) and Saldaña (2016): 1) Initial review of data and in vivo coding; 2) Open coding with temporal and structural coding; 3) Chunk coding, linking streams of similar ideas; and 4) Review of data making additional memos. The first stage of coding took 30 hours to complete. The second stage of coding was completed in 40 hours. Then, the third stage of coding lasted close to 45 hours. The fourth and final review of data took an additional 40 hours. In total, the coding process involved 155 hours of work over

the course of one month. I worked on the coding process approximately six hours each day during this time.

From this coding process, I first compiled a list of codes for each participant. Then, I compared codes among participants. After identifying commonalities among the participant interview codes, I grouped the codes into categories of overarching topics. From this stage, I further narrowed the categories and grouped the codes into main themes. These themes were drawn from the participant narratives and were used to address the research questions.

Throughout the data analysis process, I reflected on my theoretical framework. I utilized critical theory, intersectionality, transformative learning, and social cognitive theory to guide this narrative inquiry process. As I considered the participant narratives, these adult learning theories facilitated a deep exploration of the adult refugee student experiences revealed in this study.

Narrative Introduction of Participants

This study included nine participants, as detailed in Table 1. The participants were recruited using purposeful network sampling methods (Roulston, 2011; Saldaña, 2016). This table includes the participant pseudonym, country of birth, summary of pathway to the U.S., age of arrival in the U.S., and the participant age at the time of the study interview.

The participants shared their life histories prior to coming to the U.S. as refugees. These life histories facilitate a better understanding of the participant experiences with cross-cultural transitions, education-seeking, and motivations in establishing a life in the U.S. The participant experiences share some common ground, while also exposing the diversity among individual refugee journeys.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Country of Birth	Path to U.S.	Age of Arrival	Current Age
Ahmed	Syria	Refugee in Jordan (1 year) UNHCR program to U.S.	17	22
Deena	Iraq	Refugee in Jordan (3 years) UNICEF program to U.S.	18	24
Frederic	Congo	Refugee camp in Uganda (17 years); IOM program to U.S.	19	22
Ibrahim	Iraq	Obtained help by going to US Embassy	33	37
Jamal	Syria	Crossed border into Jordan to appear at US Embassy for assistance	20	24
Maryam	Iraq	Obtained help by going to US Embassy	43	48
Rabby	Burundi	Refugee camp in Tanzania (10+ years); USAID program to U.S.	19	23
Salma	Palestine	Obtained help from the UNHCR program to U.S.	18	29
Sarina	Iraq	Obtained help by going to US AID	31	34

Ahmed. Ahmed was born and lived in Syria until he was 16 years old when his family fled to Jordan to seek safety from war and violent civil unrest. Ahmed's father was killed by explosions in their city in Syria, which led to conflict among their family. His father's side of the family began to harass them for financial support. His father was providing financial support to the extended family members in Syria since he had a higher paying job prior to the war. After his death, the family members began to threaten Ahmed and his mother with more violence if they did not find a way to continue this support. He explained, "literally all my family, they start treating us, like, in a bad, bad way because we couldn't give them the money that we used to give them."

After living in Jordan for one year, Ahmed and his mother and sister were approved to come to the U.S. through a United Nations refugee program. His family continued to receive threats from their family while in Jordan, so they were happy with the news of the possibility for safety in the U.S. His family was also nervous and scared about this move, since they did not know English and had only heard rumors about the U.S. and did not know what was going to happen to them. Ahmed discussed his role as the head of the household since his father's death. Even though he was still a teenager, he now was making decisions about the future of the family. He was considered the caretaker, the provider, and the protector of his mother and sister. He talked about how much pressure he felt to take care of his family. He shared, "it's my mom and my sister, you know, I'm the guy, you know, so I have to protect them, there is no one to help us - it's a different language, different culture." Ahmed arrived in the U.S. when he was 17 years old and was 22 at the time of our interview.

Deena. Deena was born in Iraq and then she, her mother, and younger brother moved to Jordan when she was 15 years old to flee the war and ongoing violence in their home country. Since they lived in Jordan due to the war in their home country, they were required to apply for refugee status through a United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) program. Deena explained that the UNICEF program required the family to complete an interview process lasting three years. The first step in the interview process was for each family member to tell their story to the organization:

You go and tell your story. You originally came from a country that had war. Why you escaped there? Why you came here? Why you want to go to the U.S.? So the first thing you normally tell them, it's like how hard it is to live back there and the original country.

Deena explained that while the family was waiting for the UNICEF decision, her father went back to Iraq to check on their home and farmland. She paused for a moment before she shared how he was killed during his trip home by a bomb outside their house. She shared that, after her father was killed, she and her family had to be especially cautious to protect themselves. Even though they were in Jordan, they were fearful that the Iraqi government was watching them and would not want them to survive and tell the story of the hardships in their home country. Deena characterized the interview process as a long and frustrating experience:

When you go there to the interview you wait for three, four hours, you cancel everything for that day. So it's not that easy thing like, oh, we have an interview, you just come in and come out. No, it's like you wait with all these people that you might see them again in the United States. You asked them and each one of us had a different story and it's sad story.

While in Jordan, Deena completed high school and began to learn the English language. She wanted to start college but delayed her admission since they were waiting to be placed in another country as refugees. During the interview process, Deena talked about how families would put everything on hold while they wait for a decision. There was a fear that if she started college in Jordan, for example, UNICEF would think that the family was doing well and was no longer in danger. She described this time as a “waiting game” where they tried to live day by day as they hoped for approval to move to a safe new home country. Finally, when the family received a phone call that they were approved as refugees for the U.S., the family was told to prepare to leave in 12 days. Deena’s mother was scared to leave, due to the fear of being able to survive in a new language and culture. Deena explained that:

I was happy. I was like packing like everything in bags. And when she came she kept taking everything out. She took one bag for all of us, for three of us. She said we can be back within a month. We are gonna go to the U.S., see it and then we’ll be back. Because I’m not gonna lose you. So, it was the mentality that TV transferred to us, it was like people over there are always seeing things like rape, like open-minded people who all they care about is drinking and sex. And I can tell you that is how we see it.

The family travelled to the U.S. with one suitcase and arrived in New York to begin the resettlement process. At the time of the interview for this study, Deena was 24 years old and graduated with her Associate of Science Degree in the previous academic semester.

Frederic. Frederic was born in the Congo, although he does not remember much from this time since his mother and father fled the country when he was two years old. Due to ongoing civil unrest and violence in the Congo, his parents decided they had to leave to find a safe place to protect him after his elder brother was killed during an attack on his village. The family spent

weeks walking through the bush, which he described as a “dense forest with a lot of wildlife” until reaching the Uganda border.

The Ugandan government offered them protection and they lived in a refugee camp there for 17 years. Frederic expressed, “Yeah, so the whole of my life was in the camp.” While in the camp, Frederic’s parents had five more children. Frederic goes on to explain what life was like in the camp:

It was really hard, because there is no place to stay. They just stay, that’s in a bush or in the forest, sometimes in tents. They help with food for porridge. But life was really hard. The problem is, in the camp, you find like all those people there are refugees. So nobody knows anything. And you're not allowed to go outside and see where other people are.

You stay in your camp. Make your own market. Make your own place of worship.

Since Frederic was the oldest male child in his family, he was allowed to go outside the camp to the local school. However, he experienced discrimination from the other students. They would tell him to “go back to your country – what are you waiting for here?” He talked about feeling very out of place and different from the other children. When he traveled to the school, he would see houses, cars, buses, and buildings that were “so different” than what he knew from living in the camp. When Frederic was 19 years old, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) granted the family refugee admission to the U.S. after each member of the family went through a year of individual interviews and medical treatment. He explained:

They interview the family, they interview husband and wife, children in groups, and then one by one. For several times. And then they're like if you're up to six months, you have to go back. And then somethings, they want to know if you still remember the things, because they want to make sure what you're telling them matches what they already have.

So they want to make sure you're not lying to them.... They give a lot of treatment.

We've been getting treatment for a year. Because that kind of life we've been through, many of us had injuries. So they make sure they give you enough treatment, so when you get here, you'll be able to make a life.

Frederic and his family of seven arrived in Texas in 2016. At the time of our interview, Frederic was 22 years old.

Ibrahim. Ibrahim is from Iraq and decided he and his family had to flee their country to seek safety from violent unrest in the country and threats to their personal safety. Ibrahim worked for the U.S. government in Iraq to investigate human rights violations. He explained:

They offered me a job, I used to work for them for five years. But when some individuals, some extremists knew what is the nature of our job, they started threatening me and even my family, everyone. Because what we did over there, we were interviewing the victims directly. I mean, or relative of the victims who has been arrested for no reasons, tortured in the jail, been in the jail for a long time for no reason, their house burned down to the ground, their children had been killed in front of them. I mean, when we were interviewing the victims, collecting the data, we found that there's a lot of serial criminal and perpetrator from the past, now they got authority in the government and they are politicians. So when they knew that what we do, they started by threatening us.

Ibrahim worked and lived in the Kurdish region in Iraq, which also made him vulnerable to violence stemming from religious persecution and marginalization of a minority group in Iraq. When the threats of violence against Ibrahim and his family began to increase in severity, he decided it was time to seek safety elsewhere. Ibrahim took his wife and two young children to

the nearest U.S. Embassy in Jordan when he was 33 years old to seek protection. The family was granted refugee status due to their circumstances and after clearing the security clearance process, travelled to the U.S. At the time of the interview for this study, Ibrahim was 37 years old.

Jamal. Jamal is from Syria and was forced to flee his country when he was 20 years old due to war and threats to his personal safety. Jamal was studying at a University in Damascus, the capital city of Syria, which was five hours from his home city of Aleppo. Jamal was travelling to visit his family on a bus one weekend when he was 19 years old and the Syrian Army stopped the bus for a “security check.” He explained:

I was going back to my home, and they just stopped me on the way. They made us all go out of the bus. They picked few people for no reason, you know? They told us like who going to defense that Syria? We're studying. He said, "Well, we're not the only people who going to die."

Jamal explained that all of the people on the bus were students going home to visit their families. The officers loaded the thirty students onto a different bus, then took them by plane to another city where they were kept together in a small room for three to four days. On the last day he was there, his dad walked into the building. The army called the parents and were asking for money in exchange for the students' release. He remembers his dad on this day, “He was crying. I never seen him crying before we go there. But, for the first time, I saw him cry. Like he no say whatever. I got so sad. He's crying. I never seen him crying before.”

After Jamal and his dad returned to the family's home in Aleppo, Jamal was afraid to leave his house. Jamal and his father decided that it was time to escape from the country before Jamal was taken into the Army permanently, where both believed he would die due to the harsh

realities of the ongoing war in the country. His father found a man who he could hire to drive them to Lebanon using a system of bribes the driver had arranged with the army at the security check-points. Jamal talked about feeling very scared during this journey and not confident that they would survive.

When Jamal and his father made it to Lebanon, they tried to get into Jordan to seek help at the U.S. Embassy. After two flights to Jordan, they were permitted to enter the country. They were denied entry on the first try due to a lack of having a return flight booked. Similar to Maryam's family, he and his father went to the U.S. Embassy in Jordan to ask for protection. Given the threats to Jamal's personal safety, he was granted refugee status to go to the U.S. His father was offered a short-term visa for the U.S., to allow him to accompany Jamal to the U.S. for one month. Then, the father would be required to return to Syria. Jamal was 20 years old when he came to the U.S. and was 24 years old at the time of the interview for this study.

Maryam. Maryam is originally from Iraq, but fled her country with her husband and two young children when she was 42 years old due to receiving violent threats based on their religious and political identity. Maryam and her family were living in Bagdad when the Iraq war broke out and her husband was forced to flee to Syria for safety due to religious persecution. She was three-months-pregnant at this time and she had to continue to work to support the family in his absence. She talked about her travel to work by foot each day:

And I was pregnant, and I have to just walk in some dangerous area, because at that time, they blocked some streets to just to control these group of armed people. So I have to walk all the streets, just walking through-yes. When I'm pregnant. I remember it's the summer and it's hot. Oh my goodness. It's bad time.

After she had her first son, she talked about waking up one morning to find an oily mass on their kitchen floor and the front door open. She asked her neighbors about what happened and they told her it was a warning that they should leave. Maryam, her mother, and baby fled to Kurdistan to seek safety. Her husband met them in Kurdistan and they found a place to live, although there was no power or running water. After a few years, the area in Kurdistan also became unsafe due to violence and prejudice against Iraqi citizens. Maryam fled with her family to the nearest U.S. Embassy in Jordan to seek help and protection. Maryam and her family were granted protection from the U.S. government and permitted to enter the U.S. as refugees after completing a two-year screening process. Maryam was 48 at the time of the interview for this study.

Rabby. Rabby was born in Burundi, East Africa and lived in a refugee camp in Tanzania for over ten years before coming to the U.S. through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) refugee program. Rabby was around ten years old when the family had to flee ongoing violence in Burundi. He explained that life in the refugee camp was difficult, mainly because it was “like a transit, no one means to stay forever.” Everyone there was in the process of waiting for refugee placement in another country. He explains the refugee placement interview process:

To come here, it's long to come here, it's a long process so you have to submit your request and they have to interview you, it's kind of like five to six interviews and you have to pass each process if you fail, they will reject you. And once you pass you have to go through them and take medication and stuff and then you have to go to orientation. So, they can teach you a little bit about how the system works, house, rent, school, a little bit. But you kind of like don't get it 'til you are here.

After Rabby's family was approved to come to the U.S. as refugees, they began their two-day-long series flights to land in New York. Rabby's family includes his mother, younger brother and sister, and an older brother and sister, along with a niece. When I asked about his father, Rabby shared that this is the main reason the family finally left Burundi – his father was killed during an attack on their village. At the time of the interview for this study, Rabby was 23 years old.

Salma. Salma is from Palestine and came to the U.S. as a refugee when she was 18 years old due to ongoing economic instability and restrictions based on gender in her country. Salma married at 18 years of age while her Palestinian husband was studying in a U.S. university. She talked about how she did not plan to marry at that age, but she married in order to follow the religious traditions in her family's culture. She also believed that her marriage would help her continue in her education. Because of her marriage, Salma was granted refugee status to move to the U.S. However, Salma discussed how hard it was for her to leave her family in Palestine:

It was hard We had a big family there and we were used to seeing people every day.... Very bad. It was the worst feeling I have ever felt. I miss my family. I hope that they are here. But I feel like I'm lucky, because I have the best that I can have. Everything that my kids need is here, the best life, the best.... I think it's best for me and for them, because we can get the best education that.... The life is different. Everything is here.

When Salma moved to the U.S. she immediately sought ESL tutoring. She stressed how she felt it was “urgent” to improve her English to prepare for college. Salma was 29 at the time of our interview.

Sarina. Sarina is from Iraq and was 31 years old when she came to the U.S. and was 34 years old at the time of our interview. Sarina completed her Bachelor Degree in British Literature in Iraq and worked in the human resources field at an American company in Bagdad during the Iraq War. Sarina's husband also worked at the company as a graphic designer. She began studying English language in college and credits her English language proficiency with helping to build a successful career at the company in Iraq.

Because of the American military presence in Iraq following the Iraq War and ongoing conflict between the U.S. and Iraq, employees at the company experienced threats, violent attacks, and feared for their personal safety. She was told that some Iraqi citizens believed the employees were betraying the country by working for an American company. The attacks became increasingly intense and Sarina talked about several times when bombs were planted at the company.

Sarina and her husband were unsure about leaving Iraq due to their strong family ties, successful careers, and love for their country and culture. However, they began to feel increased pressure to leave as acts of violence against those working at the company intensified. Sarina decided to seek refugee relocation through USAID, the same organization that helped Rabby and his family. Sarina and her husband were granted refugee admission to the U.S. based on the threats to their personal safety and travelled to the U.S. in 2016.

By reflecting on the participant journeys, the participant views of the world are brought into focus. After knowing more about their past experiences, it can be easier to understand how they make meaning of experiences after resettling in the U.S. As Brockett (2015) emphasized, reflecting on the past can open a pathway to move forward with a better understanding of the

future. Additionally, prior life experiences can facilitate learning as adults build from past experiences.

All nine participants each left their country of birth in search of safety – safety from war, violence, personal threats, or terrorism. Many of the participants lost close family members due to armed conflict in their home country. The importance and centrality of family served as a thread that binds their narratives. As this study seeks to expose the meaning-making process for adult refugee learners, the importance of family relationships and the preservation of cultural traditions remains a constant source of motivation for the participants. The beginning of the participants' journey serves as a foundation as this study sought to facilitate a deeper understanding of how the adult refugee learners perceive and experience the world.

Themes from the Study

The narrative analysis of the interview transcripts revealed four key themes: a) seek to understand and be understood, b) bird in a cage, c) power of education, and d) there is only hope. Seek to understand and be understood includes the categories of language barrier, complex identities, and dualistic realities. Bird in a cage includes the categories of cultural adaptation, alternative reality, struggle to survive. Power of education includes the categories of pathway to success, help-seeking on campus, and impact of prior experiences. Finally, the theme of there is only hope includes the categories of it was like a dream, perception of refugees, experiences of discrimination. Table 2 shows how I came up with these themes from the coding process.

Within each theme, the cultural adaptation process impacted the participant experiences. The cultural nuances of the participant experiences are discussed within each of the four themes. The four themes were drawn from the interview data and constructed to summarize thematic

expressions from the participants. Examples of the coding and analysis process can be found in the code book excerpt in Appendix D.

Theme One: Seek to Understand and be Understood. The first theme that emerged from the participant narratives was *seek to understand and be understood*. This theme includes the categories of complex identities, language barrier, and dualistic realities. Seek to understand and be understood refers to the participants' experiences with coming to the U.S. and realizing the role and impact of English language acquisition during the adaptation process. This theme also addresses the participants' complex individual identities. For instance, some of the participants in this study identify themselves as: refugees, ESL learners, family-centered, multicultural, students, and professionals. In this way, the participants do not identify themselves as belonging to one specific categories of individuals – humans are complex and multilayered beings.

The nine participants in this study also experience dualistic realities, when a person's lived experience is interwoven and interacts with the social and cultural environment. In other words, the participants explained how they felt caught between what they understood and expected and what reality presented. All nine participants shared experiences related to the desire to understand and be understood as individuals during the resettlement process and while seeking access and opportunity in higher education in the U.S.

Complex identities. Each participant shared a unique life story and while some aspects of their experiences overlap based on their refugee status, each person expressed their individuality based on their family structure, belief system, and way of viewing the world. For instance, Deena, a 24-year-old refugee from Iraq, talks about relying on “blind faith” when she came to

Table 2

Examples of Coding Process

Themes	Categories	Codes
1) Seek to understand and be understood	a) language barrier b) complex identities c) dualistic realities	i) first challenge is the language; language equals connection ii) we are not just one thing; multiple sides to every person iii) between cultures; never know what to expect
2) Bird in a cage	a) cultural adaptation b) alternative reality c) struggle to survive	i) social and cultural capital; systems so different ii) same behavior, different outcome; I must be missing something iii) perseverance; persistence; safety v. home and knowing what to do to survive; fear v. glad to be here
3) Power of Education	a) pathway to success b) help-seeking on campus c) impact of prior experiences	i) education is a priority; education is pathway to survive and to success ii) empowerment through communication; I need people to know I am a refugee, then they will know how to help iii) prior knowledge to help survive; knowing past to see way forward
4) There is only hope	a) it was like a dream b) perception of refugees c) experiences of discrimination	i) hope for a better future; it was like a dream ii) seen as other/apart from society; always an outsider iii) discrimination based on race, ethnicity, immigration status; treated as not even a human being

the U.S. with her mother and younger brother six years ago. When the family entered the U.S., they lived with a sponsor family for several months until they could afford a private apartment. Deena describes her time with the sponsor family as “scary” and “stressful.” She talks about the man in the house as a “bad guy” who “beat his kids and wife on a daily basis.” She had tears welling in her eyes when she recalled her time at the home and shared how distraught she and her mother were in that environment. She said that she was especially upset because her family “was really peaceful, we always live a very peaceful life before.”

The experience living with the sponsor family further motivated her to seek independence for her family. Deena spoke “some low-level English” so she took a leadership role in her family upon arrival to the U.S. Her mother and younger brother did not speak or understand any English when they arrived. She recalls thinking “okay, so you take care of your tribe until we get to your final destination.” When she was in Jordan, she remembered thinking that when her family arrived in the U.S., everything would change for the better. However, soon after arriving in the U.S. she realized a new form of the same struggle for a better life was just beginning. She emphasized that she saw that the family had to go through an “ending to get a new beginning, but we are always between cultures – outsiders on the inside trying to get another new start.”

During the first two years of establishing a new home in the Southeastern U.S., Deena carried many identities. She was the head of the household, meaning that she served as the interpreter and translator for her family and took the leadership role as they sought employment, school enrollment for her younger brother, English language courses in the community, an apartment, and setting up all related household accounts – such as utility and telephone service. She was also a daughter, a sister, a young adult seeking her place in the world. Deena became a

student and a student leader on her community college campus. She identifies herself as a refugee and as many things beside “just being a refugee.”

Moving to consider the narrative for Rabby, who spent more than ten years in a refugee camp before coming to the U.S. four years ago, exposed how he focused on his identity as a refugee as a starting point – a place from which he moves forward to relay his perspective on life and opportunities in the U.S. He shared his experience with support from a local refugee agency when he arrived in his new home in the Southeastern U.S. His family’s case worker from the refugee agency met them at the airport and “gave them a nice welcome.” Rabby explained how the refugee agency helped his family during the resettlement process:

Before you come to the U.S., they [USAID] have to provide your file, your information to the case manager in the U.S. for them to receive you - for them to prepare for you – to prepare a house. They have to find you a house; they have to pay for a few months’ rent, and they have to help you apply for a few different cards – like, social security card, food stamps, and so on.

He shared how he felt that, in the beginning, he felt like he was “so new, everything and everyone is new.” From this perspective as “new” to the U.S., Rabby shares stories that provide windows into how he learned and adapted to life in a new country. Rabby often talked about how important his family is to him, as they have a strong bond formed through their shared life experience and journey to the U.S. His family appeared to be at the core of all that he does and serves as a motivating force in his endeavors. Rabby identifies as a refugee, a student, a family member, and as an English language learner. He manages competing priorities as he works full-time and goes to community college on a full-time basis.

Similarly, Ahmed, a 22-year-old refugee from Syria, shared his struggles to balance a full-time work and school schedule while also serving as the head of his household. Much like Deena, Ahmed took the role as head of household at a young age – after his father died when Ahmed was 13 years-old. When Ahmed arrived in the Southeast U.S. with his mother and younger sister, the family expected to receive support from the local refugee agency, as did Rabby’s family. However, Ahmed expressed frustration and disappointment as he reflected on this experience, as he felt that the refugee agency did not provide the help that he felt the family needed. He shared:

And we moved here and, like, we literally, like, had no one, no phones, no money, nothing. We have only once couch, and I remember it was like three frozen fish in the fridge with nothing to cook (with). No oil, nothing. Literally, two days only water and we got some candies from the airport. That’s all we had.

Ahmed began his narrative in this way, expressing a sense of loss – a loss in socioeconomic status and loss of social and cultural capital to aid him in providing for his family. Ahmed began to work full-time and gained access to school at a local community college, which I will expand upon at a later point as I discuss the participant experiences with higher education. Ahmed became an active member and vice president of the school’s multicultural student club. He identified himself as an optimistic person, despite many struggles in his life. He is dedicated to his family and education as he strives to build a strong foundation for his family in the U.S. Ahmed also identifies as a martial arts instructor, spending time teaching Tae Kwon Do at a local martial arts studio. Ahmed’s multidimensional identity as a leader, student, teacher, and refugee offers a lens into better understanding the complexity of adult refugee experiences. Each individual is a refugee, but they are also much more.

As Maryam shared her story, she also identified herself as a complex and multi-faceted person. She stated that “there are no one-sided human - everyone is complex – we have to look past stereotypes.” When she came to the Southeastern U.S. as a refugee from Iraq when she was 43-years-old, she travelled with her husband and two small children. She emphasized several times how her life revolves around her family and that all that she works to do is centered on helping advance her family’s future and opportunities. She shared her feelings about her experience coming to the U.S.:

So even though we think we are lucky, because they accept us as refugee, and you know that the first two years we have to work, and you are unknown. Just you are working with the unknown future. Because you don't know if they're going to accept you, or refuse you. You don't have anything back in your home. You just sell everything, and you left everything behind, so you want to start new future for you and for your kids, and it's so awful that you don't know the future.

Maryam talked about feeling like she is always in transition as she sought to establish a life in the U.S. She identifies as a person with an education and a career from Iraq, and so she struggled to make sense of why she could not find a job when she came to the U.S. She explains:

The other thing that when I applied for job here, they will not consider your experience in your country. This is the struggle that we have here once we came here, and as asylum or as refugee. So they ask you to start a new thing here. And even you will accept anything, only will keep your family survive.

When Maryam was able to enroll in a community college, she began to feel more hopeful for her future. She shared her feelings of empowerment through being a student while striving to manage her responsibilities as a mother, a full-time employee, and her desire to be involved in

her community. Maryam brought the importance of social inclusion and equity to the surface in regard to adult refugee students. Maryam carried her complex identity as an educated professional, a mother, and a refugee into the development of her identity as a student leader in community college. Through this convergence, she became a role model and advocate for other international and refugee learners on her campus.

In Salma's narrative, she also shared how important her family is to her life. She works to support and protect her two young children from feelings of instability as she and her husband work full-time and Salma goes to school part-time at a community college. Salma married and had her first child before she was 19 years-old. Since her husband was in the U.S. when she had her first child in Palestine, she identified as a single mother for the early part of her marriage. When she resettled in the U.S. as a refugee at age 18, her role as a student became central to her identity. She expressed gratitude when talking about the friendships she developed in her college with faculty and students. Salma, as in Rabby's case, began to learn English after arriving in the U.S. As her ability to interact and have conversations in English developed, her sense of identity in the U.S. also evolved.

Salma explained that, before learning English, she felt "lost" and "isolated" in the U.S. She maintained strong ties with her family in Palestine, but she was anxious to feel stable in her new home. Salma's sense of identity revolves around being a mother, a wife, a student, and a Muslim. Salma expressed the "importance of religion to her culture" and her family's way of life. She also serves as a peer tutor at her community college, where she has the opportunity to "help support others in the same situation." Salma expressed a desire to connect with others who may share aspects of her identity and prior experiences.

Moving to consider Sarina's experience, it stands out that she identifies herself as a "strong, independent woman." While other participants did not share feelings of high self-efficacy at the beginning of their time in the U.S., Sarina expressed her positive sense of self-efficacy as a result of motivation from her family. She explained how she always felt "set apart" in her cultural environment in Iraq due to her family's encouragement toward independence. She shared:

My father was a motivating man. He supported me, even with something that is not encouraged in our country, like playing basketball. I was playing basketball all the time. It's weird. We are playing basketball. It's a wild thing. So you go swimming. You go do something with somebody else. Play guitar or play piano maybe. This is a girl thing, but girls playing basketball is not, but father told me, "If you love sports, you can do it."

Like, Salma, Sarina also expressed a desire to encourage and motivate others. Sarina uses a saying from her home country about a "horse running alongside a wall" to explain how she believes in the value of purposeful work. She explained:

If you give this motivation to others, it will make their minds start working instead just sitting there. In our country, also, we have a government employee. The government employee is almost like See that horse, the horse running the wall. He is just moving forward without doing anything.

She expanded on this metaphor as it was meant to show how believed that individuals should strive to do something "important" and "meaningful" with their lives, rather than simply follow a set of rules without question.

Sarina and her husband came to the U.S. as refugees from Iraq when she was 31 years-old. She also has a young child who was born after they arrived in the Southeastern U.S. While

she shared how important her family is to her life, her narrative focused on her dedication to building a stable economic and social life in the U.S. She is committed to completing a degree at the community college so that she can “be a full member of the community.”

She and her family plan to stay in the same city indefinitely, as she shared how happy she and her husband are in the area. Unlike the other participants, Sarina does not like to identify herself as a refugee and does not feel “connected to the other refugees in the community. They are different, they have different ideas.” She feels more closely tied to the identity of an immigrant, as she does not want to be considered “in danger” or as “dependent.” Sarina’s independent nature framed her narrative and served as a thread through her sharing of experiences.

Just as independence served as a thread through an exploration of Sarina’s identity, being a college student is a thread that binds Jamal’s narrative. From when he shared his experience in Syria which led to his journey to the U.S. as a refugee at age 20 to his sharing about his life in the U.S., his role as a college student played a consistent role in his story. After being in the U.S. for four years at the time of this interview, Jamal strongly identifies as a community college student. When he talks about his experience learning English, finding employment, and planning for the future, he frames his narrative to be clear that his education is his first priority.

Jamal clearly stated how important his family is to his life and that he wants to please his father and mother by “completing my program and getting a good job.” Jamal works full-time and goes to community college full-time. He took some time away from college in the past year due to financial struggles, but at the time of this interview he was back enrolled in school full time to finish his program in the coming term. He explained that life is “complicated” in the U.S. as a student, he lives alone since his father and mother were resettled in Germany. While he

maintains the family's strong bond at this long distance, he has to support his living costs and his life goals independently and simultaneously.

Moving to consider Ibrahim's sense of identity, he shared much in common with Maryam's narrative. Ibrahim shared how important his family is to his life and how he always wanted to do what is best for his family's "safety and stability." He also considers himself a professional, as he had a successful career and college degree in Iraq. He was proud of his ability to come to the U.S. as a refugee when he was 33-years-old "to protect my family and seek a better life." Ibrahim also identifies as a motivated person and said that he must "work hard" to be successful in the U.S. because "everything is hard; it is a struggle."

Ibrahim completed his associate degree in the past year and is proud to be a community college graduate. He credited his success to his commitment to always "work hard and keep moving forward." He was fluent in English before coming to the U.S., since he worked with the U.S. military as a translator in Iraq. Ibrahim expressed his loyalty to his home country and culture, where he hopes to return one day when it is safer. His "dream is to run any managerial position. Like working in any American embassy, military, or somewhere positions. Over there, not here." Ibrahim gave the impression that he views his stay in the U.S. as a transit – a pathway to a brighter future he envisions for his family back in Iraq.

Moving to Frederic's narrative, he shared much in common with Deena and Ahmed's expressions of identity. Frederic also identifies as the head of his household in the U.S. After coming to the U.S. from the refugee camp in Uganda when he was 19-years-old with his family of seven, Frederic was the only one who spoke and understood some English. He also shared that it was his responsibility to provide financial and social support to the rest of the family members. He shared:

You're the first male child. Because I mean, here it might not be that much, because everybody can work and do their thing, but in Africa like ladies are kept away from work. They're kept away from doing hard things. They stay home and take care of kids. It's like a cultural thing. Like the only thing we're trying to keep with our traditions.

Frederic shared how his family strives to balance their cultural traditions with new experiences in the U.S. However, Frederic talked about the importance of the family's religion to their way of life. He added, "and we are Jehovah Witnesses, so we're looking for like find a religion, like where they speak the teachings in Swahili, because we're going to an English congregation, and my parents do not speak any English." He shared how the family spends a lot of time with their church, where they seek advice, support, and guidance as they resettle in the U.S.

From the beginning of his journey to the U.S., Frederic maintained a desire to complete a college degree in America so that he could "get a good job and support his family." He is proud to be a community college student and has found what he calls "a family apart from my family in school." It is also important to Frederic that others know he is a refugee, even though being a refugee is "a hard life." He believes that by claiming his roots, he can achieve better success. He explained:

Sometimes you feel like, because I mean, I'm a refugee, and nobody else is a refugee, I feel like yeah, I'm just by myself. I have to be alone and it's lonely. I need people to know I am a refugee, and I have gone through this kind of life and this life. Because in that way, they will be able to know how they can treat They wouldn't know I need that help. So I feel comfortable telling people who I am and where I came from. Because it's one way of getting to know them better, and them knowing me better. Where are my weaknesses. Where they can help me out.

As the participants shared, each person is unique and complex. even while they share the identity as a refugee. Each person's unique life experience impacted how they see the world and how they view themselves in the world. The participant narratives expose the importance to recognize the individuality of refugees, as each person's story may impact needs, abilities, goals, and behaviors. Additionally, by recognizing and honoring the individuality of adult refugee students, learning environments can be adjusted or expanded to meet the needs of a diverse population.

Language barrier. The next category under seek to understand and be understood involves language barriers. As participants sought to understand and be understood after coming to the U.S., English language proficiency became a vital component that influenced their level of interaction and inclusion. In Rabby's narrative, he spoke often of the importance of adapting, working hard, and the patience required to "make it" as a refugee in the U.S. He talks about the challenges of language barriers:

You have to accept it [the challenge], it's disappointing sometimes. You be like, why I don't understand! Why I can't understand this, these people! How, how this happen?
But, little by little, studying, you get it a little by little. You have to pay and you have to work for everything.

One of the first hurdles Rabby faced in the U.S. was related to English language proficiency. His education in Tanzania while living in the refugee camp was in French and he did not know any English when he first arrived. He remembers feeling like he was in "elementary school" again and that the process was "pretty hard to figure out." He joined a free English language class at a local church and "little by little" he began to learn basic English. He shared:

It has changed me so much from the language to experience, of course, interaction with people. Yeah, because for the first time it was really hard to understand teachers. But by now, right now I may say I'm really good at understanding them.

Salma supports Rabby's narrative and adds that she believes "English is vital for survival and inclusion" and to her, language proficiency equals "human connection." Salma also explained how English proficiency has impacted her sociocultural interaction and adaptation process since she arrived in the U.S. from Palestine already knowing some English. She stated:

The best thing is my language. I can connect with people. I know that my English is not perfect. I also feel like I'm more confident to talk with my kids, because they speak English as their first language. So, when they ask me to help in their study or education, I can help them. I feel confident. I'm ready. But if I don't know the language, how can I help them?

Sarina added to this perspective of the impact of having prior English language knowledge before coming to the U.S. Sarina explained her perception of how language impacted her experience in terms of self-sufficiency and level of autonomy. She explained: "I thought this would be difficult, getting settled, but when you speak a little bit English and you are confident you can communicate with people, you'll not have that strong fear or great fear to come to another country." Sarina equated language proficiency to the level of success refugees could achieve and level of ease of the transition process. She added:

If you don't learn English, you will not do anything because all the research is in English. All the thinking to answer anything is in English. All the people that know the information is English-speaker. If you do your English work, then you are set to go.

Maryam, Deena, and Ibrahim also arrived to the U.S. after already having some English language proficiency, but they offered a different perspective about their experience than Sarina. Maryam knew some English from her professional life in Iraq and she talked about how useful this was during the refugee interview process and upon arrival in the U.S. However, she quickly sought additional language training programs because she found a need for more vocabulary and conversation skills in order to “survive.”

Deena remembered when her family arrived in the airport in the U.S. when she helped everyone in their refugee admission group with English. She recalled:

I was the only one who understand and I was helping all the people with me to understand as well, what they are asking (at the airport). I do not know everything but I am doing my best. You need to keep asking where your luggage is, like officials and everything and have your dictionary with you because most of us would not speaking English, we never even thought about it. You cannot go anywhere here. It's a scary.

She taught English grammar to school children while she was in Jordan, waiting to be placed as a refugee from Iraq. However, she did not have the opportunity prior to coming to the U.S. to learn an expansive vocabulary or to practice in conversation and listening skills. While she knew some English and tried to help others upon their arrival, she found the English language barrier created additional stress and fear of providing a wrong answer to the immigration officers, which could risk their admission to America.

When Ibrahim discussed his view of how English language proficiency, he offered insights for how language proficiency impacted his education in the U.S. He shared:

Because I'm in a completely new culture. Your language, it's still, there's a lot of terminology, something you don't know. There's a lot of students, you never know where

they are from, how they do behave. And even you never know who is the teacher, the professor or something like that. I mean, I was completely nervous before my first class, first one.

From Ibrahim's perspective, English language learning is a continuous process, since there will always be new vocabulary words and new cultural "slang" to learn. Whereas Sarina advocated that if the person has "confidence" and some prior English language experience, anyone could "make it." By combining Ibrahim and Sarina's experience and advice, perhaps English proficiency can be enhanced through learner persistence and self-confidence.

Jamal adds to the understanding of how it felt to come to the U.S. as a refugee and not understanding English. He explained:

So, I was so nervous every time someone talked to me or something. I didn't speak English. I was standing like this with a big smile on my face, and without knowing anything. Oh, what's he talking about? Actually it got a lot easier. But, I had some problems with some accents because I knew I could understand some people, but some people I can't understand them at all, like never.

Jamal expresses how emotional and stressful the process was of moving to a new country and trying to live in a place where the language and culture are different from what is previously known and understood. This transition from being a socially-active college student in Syria to a refugee in the Southeastern U.S. was a difficult adjustment and made Jamal question who he was and how he was going to have a life in the U.S. He recalls how he began to "feel himself" again when he began taking English classes at the community college. His sense of self re-emerged as he became a student in the U.S. and started to gain more control of his life.

Frederic offers additional information to help understand what this emotionally-charged adjustment process can feel like. He explained how he felt and how he dealt with challenges when he first came to the campus of his community college:

There's no English [in Uganda]. They speak French. Things are just different. So I find out that sometimes I just have to figure things out for myself. The problem was like, what was the biggest problem is people would talk to me. I'm like, I can't understand. I can understand you, but not everybody. So somebody would give me directions. "Hey, go right, right." I'm like, hm? Too much.

Frederic offered a window into his life experience through his telling. He stressed that when some people speak English, he can understand; however, when other people speak quickly or with an accent, or using words that are new to him, he still struggles to understand and interact. He recalls how frustrating it was to not be able to communicate and show who he was through language. Frederic also shared his process of coping with language barriers as he explained:

Well, I feel like I have to get to used to, because I'm not going back to Uganda in no time. If I don't focus to know what's going on here, I'll stay back there. Yeah. So, I feel like if I get some, because it happens always, even when I'm in class, the teacher will talk about words that I can't, I'll just write it down and afterwards go talk to them. Ask them, "When you said this. What did you mean?" Because it's your mother tongue language. There's sometimes even they use English use is not professional. And they put in their slangs, which is hard for me to understand. This one teacher has told me studying does not end. It's just a system of going back, so when you're at school you have to study everything going on around you. Not only the courses, but everything going on around you.

Frederic highlights how he sees that learning is continuous, just as Ibrahim shared in his narrative. As the participants remembered the journey toward English language proficiency, they emphasized the vital nature of communication as part of cultural adaptation and integration. In order to access public resources and make connections with others, English language proficiency served as the cornerstone of the participant stories. As the participants sought to understand their new home and themselves in their new home, they were persistent in language acquisition in order to be understood and feel an active part of society.

Dualistic realities. Similar to the participant experiences with language barriers, the participants also shared experiences with dualistic realities. Dualistic realities can be understood as experiences when a person's lived experience is interwoven and interacts with the social and cultural environment. In other words, the participants explained how they felt caught between what they understood and expected and what happened in real life. Deena, for instance, talked about how she felt when she arrived in the U.S. and realized she no longer could predict what would happen based on prior knowledge of cultural or social norms. She expressed, "it's like throwing us in the ocean and find your own way – it all looks the same."

While Deena was excited and looking forward to a new start in the U.S., she began to experience frustration soon after arrival and feeling like everything was a "struggle" and that, no matter what she did, she was perceived as an outsider and set apart from others. These experiences led to feelings of fear, entrapment, and isolation, as she explains, "we are afraid of the outside because, especially with refugees, all we have been through is that Americans treat us very rough and very aggressive. I was always afraid of them."

Deena continues to explain how she felt like she "could not be understood" as a refugee in the U.S. She stressed, "we still love to laugh, say jokes, hang out and we would love to do

many things that Americans do the same. But it's just mentality of refugees more than international students.... we were afraid to be alone.” She felt as though no one treated her as an “actual human being” and only saw her as “refugee” and “an outsider.” She became very emotional during this exchange and began to cry when she talked about how, in the beginning of her resettlement, she felt badly about herself and her place in America.

Transitioning to Ahmed’s narrative, he echoed many of the feelings Deena expressed including fear, isolation, and disappointment. He shared:

In the beginning, like, it was like a dream. Like, I was so excited. Like, I just wanna come, you know, like it was – the United States of America....like everybody’s dream. In the beginning, like whenever I arrived in New York, in the airport, I was like, wow, that’s like different world. Like, finally, you know. But when I get to (city of residence), and when the people who are in the, like, refugee office who helped us, like, they didn’t help us as like they should.... Why, I don’t know. So I started like hating my life and I actually went for therapy for it.

Even though Ahmed was grateful to be in the U.S. and have the opportunity for a safer and more stable life for his family, he struggled to make sense of what he expected and what actually occurred. For Ahmed, this became an emotional journey where the quest for understanding influenced his sense of self-efficacy and ability to function. He explained:

I’m nervous, I’m scared, and I don’t know anyone. And it’s my mom and my sister, you know, I’m the guy, you know, so I have to protect them, there is no one to help us - it’s a different language, different culture, it was terrifying. I’m still excited about being in America but I’m like, at the same time, I’m scared.

Similar to Ahmed's simultaneous feelings of excitement and fear, Rabby elaborated on the variations in his expectations and reality of resettling in the U.S. He recalled when he first came to the U.S. and how "happy and a little bit shocked" he felt during the first few weeks. He remembers thinking about some of the differences he first noticed that made him feel like things were "more complicated than anticipated." He thought that everyone in the U.S. was going to be rich based on sociocultural knowledge from the refugee camp in Tanzania. He explained, "You have a lot of expectations, and when you came here, your friends are different. You have to work hard – nothing is for free. You have to pay and you have to work for everything."

Frederic also shared how the perception of America in the refugee camp in Uganda was that "you walk into the people's house and there will be money everywhere. You can just get it and live." He laughed as he recalled this belief, since he now knows the reality of living in the U.S. where he works "all the time" and "barely can pay." Maryam also elaborates on this point as she talked about feeling "lost" when she arrived in the U.S. She had a successful career in human resources in Iraq and she struggles to understand why employers will not consider her previous experience in the U.S. She explained,

So it's not fair that the person who came from so far away, and struggled enough in their life. Then when we came here, and they put us in another struggle, and they didn't believe that this kind of people can do something.

Frederic also shared how he began to develop anxiety about not understanding what was happening or what he should expect in the American context of social and school life. He acknowledged that, at his community college, "they help me when I have a challenge - from school, I found teachers who are my friends, like best friends." However, he continued:

I felt like maybe I'm just missing some or maybe they're going to make me do something twice. Maybe I'm taking what I don't need. So, I was wondering if I'm taking the right thing. I was thinking of something I want to study about, but the biggest challenge was like when I talked to them, they were like, "What do you want to study? What do you want to pursue?" But I don't know. And there was some things very confusing to me.

While Frederic felt supported by faculty in his college, at the same time he worried about “missing something” or not doing something required due to a lack of prior knowledge. He asked, “How should I know what to do when I don’t even know what IT is?” Salma then expands on how she coped with not understanding and not being understood as she reflects on her dual sociocultural identity. She explains how she felt:

Torn between living in safety with opportunities for more education, or returning to “known life.” They (family in Palestine) wish that we'd go back. We tell them once we finish education, once our kids finish their education, but nobody knows. We need to get the best education, the best of the life here. Then, we can go back. But we do not know. Maybe we got used to this life. I don't know.

As she struggles with missing her family and culture in Palestine, she also struggles with not always knowing how to manage life in the U.S. She feels that her family needs to be here for safety and for the opportunity for education, but she is torn between her cultural and familial ties and her dedication to her family’s well-being. She elaborates on her experiences navigating the cultural and societal differences:

Very different. You feel like when you go there, you're going to miss lots of things here. The life (in the U.S.), it's very easy. It's smooth. Nothing in your way to do anything you want. There, there's lots of things to think about before you do anything. You know, my

country, it's very bad. We cannot go to the airport. If I want to travel to any country, I need to go to Jordan first. And I have to do three checkpoints. It's about six hours from my country to Jordan. It's, should be without checkpoints, about one-hour driving.

In Sarina's narrative, she situates herself as an outsider to the refugee community. She characterizes herself as having shared in the same refugee admission process, but after arrival she sees herself as taking a different path than other refugees that she knows. She offers criticism of refugees who she sees as not working hard to build a life for their families. She explains, "You should work hard to depend on yourself and not costing the government that way. I'm against them because there a rock in our step. Every rule come in the future because of them." She is concerned about refugees who do not find employment and make strides toward integrating themselves into the community, as she fears that they will be perceived as relying on the government for assistance perpetually – thus, creating issues for all refugees with increased work requirements or reduced levels of government-sponsored resettlement assistance. She offers a perspective unique among the participants, since she sees herself as part of the same culture as some other refugees and sharing in similar experiences, but she sees her position in U.S. society and culture separate from other refugees in her area.

Ibrahim also offered a unique perspective on how he feels a duality in his experience in the U.S. He has two young children who have "become native speakers so fast." Ibrahim expressed frustration and sadness that his children know more English than Kurdish or Arabic. He shares his concern that they will not know enough about the family's cultural traditions to carry them on into the future. He shared:

And they adopted to everything in the culture. And they are teaching on me, you know.

They say, "Hey daddy, don't pronounce that word in that way. You don't know English."

Especially my daughter, "Hey, you don't know English." Say, "Oh okay." When I'm talking about something, I pronounce something which is not right, she's on the couch and says, "Hey, don't say" Oh my goodness. So now you have a teacher in the house.

They allowed to forget our language. That's our concern right now.

Ibrahim shared that he felt he lives in dual cultures while his children are growing up in American Culture, creating a gap in understanding between him and his children.

Considering Jamal's narrative, he relayed experiences of consistently striving to "fit in" and "finish his degree." Throughout his story, he discussed his long work hours and varied job responsibilities while always coming back to discuss his intention to complete his academic program in the U.S. While Jamal briefly discussed his personal life and friends he has made since coming to the U.S., he spoke mainly of his dedication to his academic goals. This intense focus was briefly interrupted as he reflected on his traumatic experiences in Syria and the remembrance of friends lost. He seems to compartmentalize his experiences in Syria and his life in the U.S. in efforts to manage the emotional and psychological impact.

As participants shared experiences with dualistic realities, they highlighted how emotionally-complex their lives can become as they seek to be a part of a new culture while maintaining their home culture and belief system. As Ahmed said, sometimes coming to the U.S. was "like a dream", however, he also shared how scared and fearful life can be as a refugee in the America. As prior understandings and new realities in daily life converge, participants expressed feeling torn between fear and joy, inclusion and exclusion, and isolated while living in a new culture.

Theme Two: Bird in a Cage. The second theme that emerged was *bird in a cage*, which includes the categories of cultural adaptation, alternative reality, struggle to survive. Bird in a cage is from one of the participant's descriptions of his feelings about living in his home country where he knew what to expect, where to eat, how to talk with people, how things work – but still feeling like he wanted to do more with his life. Then, when he was able to come to the U.S. as a refugee he felt relief at being in a place that offered safety, freedom, and hope for a successful life. However, he soon realized he still felt like a bird in a cage – always trapped by barriers but always wanting more from life. So, bird in a cage emerged as a theme when other participants shared similar feelings during their refugee resettlement experience. This theme embodies the ideas of feeling caught between cultural realities and striving to balance prior knowledge with new social and cultural expectations.

Cultural adaptation. For instance, Deena expressed how she felt caught between cultural traditions and personal desires. While her family held an expectation of marriage before she was 19 years-old, Deena's dream was to have an education and make a pathway for herself in life. This led to an emotional journey to resettle in the U.S. as she strove to balance the expectations of her family with her personal identity and dreams. While Deena talked about the excitement of having the opportunity for a safer life, she also expressed sadness at leaving the Middle East where she was at home in her culture and language. She shared,

I did not want to be just a housewife. It was not my dream. So, even though it's something that has been taught through the culture for years, for generations, still-it was what I wanted to do with my life.

Ibrahim continues in this theme and talked about his experience seeking to adapt to new cultural ways and understandings. He shared that the relocation from Iraq to the U.S. was the

“longest, hardest trip in my life. It’s not only about the travel time and the flights, it’s only completely new culture.” He felt that deciding to come to the U.S. as a refugee family was “the hardest decision I made in my life. I was very indecisive, and it was between stay with risk and the familiar to the culture or go to somewhere else, starting from scratch, but you have safety.”

Additionally, Ibrahim explained his beliefs about the impact of “cultural behavior” and how it “leads to different results in different social-culture.” He also emphasized the differences between his home country’s culture and American culture, which impacted his adaptation process. He explained:

I mean, the culture that I am from is more socialized than the culture is here. You know everyone on your class. And if you, for example, get a new job over there, expect that in the first week you have five close friends I mean, just for like simple conversation, they are very connected, yes. So, having a lot of conversation with people in my job, community, out there, but no one of them you can say that's, for me so far, trusted one. It's not about prejudicing, but that's a culture. That's a culture, you cannot blame it. There's a lot of bad traits from my culture. There's a lot of good. You know, there's no any perfect culture in the world.

Frederic, who was born in the Congo but lived in a refugee camp in Uganda for 17 years, shared similar ideas with Ibrahim and while he said that “I feel like I'm treated equally, but again, to the other side I don't feel like socially, like I feel like I can talk to everybody.” In Frederic’s experience, he feels more connected with his teachers in community college, because he can “feel like they want to know me.” However, he had trouble connecting with peer students. He said that the main issues or gaps in relationship-building are:

The way they behave, things they talk, they're just different from the person I am.

Because most of them, their language, they use bad languages in speaking. I had friends, like was trying to make friends when I came here. And they would talk some things, and I'm like, "Do you think that's the right word to use?" And they're like, "Hell no it's not, but it doesn't matter." Why? It's hard because people are very many, and they're all different and if you, sometimes you may find someone, you have things in common, but then it's hard to get in touch because of the language.

Frederic makes this connection between social connectivity and language proficiency that all weaves through other participant narratives. He expressed how his personal, cultural, and multifaceted identity impacts how he interacts and how others interact with him. He elaborates with:

I mean, people don't like people to know where they are from or who they are, but to me, that doesn't work for me. I need people to know I am a refugee, and I have gone through this kind of life and this life. Because in that way, they will be able to know how they can treat. Because if I reached here, I couldn't tell these people, "Hey, I came from here." They wouldn't know I need that help. So I feel comfortable telling people who I am and where I came from. Because it's one way of getting to know them better, and them knowing me better. Where are my weaknesses. Where they can help me out. Because if someone has been here for long, there's no need of helping them. Hey, this goes like this. This goes like this most people don't know I'm here. I try my best to get in contact with as many people as I can, but it's way too hard, because everybody's busy. And I'm busy too.

Because Frederic must work full-time while going to school, social connection becomes even more difficult. However, Rabby, who was born in Burundi but lived in a refugee camp in

Tanzania for over ten years, adds to this consideration by advocating how much his sense of self-efficacy has increased due to his experience in community college. He stated:

Now I mean I have a lot of experience, I mean I may say I can say I at least understand how the system works. I may say I have a vision that I can see where I'm going. But for the first time I was like, nothing's going on – I don't know anything what's going to happen tomorrow, but now it's really good. For the first time when I came, especially for the first day, it was really shocking. You don't have your friends and you find yourself in a new system, so it's really shocking and you have to adapt.

As the participants shared, the cultural adaptation and integration process of establishing their lives in the U.S. involved feelings of isolation, transition, and a struggle to balance dual cultures.

Ahmed also talked about the feelings of isolation during the cultural adaptation and integration process. While he indicated a struggle “getting used” to American ways of doing and being in the world, he found relief when he visited Chicago. He shared his reaction:

I've been through a few states, like Chicago and there is like a huge Arabic community. Huge! I feel like I'm home. Like, literally, like, home. Like, the uber driver he's from Lebanon, like, the restaurant, like everyone, you know, so that was nice. (Then) Miami, I went to Miami. Like all from all around the world!

Ahmed shared a sense of happiness as he smiled during this portion of his narrative. He laughed as he imitated himself crying with joy when he told about when his driver in Chicago started speaking in Arabic to him. Ahmed's narrative illuminates the strength and emotion tied to cultural heritage and language. Ahmed was blissful as he remembered his time in the diverse cities of Chicago and Miami.

Maryam also shared her awareness of a change in culture as she visited elementary schools in the U.S. for her children. She was saddened when she compared the educational setting in Iraq to what she witnessed in America. She recalled:

And I remember the school in my country (Iraq), and what they became after 2003. It has to be more difficult, because when we are asking about the freedom, we think, and we thought that we will be so different a country, and we will be more technology. And stuff becomes so shiny and useful for our kids, and the new generation, but no. You don't imagine there is no desk to sit on, the kids sitting on the ground. No board. No books. Yeah they are sitting in the tent, or in the caravan, only they just managed that to be like a class for the kids. And it's awful. So why I change something with the bad things. Most of the time when you dream to change something you have to have better than the thing that you have before.

Salma also shared memories of realizing how educational opportunities varied between Iraq and America. After being in the Southeastern U.S. for a year, she wanted her son to join a local Arabic language program after realizing that he was growing up in such a different culture than did the rest of her family. Since he was part of the U.S. education system since he was an infant, he was growing up as an American child would, with cultural ties to American culture. She was worried that she would not be as “connected” to him as he grew older. She shared this about her son’s schooling experience:

The good thing is my oldest one, he's a blonde. And when he goes to school, nobody knows that he is Arabic. When you see him, you think, oh, is he Arabic? No. He has the blonde hair and that helped him. He stayed in the public school for second degree. But now, he is in Islamic school. And so, he can get the language and the religion.

Bridging into Sarina's narrative, she also shared experiences when she felt there was a gap between what she knew and understood versus what she needed to build her life in the U.S. While she felt her prior English language proficiency from her schooling in Iraq significantly helped her during her resettlement process, she still struggled to find a job. She explained:

We thought, when we came here, that we will get job easily because we talk English.... Here, the competition is very big. So, yeah. You have to work hard to get a job in your field. So I could not get a job here, not here, because even if I had the knowledge, I still don't have enough knowledge of HR because I learned my knowledge on my own and my experience from entering it, but HR, here, is studying a whole policy, then try to apply it in their job. So I don't know the work law here.... But still, there is also that you don't have the years of work here. You don't have this experience to work in the United States. You worked before in Iraq, but you didn't work with American people. So you don't have this knowledge of working in this environment. So they need someone who is working two years or three years.

Even though Sarina felt she had the benefit of language proficiency to help her obtain employment in the U.S., she found that her cultural knowledge of the American workplace and a lack of prior American job experience kept her from finding a position upon arrival. She stressed that she “had to have an American degree” so that “they will know your experience.”

Jamal further shared how he felt like everything was “so different” when he came to the U.S. In Syria, he was a full time student at a private University, which was a protected space where students did not have concerns for safety and they were provided full time support for housing, food, health care, and given opportunities for outdoor activities – such as horseback

riding. However, when he began studying in the U.S., he realized that he also had to work full time in order to support himself.

While he remained focused on the importance of education throughout his narrative, Jamal also discussed how his work environment impacted his sense of belongingness. He explained that “either I am too sensitive, or the treatment is bad.... I just want to graduate and find a better job.” When he had to take a leave from his community college so that he could save money for the rest of his program fees, he talked about how “excited” he was to get back to college and “finish..... I should have graduated already.”

As Deena highlighted, participants showed how they found it necessary to balance traditional cultural beliefs and expectations within a new cultural environment and with different social expectations in the U.S., while also considering their personal beliefs and goals. The opportunity to enroll in college provided an outlet where participants found opportunities for growth, support from faculty, and a way to better understand American culture. While participants expressed feelings of being “outside” of society, community college appeared to serve as a pathway to feeling included and building mutual understanding.

Alternative reality. When considering the transitional experiences between cultural realities for the participants, they expressed feelings of being in America, but not the same America that others may experience. For example, Frederic shared a story of wooden bicycles that people built in his refugee camp in Uganda. The wooden bike offers a metaphor to better understand how the participants feel they are in the same, but different space. He explains:

Just imagine you being in a camp, or even you don't care about driving a bicycle, I mean, there are wooden bicycles. I don't know if you have ever seen it. Yeah, they stay in the camp. You just make it yourself. You cut trees and you make tires by trees. Build the

bicycle this way. We grew (up) knowing a wooden bicycle. You go fetch water with it. But you cannot ride it. You just push it. Yeah, so you've been seeing such things, and you're (told to) saying, "Go drive a car." It's something way harder.

So, the wooden bike is still a bike, but it is not meant to hold a passenger like bikes which are most well-known in U.S. culture. It is the same thing, but it is different – much like how the participants experienced life after coming to America. Frederic adds to his narrative about the perception of the U.S. versus the reality of how life evolved for him after arrival:

Well, coming to the US when we had heard about a long time from Western Uganda. We thought, wow. Because like they would describe the US in Africa, they say, I mean, some people call it like the second part of heaven. They say it's very nice. A good place. You just relax, you don't work, you don't do anything. Because like when we're coming, I had no idea I was going to work. My parents thought maybe we're just going to school and eat, stay, because people say money comes from America. And so we thought money can just get it from anywhere. mean, when you go there, you would be surprised. Some people say they get money from trees. So when I came here, I mean, we couldn't believe we were in America. Yeah. I mean, the kind of life people live is new. It's different. But it's like the physical features, and outside, it's still the same thing. I'm happy to be here, because a lot of things have changed in my life. Before I came here, I mean like it's life of being a refugee is not something, it's really something bad.

Deena also shared experiences of alternative reality, when she felt she was living in the same place as other Americans, but her reality was very different. Although Deena and her family were excited as they began to save money and become more independent over the first

year of their resettlement, Deena discussed how she still felt afraid and wanted to be able to feel at home here, rather than as “always an outsider.” She expressed:

I see mothers, fathers, leaving relatives coming here within days and then living in fear.

Yes, there's no explosions here. There's no bombs, there's no electricity cancellation all the time. We have A/C. We have heat. Yeah, we have the living that we want. But living with fear is worse.

Deena talks about how it was difficult for her mother to trust that the family would be safe in going to the U.S. People talked with her mother about the dangerous environment for young women in the U.S. “your daughter will be raped” So, her mother did not want to “loose her” by going to America. Deena mentioned how difficult it was to “convince” her mother to leave Jordan. But she persisted for the well-being of her family. She also felt that she “never really find myself there – I want to do more with my life.” Maryam also shares how she feels that she lives in uncertainty in the U.S. She adds:

You are just working for an unknown future. You don't have anything back in your home.

You just sell everything, and you left everything behind, so you want to start new future for you and for your kids, and it's so awful that you don't know the future. You don't know if they will accept you or not. So the first two years, so, so hard. Critical time for us.

Deena remembers finding other Arabic people in the community in the Southeastern U.S. and feeling that, “the want you to be indebted to them, they always want you to ask them for a favor. So they feel like they have done something for you. That's only Arabic culture.” She felt set-apart from her Arabic culture, while also feeling “apart” from American culture. While Deena is “thankful for being here” and does not want to go back to Iraq or Jordan, she dreams

about seeing the culture change to be more accepting and inclusive of varied cultures and ways of being in the world.

Similarly, Ahmed is grateful for the opportunities resettling in the U.S. has provided for him and his family. However, he also deals with a persistent feeling of being “on the outside” and not “totally the same” as others. In classrooms in his college, other students “they all choose to sit like way far” and will not speak with him. Outside of the classroom, he emphasized that he has a strong support system at his Tae Kwon Do studio, but “I can’t stay there all the time.” Ahmed gave the impression that he navigates life strategically to negotiate a space for himself to seek safety, opportunity to progress, and “survive” for the sake of his dreams and his family’s dreams.

Rabby also shared feelings of being “in-between” and seeing things differently than others in his community. He said:

Everything is going too fast and like for transportation. Most of the time they use car, and you can’t walk everywhere using your legs, you have to use car to get around. And another thing is, the system – we will have different systems. Like most of the time there where we were, we use cash to buy food. But here, you have to use cards, so it’s a little different and difficult.

He and his family were “shocked by culture” and how people reacted to them. For example, he noted differences in perceptions of personal space, he added: “like, personal space, we don’t respect personal space back home, not much as here. And everything is, excuse me, excuse me, thank you, thank you, so they have to adapt to that too.”

Salma also talked about seeking to cope with living in what can feel like an alternative reality from everyone else. She explained how some people stare at her but will not approach her

to ask questions. She said, “normally, there's some people that you know they're looking at you like from up and down, what you're wearing. But if they ask me or they try to contact me, I'm free.” She expresses frustration that people seem to be afraid to talk with her. She also explains how she feels “lost” and fearful sometimes:

You don't know what to do. Because sometimes, my kids are with me. Sometimes, when I feel.... I don't go outside at night that much. Because I know at night, it's not a good time to go out. I always go out before sunset. But when I needed to go, sometimes, I need to take care of my car. And I need to check around me, there's somebody. Especially, you don't want them to feel the fear that you are feeling, because we feel like they're going to be afraid.

Jamal also shared emotional experiences as he struggled to make sense of his life in the U.S. He became emotional and held his head in his hands when talking about how he struggles with balancing the memories from Syria and his life today in the U.S. He feels fortunate that his life in Syria was not as endangered as some of his friends who,

Had to go in water, in a small boat that's not safe at all. And the jet skis, the cops pull them. There's too many stories a lot harder. I'm sure you heard about people who died while they tried to leave to flee the war.

He talks about people he knew in Syria who could not leave due to a lack of funds or family connections. He says, “That's still when you get stuck in there, and you feel like you are in a big cage.” Jamal talked about how there were a few places in Syria where he would have been safe, within the walls of his University, for example. He emphasized that he could “stay safe in a big cage or go out and face reality.”

Jamal also discussed how, although he is grateful to be in the U.S. and in safety from the war in Syria, he still feels trapped in many ways as “always an outsider” to America. He worries about being able to find a job as a refugee, be welcomed as a refugee, he always identifies himself as something, plus a refugee. It is as though being a refugee has become the cage which keeps him from fully realizing himself.

Ibrahim, Maryam, and Sarina share similar feelings of displacement in relation to their career options in the U.S. versus their prior careers in their home countries. For example, Ibrahim shares the example:

For the sake of my children, not myself. For myself, it's completely hard and I have to do something, which is actually not my job. Not my right job. But, I can do much better over there. So, I mean, all position I had in my home country, it was managerial. I was manager in all the positions. So it's completely different from here. Especially when you move you don't have any employment history inside the US. That's hard for the employer, for everyone. So it's a big, big, big transition.

Maryam also talked about how she feels so “strange” that she cannot find a job in her field. She feels “not like herself” working in the U.S. because she has only been able to find manual labor positions, while she was an executive in human resources in Iraq. This has created a feeling of living outside her norm which adds her to adaptation process. Sarina shared similar feelings of feeling it was “too hard” to find a job and that she was “over-qualified” for most of the jobs she was turned down for. Ibrahim further elaborates:

And after four years, I can say still I am in the assimilation process. With all of that, I can say still we are in the assimilation process with a new culture. Because everything is different. I cannot find any one common point between here and there.

Returning to the metaphor of the wooden bike, when it is still a bike, but used in a different way for different purposes than how bikes are perceived in the U.S. In the same way, participants talked about how they felt learning about the culture and way of life in the U.S. required many adjustments to things that were the same, but different. They also shared how they experienced reality of life in the U.S. within a context influenced by prior life experiences. As they remember hardships and loss from the experiences in their home countries, they persist to manage the quest to survive in the U.S. economic and social environment. Overall, the participants shared that they are grateful to be in the U.S., but they still experience daily struggles and fears as they manage competing economic, social, and personal needs.

Struggle to survive. Each of the nine participants mentioned a struggle they faced to “make it” in the U.S. numerous times. At times, the struggle overlapped with a cultural, linguistic, or economic challenge. This category of bird in a cage illuminates how participants struggled to survive as they transitioned to a new culture and way of life. Continuing in the thread of employment opportunities, Deena shares one of the struggles she experienced in finding a job when she came to the U.S. One of the immigration requirements for Deena was to begin working immediately upon resettlement. She previously worked in Jordan, where her family fled for safety from Iraq, to teach English to young children but working in the U.S. was her first full-time working experience. She recalls, “as refugees, all you get is factories. They don’t want you to open your eyes to other job opportunities, they do not think you are worth that.” She remembers meeting other workers in the factory who “have been to college, they are really educated if you talk to them in their own language they know they are well-educated, well-known in their home countries. They come here, they get treated like nothing.”

When Deena found a circle of friends in the factory who were also from the Middle East, she thought, “you know, when you find your people, you’re like, oh god, they get me!” She talked about how she was grateful to have a job so that her family could begin to save money to begin a life independent of their sponsor family. However, she still felt so “wronged” and “like nothing” because of the type of work she was forced to do.

Rabby and Jamal also talked about striving to balance financial needs, family responsibilities, and educational goals. In particular, Rabby stated:

Some time you know you have to be a college student at the same time trying to find a job to meet some meet some needs. So it's really somehow you feel like I'm missing something missing these, missing this, because when you are attending college or university or when you're a student, you are limited in resources, especially money, so somehow you feel like oh, no. You are in a financial crisis.

Ahmed also summarized what the other participants shared in his reflection:

We have no one. No job, no school, no money, no body to at least help us. There’s no one. So, everybody, like, take care of their own business and they don’t care about anyone else. It’s all about money. We are scared, because we don’t want to go back to our life in fear.

Ibrahim and Sarina share a similar optimism as they consider their struggles in the U.S. Ibrahim offers a reflection on his experience which echoes Sarina’s narrative. He offers:

You don't know anything here. Everything is different here when you move. Road, driver license, school.... You know, children's school, hospital. So we have to be very positive and very active. I'm, by nature, an optimistic person. Even in my home country. There's a lot of problems, stuff going on, I say, "When they gonna get better?"

Frederic also reflects on his thoughts when he first came to the U.S., he remembers “I was just thinking if I'm going to be able to make it over here. And what gave me energy to think I will, because I'm thinking if I say I can't, then what would my parents say?” The biggest challenge for him was that no one else in his family could offer advice about how to survive as a refugee in the U.S. He expressed how alone his family felt as they tried to figure out how to live in American culture and society.

Frederic and Rabby talked about their time in refugee camps and how isolated they were during that time. Frederic explains, “like when you're in the camp, because they don't allow you to move outside, they keep you away from other things that you should know.” Because the campus did not have technology, solid buildings or big structures, formal road systems, cars, and so on, Frederic and Rabby felt as though they had so much more to try to understand before they could begin to make a new life in America. Frederic was able to leave the refugee camp in Uganda to attend school, so he saw cars before coming to the U.S. However, he explains:

I was compared to my sister and my siblings who never went to town, because they're looking at things, I have seen some of them. But it was also still different, because like there were roads. They're more developed over here and they are big, huge, the buildings are huge.

Frederic went further to talk about how his family was “so shocked” and “confused” for a long time after they arrived in the U.S. because there were so many new things to see and try to understand. This learning and adaptation process added to the family’s struggle to build a stable life.

Salma and Maryam discussed how faculty and staff at their community college helped to support their struggle to rebuild their life in the U.S. during resettlement. For instance, Salma shared how a faculty in the ESL program made a positive impact on her life. She explained:

She is wonderful. Until now, we are in contact. She is not my teacher now, but she is always contacting me like her friend. She is always asking me to come to the ESL lunches.... She's sending me messaging. And, yeah, and also, she invited me to her daughter's graduation party. We are like friends now. I feel lucky, because she's in my life. She helped me a lot. She knows how to understand international students, I think. She has the ability of understanding.... I feel like the faculty and staff here are good. Like, I adopt you. They're very good. People outside like who I told you, sometimes, I feel unwelcome. They need to just know and understand what the struggle we and our families are facing

Finding support on campus appeared to make a significant impact for all nine participants as they worked to balance cultural, economic, and academic concerns. Having the support and understanding from faculty and staff offered the opportunity to express themselves and feel acknowledged as an individual. Maryam summed up what she thought of her advisor at her community college when she called her advisor “my angel.” She explained how her advisor took time to “understand and get to know me from first day. This is something I will never forget.”

The struggle to survive meant several things to participants, from finding a job, learning English, or the process of getting used to a vastly different environment and way of living. As participants struggled, they also shared strategies they used to survive. Whether relying on their self-determination, optimism, or family or on-campus college support, the participants reflected

on what it meant to them to survive as they maintained their personal goals to find themselves in America.

Theme Three: Power of Education. The *power of education* theme includes the categories of pathway to success, help-seeking on campus, and impact of prior experiences. This theme emerged from the interview transcripts as the nine participants shared beliefs about education as a pathway to success, a way to a more secure future, and as a way to build socioeconomic stability. This theme also refers to the strategies participants utilized to seek help on campus and the ability to find support and guidance which helped participants on campus and in the community. The interview transcripts revealed the impact of prior experience on the participants' understanding of educational systems and the ability to transition from previous careers into the U.S. educational system. Prior life experiences also influenced the participants' motivation to seek education after resettlement in the U.S.

Pathway to success. The nine participants shared how gaining access to community college influenced their feelings of self-efficacy, level of welcome, and facilitated empowerment as they looked forward to a safe and stable future. For instance, Deena shared how the day she visited a community college campus “changed our minds, our life, everything.” She went to the nearest community college by taxi, after her sponsor family would not take her because her English was “not good for school.” She spoke with the admissions office and remembers them saying, “you can do it, you just have to be bold, and he said all you need is just to take the test. I did not actually think I would pass, but I passed.... we are doing something!”

Rabby viewed higher education as a pathway to a more stable and positive life in the U.S. He shared how he believed college could change the quality of life:

When you are in the community and you are not in the school, you may end up in a bad way. Yeah, like smoking stuff, or get drunk.... For first of all when you are in school you are busy, getting an education and like in college success, you know they have classes that teach you how to improve yourself and make your goals. So, you really are busy and you don't have some distractions and when you are out of school you may get some distractions, and end up in bad way.

Rabby spoke of a fear that, without the focus and opportunities provided through college, he would risk getting involved with drugs or become influenced by negative forces in society. Like Rabby, Ahmed also viewed education as a pathway to stability and as a way to support his family. Since Ahmed was considered the head of his household, he spoke of wanting to make the best life for his mother and sister. He told his mother that, "I'm going to work with this Associates Degree and you're not going to work anymore. We gonna buy a house."

Maryam and Salma also spoke about viewing education as central goal in order to be successful in building a new life in the U.S. Salma shared that she felt she needed to: "hold on to the opportunity Our main goal here is the education." Maryam added that she found a sense of freedom through gaining access to education. She elaborated:

It's amazing feeling when you came here, and start again as a student, and they accept me as a student here, regardless of my age, or regardless of religion, or regardless of my situation, or anything, or political issue. So I was like a bird.

Jamal shared in Maryam and Salma's feelings that education was his primary goal and the guiding force in his life. After he had to take a leave from his community college for one year to work two full-time jobs in order to save enough money for the final year of his Associate Degree, he was "very excited" to come back to college. Jamal adamantly shared that there was

“no way he would ever leave school forever.” He displayed sincere determination to reach his goals and never appeared to question if he would finish his degree. He believed that education is “the only good thing to do with your life, studying, because that what makes you always better.”

Sarina and Ibrahim spoke about the difficulty in finding stable employment using their bachelor’s degree from Iraq. Sarina felt that her degree here “meant nothing to them (employers)” when she applied for positions. She added, “I have work experience, but not the right education for jobs here.” Ibrahim also talked about his quest for employment in the U.S. and feeling that he needed to earn a U.S. degree so that he could, “I can say I have my degree in business management, like Associate degree. Everyone take it.”

Ibrahim went on to share how he feels about the opportunity to go to college in the U.S.:

That's a great, great, great feeling. That's one of the things make you love back to school.

So, if here was the same as my home country, I never back to school. Because I never know what you gonna choose for me, what you gonna pick for me. But when I pick by myself, yes.

In Iraq, Ibrahim discussed how the college admissions staff decides what degree program students follow based on the student high school exit testing scores. So, Ibrahim shared how surprised and excited he was in the U.S. when he realized he could choose his degree program in the community college based on his goals and interests. Ibrahim also discussed the value he sees in higher education for refugees in the U.S.:

And I think schools are really helpful, advice are helpful. For someone like low income families, financial aid is very helpful. And from my perspective, every immigrant has to study. Gonna be great for each one. If you learn more about the country history, you learn more about any major you want, you gonna be connected more, you gonna be familiar

with the education system. A lot of other stuff, a lot of other stuff. It is a lot of challenge, a lot of different, a lot of stuff you have to cope with it, a lot of stuff is interesting and make you happy. But it is very, very, very, necessary for everyone. 'Cause it's very appreciate, that's a job. That has to be, but for an immigrant, if they want to improve themselves, if you wanna go forward, they have to do something like study, connecting very well with the community, with people, even with classmate, with anyone back to school, working hard. It's gonna help. That's gonna boost the adaption process. because the adaption process is not easy.

As Ibrahim compared his experience with education from Iraq to the U.S., Frederic also discussed his reflections about access to education in the refugee camp in Uganda compared to his experience with education in the U.S.:

Because when you live in the camp, it's not easy to do school and that kind of life.

Because we need to, like everything you need to find for yourself. Yeah, so I used to work hard. I wanted to see if maybe at one time, at one point, I can make our family be a better family. Like maybe buy something for my family, for my parents, because they, like my dad wanted to study, but he didn't have a chance, because when his dad died then the family members never wanted to pay for his school. And you have nothing. You need to start fresh.

Frederic also talked about the fears of financial stability that impacted his perceived ability to go to college in the U.S. However, “because of Tennessee Reconnect, I was able to begin college for free while still worked full-time. It covered my tuition so I could make it work.” As Frederic recalled the day before his first day of community college in the U.S., he shared his feelings of excitement, trepidation, and curiosity:

When I knew tomorrow I'm going to school, wow. I was just thinking about it all the time. I didn't know what to take, I didn't know what they would need, and they gave me classes. They gave me first a college success (class), all those I had never heard about them before - I didn't know my teachers. And like the hardest part of it was finding the buildings. Any building.

Frederic summarizes in this statement some of the feelings from all the participants. As they looked forward to their first day of community college in the U.S., they were joyful about the opportunity that was open for them, but also scared about managing expectations and being able to understand what they should do and how they would “make it.”

Help-seeking on campus. As the participants began their journey into community college, they utilized varied strategies to persist. For instance, Rabby focused on the centrality of education in his process of adapting to life in the U.S. He said he was “eager to continue his education here” and found support from campus staff from the first time he stepped on the local community college campus. He remembers how he was able to find help on campus, but he also experienced struggles to complete requirements for enrollment due to his immigration status and ability to obtain prior educational records. He explained:

When I came to the campus I was really supported by staff. But you know it's a little complicated because for the first time you just to try to find documents to be legal in the United States. So somehow staff are complicated sometimes by your case.

Sarina also discussed how she experienced mixed feelings as she began college. She explained her feelings of happiness and worry about being “good enough” as she shared:

I was afraid that I will not be able to communicate with people or to do good because I'm not a person that will be satisfied easily with this work. I look for something that makes me number one. I don't accept to be number two.

Jamal and Salma talked about how they felt welcomed and supported on campus. Jamal said that people in the admissions office were, “people were nice, super nice actually. I didn’t feel any different than anyone else. Everything was so good.” Salma also talks about the convenience and availability of support on her community college campus. She emphasized that it is important that she is not scared to ask for help because “everything I asked about, I find somebody who can help me with, but you have to ask.”

Frederic also shared his experience trying to find out about what college opportunities existed for him. At first he had difficulty finding out about college and what community colleges “meant. We don’t know that in the camp.” After he learned about his community college from a friend at his church, he visited campus and shared:

So when I came here I found things were okay. I didn't know how can I apply, because I was even computer illiterate. I can't use a computer. With phones, we didn't know how to use phone. There's so many questions. I told them I'm a refugee. I don't know much, but they asked me about passport. I didn't come with a passport. I just came as a refugee with other papers. But they helped me.

Salma offers insight into how this experience felt to her and echoed Frederic’s narrative. She said:

It's like you feel the difference between the people who are outside a college. When you come here, people are different. They are educated and they know the right and the

wrong. And they treat you equally. I did not find anybody who treated me less equal than anybody.

Ahmed, Maryam, and Deena sought help to get into college from co-workers who shared an Arabic language and culture background. Ahmed's co-workers recommended that he go to the community college "because it is less expensive and offers English language coursework." He went to the community college campus with his uncle and met with a staff member in the admissions office. He recalls with a joyful expression that the staff member:

Really helped me a lot when you give me the approve in the first day when we filled the application, I went back, like, to my place and, I'm not even kidding, I start crying for like an hour. I was so happy, I was like finally, like I made it, you know! That was great.

Ahmed began college by taking English as a Second Language (ESL) coursework and remembers, "it was so nice and easy, because you know people from different countries and from different cultures it was so emotional."

As participants shared strategies they used to persist as they sought access to education and then as they strived to persist during their coursework, Ibrahim discussed the importance of being courageous and intrinsically-motivated:

They don't teach you if you don't try by yourself. It was completely, completely different. And it was like, if someone not help you and you don't read by yourself, it is not easy. But when you understand the situations, so everything is easy even if you do it by yourself. But what make it much, much, much easier is that you have advisor.

Sarina and Rabby also shared that they used several strategies to reach their goals in college.

Sarina advocated that "you have to dig for information. I asked a lot of questions and did

research online.” She and Ibrahim talked about reading books and doing research online both before they came to the U.S. and after they arrived. Ibrahim talked about his research process:

Actually, one of my friend lives here help me a lot. Even before I move here, I did a big research on the American education system. And I found there is four-year university, there is two-year college. I read a lot, I did a lot of research. But, you never know which one is There is a lot of community college, which one is- the idea of community colleges is not something that you find all over the world, so.... We have the same in our home country, it's called two years, over there. It's not called college. It's called institute.

Rabby and Ibrahim also spoke about the impact of instructors teaching style. Rabby explained:

The teachers who teach the ESL students, they may have, I say, different strategies they use. They teach, and at the same time, they assisting students to adapt and to know resources they can use to succeed. Resources there to help use computers and learn the technology.

Additionally, Rabby shared how he maintained his motivation to access education. He shared:

You got motivation from different people. First of all, you find yourself in the middle of other students who have the same problems. So, you have to motivate each other – it’s just normal and keep going. When you came to the U.S., you have to be shocked and you find a lot of things from the way of point of view where you’re from. But you have to keep up. You have to keep up yourself.

Then, Ibrahim added that:

Teaching style makes a big difference. I am so grateful that she (a teacher in his second semester) didn't tell the first class. She was very nice, but she was very, very serious. I

mean, like Immigrant students need a feeling, giving a good feeling for the first time.

I think they need understand their feeling instead of teaching them.

Deena also found support and encouragement on her community college campus, but she also became a leader on her campus after her first semester of study. She began working in several student support offices and became a mentor to new students. She appeared to find empowerment through her college experience, so much so that she wanted to “give back” and “inspire and help others in the similar situations.”

The participants reiterated the high value they placed on accessing higher education in order to achieve their goals in the U.S. They also shared strategies they used to both learn about colleges in America and how to access and be successful in college. Each of the participants were motivated to access and persist in higher education by intrinsic and extrinsic factors. They also persisted through challenges of language, technology, and a new educational system influenced by American culture and practice.

Impact of prior experiences. Participants emphasized the importance of education, as they viewed education as a way to establish a higher socioeconomic status in the U.S. They also discussed how education had always been important to them and to their families. For instance, Jamal talked about the pressure he felt to reach his educational goals:

It was so different for me because everyone in my family had graduated and was done. I think everyone either they are engineers or doctors, everyone. I didn't have anyone in my family who didn't study at all. Even my mother is a lawyer; my father is a doctor.

Ahmed adds to this stream of thought and explains:

Before we came to the United States, I graduated from my school with like high grades, so, I couldn't just stop my dream. You know, like, I had to work in the beginning, but

that was not that, it was not that what I wanted. I want to be something. I want to you know reach it, no matter how old I am, no matter how hard I have to work.

Rabby also emphasized that he “finished high school [in Tanzania] and I was eager to continue my education here.” He also was “shocked” at how different education was in the U.S. He was not computer literate when he arrived, since he lived in the refugee camp for over ten years previously. He became stressed when he realized that in school here, “everything has to go electronic. So it was really a bit scary....I have no idea.... somehow you have to adapt.” While he was excited about pursuing education in the U.S., he was also struggling due to his lack of prior experience with technology.

Given their common experience living in a refugee camp for most of their childhood and adolescence, Frederic shared some of Rabby’s reflections on his experience coming into the U.S. educational system. When he arrived, Frederic recalled one of his refugee support center case workers told him “no school for you.” He interpreted this as a loss of hope, but then realized the intention was to encourage him to pursue a high school equivalency program, since he was over 19 years old at the time and not eligible to enroll in high school. Even though he completed high school in Uganda, he was not able to obtain his degree certificate due to the regulations in the refugee camp.

Frederic also shared how he was unsure about the process of college education, since “nobody in our family knows about all those things.... things are just different.” Without the prior knowledge of how the educational system is organized and what is expected during a college program, Frederic felt “confused” and had difficulty since he “could not understand what was going to happen.” Salma also talks about her feelings toward her education experiences and reflects on the cross-cultural comparison of her perspective of her prior education experience:

Education is here. It's a better education for me. I feel like it's an opportunity for me that I don't want to lose. It's something that if I'm losing it now, there is no other kind that can kind of.... If I were to decide to go back home, maybe, I'm going to lose this. And it gave me lots of confidence. Gave me lots of opportunity to know people, to know more about the people I'm living with So, you see from a different perception, people, it's different.

This reflection from Salma stresses how the participants shared the idea that education is something that each of them have always valued. Further, that coming to the U.S. as refugees has further solidified the idea that education is the pathway for them to establish a higher quality of life – socially, economically, and personally.

Maryam, Sarina, and Ibrahim talked about how they bring much experience with them to the search for education in the U.S. Maryam said, “even in my country, all the time, I like to study.” Sarina also talks about her prior experience with higher education in Iraq and how this previous experience motivated her to persist through the struggle to access education in the U.S. She explained: “We want to study, but everyone is talking about different things. ‘You cannot go to the university. You have to finish this thing. You cannot go. You have to take English courses.’ And most of them are wrong.” She continued to seek colleges in her area of the Southeastern U.S. and found a community college. While she experienced fears about if she could be successful, she continued to focus on her ultimate goal of getting a U.S. college degree. She explained that:

I have my bachelor’s degree in literature, surely I can do this. But you don't know how to study here. So this is my biggest fear because I study in Iraq. In Iraq, studying is like It's like in English, I studied literature and short story, novel, or essay writing and all of this, and if I seek a normal role, I read many novels and I don't remember any of it

because we take the book and put it here and the teacher will give us just this paper and it summarizes all the thing and this is your- So I had this fear when I came here because I know studying here is a lot different from our country.

Ibrahim also came to the U.S. after completing a bachelor's degree and having established a professional career in Iraq. He stressed that he felt as though he "lost" his degree when he came to the U.S. He explained, "you know, I can't say I have a degree. Because as I said, everything is different. The school and university is different.... you can never contact anyone there to verify." Because of his prior experience in education, he did find it easier to locate and access education in the U.S. He "knew almost.... I mean, 80% about the education system before I move here. But that's not like everyone." He "did a lot of research" but he still was "confused because the idea of community colleges is not something that you find all over the world."

While he was able to utilize his prior experience in education to help him research opportunities in the U.S., he still met confusion when he encountered new vocabulary or terminology that could be interpreted in numerous ways. He relied on his motivation and persistence to find the option for higher education that best fit his academic goals.

Deena offered her reflections about educational opportunities which summarizes much of the participants' thoughts. She shared:

Getting a degree wherever you are, no matter what. No matter what country you are - it's always a strength, it's like weapon. You find fight everything with that. Especially for a middle eastern girl, having a degree does make a difference. For me personally, why I want to have a degree is because I wasn't to improve my family life. I don't want them to suffer.

As previously discussed, educational opportunities were highly important to the each of the participants. The participants also made clear that their prior life experiences directly influenced their access to and understanding of education in America. Whether motivated by family experiences or expectations, the desire to reach a higher socioeconomic status, or the belief that educational achievement would lead to stability, the participants expressed strong emotions tied to academic success. The participant prior educational achievements also influenced their experience in the U.S. higher education system, as they discussed the varied teaching and learning strategies and expectations among different educational systems.

Theme Four: There is Only Hope. The fourth theme that emerged from the interview data was *there is only hope*. This theme includes the categories of it was like a dream, perception of refugees, experiences of discrimination. Participants in this study talked about how they perceived the resettlement experience as a shift in their perception of themselves and realizing how others perceive them as refugees. Participants discussed how the experience coming to the U.S. involved feelings of being different from everyone else, feeling that others view them as lesser-than, and experiences of discrimination or marginalization. The study data also revealed participants' methods of coping with discrimination and marginalization, such as characteristics of resilience and persistence.

It was like a dream. When Ahmed first arrived in the U.S. from Jordan, where his family fled for safety from Syria, he said, “in the beginning, like, it was like a dream.” Ahmed, as in the case of all nine participants, experienced both positive and negative experiences in the U.S. Deena explains how her family was torn about leaving Jordan, where her family also fled for safety from their home country of Iraq, since they would be going to into a new culture. While there was sadness to leave their home culture and country, Deena talked about how hopeful she

was for a new start. She “kept hoping” and believed that “we should go and open that door, we should take that risk no matter what.” Even after Deena arrived in the U.S. and realized that she still had to “struggle” to build a new life, she remained goal-oriented and determined to “make it.” She often equated success with independence; for instance, when she got her driver’s license, she was able to take her family to get groceries, go to work, and explore the city independent of the sponsor family, who she said “kept them as prisoners.”

Rabby, who was born in Burundi but lived for over ten years in a Tanzanian refugee camp, conveys a sense of hope and optimism about his experience in the U.S. Even amid financial hardship and struggling to figure out this new life in America, he persists to find his way and his path in America. As he shared:

Biggest [thing] I suggest is that when you begin to understand, you really are happy, you will really be happy at that time. I may say I have a vision that I can, to see where I'm going. But for the first time I was like, [as he takes deep breath and laughs with wide open eyes] nothing’s going on – I don’t know *anything* what’s going to happen tomorrow, but now it’s really good.

Sarina also reflects on her time in Iraq before coming to the U.S. as she considers the difference between her life there versus in the Southeast U.S. She shared:

Because living in a country without hope, without the smallest thing for me to live a normal life, it will be frustrating for everyone. When I go to my work, there is no traffic lights, army everywhere, check points everywhere. I just have to live in a better way.

Sarina continues to share her impression of living in the U.S.:

I didn't face anyone who discriminate me or give me that expression. People are smiling and trying to help. If they see my mother wearing scarf, she is with me, they always

smile. I love this city and community. Me and my husband don't go out from here because it is a good place to raise our kids So the society here is multi-national and a lot of people from all around the world and they can blend in easily here. The local and the international so they have this type of quality and that's like a country. It's not like a big city with a lot of traffic and a lot of people on the street and a lot of crimes and extra, extra. We want peaceful place and we found it.

Sarina and Maryam also shared how they view the opportunity for their children to grow up in a safe environment where they can access education regardless of class, ethnicity, or religion.

Sarina stated:

I will show them that, if you want something, you can do it. You can do it. This is the most important thing. This is the first rule to tell the child, or also, I will tell them our story of success, and in our home country, because in our home country, when you graduated from university, most of the people had the mindset that, "I should get a government job because it's settled in the job and no one will fire me, and after that, I will get a retirement." So I will tell them that, "Don't get a job that shrink your mind or size it. Get a job will make you think." When you begin to think, it make you a happier person because every accomplishment has inspired you, will inspire you in the end.

Maryam adds to this understanding by expressing how she encourages her children to take advantage of the opportunities in the U.S. She shared:

Please, our kids, do your best to benefit from this opportunity, because a lot of people in our country (Iraq) dream to have this opportunity now. Most of the time when you dream to change something you have to have better than the thing that you have before. I put the responsibility 100% of people, because people the one who have to change the things

right now. But they accept to keep silent on eating and sleeping. And waiting somebody from outside to give them the solution.

Salma, who came to the U.S. from Palestine as new mother at 18-years-old, also talked about her cross-cultural adaptation process and critical reflection on her experience. She shared that she tells others in her situation:

Telling them that don't be afraid. There's always people who are here to help you.

Because even if you see people are there who are not welcome you, there is other people who always welcome you. And in every country, there is people who are understanding and people who do not understand or they have less understanding of other people.

Trusts in the good of humanity – belief in the power of forgiveness.

Additionally, Salma reflects on how she manages the difference between what seems real and what seems “like a dream from another life.” She added:

I feel like what happened at that time, I started to remember, but I do not remember. I'm not the person who puts everything in his mind. Does not want to remember the bad things, tries to intentional focus on the good. I feel like that for the people who remember the bad things and, oh, you did that to me. And you said to me that, I don't remember.

Salma's words resonate – “like a dream from another life” – with how the participants reflected on their lives transitioning from fleeing their home country to resettling in the U.S. Jamal also expressed a dreamlike remembrance of his life in Syria compared to his life in the U.S. He shared memories from life in Syria and said it felt like he was “a different person.” Additionally, Frederic laughed when sharing how his youngest brother could not recognize a mango fruit in a grocery store on a recent shopping trip. He exclaimed, “How can you not know this? These were

everyone in our camp!” He realized that his brother was so young that life in the camp was “a dream” to him and “not really real to him.”

They each expressed sincere hope in their journeys to America, seeking freedom, safety, and stability. They also possessed hope that life in America would offer them opportunities that they would not have had in their home countries. While some participants shared more difficulty than others with access and opportunity to equitable support and inclusion in the U.S., they each emphasized their hope for the future and, in particular, their hope for the next generation.

Perception of refugees. The participants also discussed the impact of public perception of refugees in the U.S. on their experience. For instance, Deena discussed how she believes that many Americans see refugees as dependent, but she talks about how “we did not just come here to work and do nothing else with our lives. So that was a big step for us (getting a better job) I was getting more independent.” She adds that she feels that “no one cares beyond that you are a refugee.” In her experiences, she felt that “most of the time” people did not care “really who she is” and focus on her status as a refugee. She expressed frustration that she was treated in specific ways “simply because of being a refugee. We are much more than that.”

Ahmed also shared that when he first came to the U.S., he was consumed with fear about what he was supposed to do and what would create more difficulty for him and his family.

However, after being in the U.S. for a few years, he shared:

Today I know that I have rights. Like, especially here in the school, we’re all equal.

Since I’m a student and they’re students, I can go and complain, I can go and talk and be like, they did this, and this, and this, and like, I will keep fighting for it until, like, ah, you know, like, ‘til I get to my point. I mean, like, why, like, come on, show me some respect.

Maryam furthers this desire to want to expand mutual trust and cross-cultural understandings. Maryam talks about how “we are suffering a lot because when they know we are Muslim, we are coming from the Middle East, they think we are terrorists. I just want somebody to be open mind. Look beyond stereotypes.” Maryam also talked about her confusion about why Americans trust in the stereotypes perpetuated through media outlets. She added that, in Iraq “they have no faith in media, because they do not trust government or what others tell them - but Americans trust the media and believe everything about Iraq and refugees.” She continues to try to reason why stereotypes are perpetuated through American society:

They have the most technology here, and this is okay. But when we just came here, and when we come back to US people, they follow the media in bad things, and bad years, and bad image, because they didn't even think about the news that they listen, or see, or watch in movie. So they have just to make smaller search before accepting or refusing anything. Even in our country, I never believed any news. We are the opposite of you. The US citizen believe anything in the news, but we are in the Middle East never believe anything in the news, because we know there is no transparency in our government. They all make it so shiny and colorful, and it's not the thing that is happening exactly in our country.

Maryam also talked about how her identity as a Muslim has caused her to be turned down for numerous jobs. In one particular job interview, she explained:

It's for something for office work. It's not big deal, it's only for making or managing the appointments, managing that with the patient, and with the doctor and nurses. It's not a big deal, and you can handle it. But they didn't accept me because the most of people, who work there, they are Christian. No one is Muslim. So one of them, who worked

there, she told me honestly about that. She told me, you don't imagine what is inside there, and if you will be so lucky and accept you, you will figure out by yourself. I have to be smart to figure out what is behind the line.

Sarina and Maryam shared how they perceive other refugees in the U.S. Both participants expressed frustration and sadness when detailing how they see themselves as negatively impacted by public perception of refugees, based on the actions of certain individuals who are also refugees. Maryam explained:

Other refugees who choose not to look for jobs in the U.S. and continue to live with federal support, so I am the one that's against this thing, because when most of us, we live in hard situations now in our countries. So when we came here, and when we just feel the work coming, and the difference between the situation when we lived before. There's no safe place to live, nothing that the government gave to, no respect and no appreciation. So when we came here, you have to be appreciated to the person that you have here. So you have to prove yourself as a human, at least, not as a refugee, as a human. Because it's difficult when I, some of the families that I know them, they tried hard *not* to work. And there is thousands of people who are looking for this opportunity, and waiting and waiting this.

Sarina also talked about her experiences talking with other refugees. She shared:

Tell them to be smart and run fast because life will not wait for them to go get it. They have to work hard for it and they will get a lot trouble. A lot of times they will not sleep. They will have fights because life is stressful, getting all that information in their mind, but if they don't succeed in it, then their life will be disaster, and they will not have this fight in the future.

Sarina also expanded on why she believes some refugees do not want to work. She offered:

They learn it from our country. In our country, they told us, ‘Don't talk. Don't talk the right thing.’ Because if they talk the right thing, you will be in trouble. So I will not be afraid. If God put this for me, ‘This is your life story, and in the future you will get this, that, and this and this,’ then you will not be afraid of talking because everything is written for you. Your life is written in the head.

Ibrahim and Salma shared experiences of times when they were treated certain ways based on their appearance. Ibrahim provides an example:

Actually there's a lot of ways, you feel, but you are not sure. You know sometime when they say something. So, for example, some people directly asking me about my religion. I tell them, "Hey, I got no religion." Too badly, because that's something that I worry about. You know, how those sorts of attitudes impact immigrants and refugees, and just English as a second language speakers in general. So, that's really good.... You have the positive attitude.

However, Ibrahim and Salma also offer a positive viewpoint on how they feel they are treated at their community college. Ibrahim shared:

Yeah, it's a nice feeling. The way you get treated with teachers, with advisors, and the fact that you are in school and you are learning, and you are improving yourself, it's gonna give you like intrinsic satisfaction, you know? So, there's only a hope, a window you can go through. But that depends on the persons, you know?

Rabby also shared how he felt supported and welcomed on the campus of his community college. He said he did “not get out a lot” because of work, but at school, “People were coming, I mean they were supportive. Like how you asked them how things are working in their system

they were eager to help.” Frederic and Jamal also shared how they feel they have people who they can go to and ask questions, where they feel “supported” and “welcomed.” However, the participants also appeared to refer to times when they were offered this help and support due to their identity as refugees, perhaps begging the question of what would have happened if they were not perceived in a certain way – would the same level of help be offered?

The participants shared how they feel they are labeled and understood as refugees in the U.S. and how this perception influences the level of welcome and inclusion they feel in society. The participant experiences highlight the importance of recognizing the intersectional nature of human beings. Each person may share some common ground with others, but every person is individual and carries various part of their identity with them into each new experience. The participants also emphasized the importance of promoting mutual cultural understandings and reaching past stereotypes to get to know individual refugees as human beings, rather than as a label of “refugee.”

Experiences of discrimination. The participants shared numerous experiences with discrimination which impacted their social, academic, and personal experiences in the U.S. Deena discussed how she views herself in the context of a discriminatory environment. Deena previously shared how she felt “like a prisoner” and how she felt “unwelcome, no matter what.” She expressed how she felt that “they make you feel like you are not an actual human being.” She struggled with the feelings these memories exposed, as she felt that she “may always be an outsider.” She considered the U.S. her home now, and she expressed great sadness in considering that she may always feel this way. Deena also spent time talking about how she views the issue of discrimination against refugees in the U.S. She shared:

I do know it's really hard for some people, but my family, we act in a very peaceful way. So we understand other people's fear, so we try to act in a way showing that we are peaceful. But there's a lot of people who hate our people. We had fights many times just because they hate Arabs. We still, if we are real, especially with the new president, trust me, none of us feeling safe. Wherever we are, we are so afraid. Me, telling you this, I'm like, getting a little nervous. Like, when we drive, when we drive we are afraid. No matter what, no matter what people are saying about how we are safe here, we are not. Like, people will smile to your face and they really don't mean it. We can feel that, because we are human and we can see when a smile is false.

Deena went further to add that she becomes confused when she thinks about the refugee system in the U.S. She considers:

I do believe that the actual question should be: Why would you (America) accept them? Why would you allow them to come here if you're just going to send them away and say, oh, they don't deserve to be here? Something has been going on for a while, you cannot just make it change in one second.

Ahmed also shared multiple experiences with discrimination which impacted his educational process, self-perception, and sense of belongingness. After Ahmed completed his ESL coursework, he was looking forward to his first semester of coursework for his academic major. During his first month of classes, a group of four students initially befriended him and helped him navigate his college course portal online. After obtaining his password, they stopped talking to him and logged into his account and dropped all his courses. When Ahmed went to class the following day, his teacher informed him that he was no longer a student. Ahmed shares his

reaction, “I was scared, I didn’t know what should I do. I was scared to go complain. So I just like, I just, I like, I didn’t even go to school that semester. Just dropped.”

Ahmed continued to reflect on this experience and shared that he felt trapped in the situation, since he was still working to learn English. He explained further:

It was my second semester and I’ve been like, I was new here. I couldn’t speak that much. Like, even if I wanna explain what happened, I will say like, in a like, in a different way and I’m not gonna like, you know, explain that much and if they bring those guys and the girls, they gonna talk, they gonna like communicate, like, in an easy way. Perfectly.

Ahmed called himself a “loser” and feels that he “just gave up” since he did not know what else he could do at that time in his life. He felt he” lost a whole semester, a whole chapter of my life.”

Ahmed speaks often of his mother as his “best friend” and the main source of his motivation and persistence. When she found out what happened during his first semester of academic coursework, he remembers she was very angry and wanted to “wake me up from the life that I’m living.”

With an uplifting tone in his voice, he explained how he returned to college the following semester and successfully completed his first semester of college level courses. He was proud to share:

I took the same classes and I end up with like, literally, 4.0 GPA. I can do it. No matter what it is, if it’s in a different language, different culture, different country, if you like, if you work hard to reach your goals, no matter what, you’ll reach it, like, no matter what. You can do it.

Ahmed shared experiences of progress mixed with several instances of discrimination. His narrative exemplified the dualistic reality of his experiences. He would share intensely positive moments that occurred simultaneously with severe hardships. For example, Ahmed shared how he successfully returned to college after his second semester, while the following instance occurred during his break at work one evening soon after re-starting his second semester:

One night I was eating and there was a guy. He was literally holding his burger and he opened it and he came and he slapped me on my face with it. And he was like, “get out of my country, why you’re here?” I start yelling.... “why are you doing this? I didn’t do anything to you.” He was like, “go out of my country. We don’t need you. You’re, like, you’re a terrorist.” “why? What did I do to you? I was sitting right here in the corner eating. Why would you say this?” Then, he literally pulled videos for the war that happened, like, in Iraq, and he showed me like, videos – I’m not sure if it’s real, fake, whatever – for like Americans who were, like, raping like, girls.

Ahmed discussed how he avoids this eatery and lives with a fear of police officers. He does not feel that law enforcement cares about him as a refugee. He expressed feeling powerless, small, and unwelcome – feelings that he carried with him into his educational experiences.

Ahmed talked about feeling like he was so unsafe that he did not return to school for a month after this incident. He feared seeing the individuals on campus or in the community. Ahmed’s retelling of his experiences with discrimination in society expose how his sociocultural experiences impact his experience and persistence in educational pursuits. He added that “it’s one story of a thousand. It’s like that for me and it’s also like that for my sister, my mom. I don’t know, like, maybe, like, everyone. Especially, here in Tennessee, it’s not like the other states.”

Another example of how Ahmed's experience with discrimination impacted his sociocultural adaptation, inclusion, and persistence includes threatening behavior from strangers. While traveling to through a small town adjacent to his city in the Southeastern U.S., Ahmed pulled over when a group of people in a truck waved at him to stop:

They were asking me to stop, I thought maybe it was something wrong with my car. I got on the side and then he was like.... you know Trump is going to be the President? I was like, yes. Then he was like, then why are you still here? I was like, I didn't do anything for you.

At this point, Ahmed mimics a gun with his hand and puts it up to his forehead. He made a motion with his hand as if to hit himself on the side of the face, then points the gun (hand) up to the ceiling. Then, Ahmed said:

Then he told me, next time, if I'm going to see you here, it's going to be in your forehead. I said ah, okay. Like, I couldn't say anything, I'm scared.... And the people in the truck, they were recording and laughing.... they were recording me and the other guy put a gun on my forehead.

Ahmed, along with each of the other participants, shared that they were surprised that this level of discrimination persists in the U.S. Ahmed summarizes:

Weird that we are in 2018 and there are still people who think like, like, he thinks all the Muslims are terrorists. All the people who have, let's say, beard, are brown, they going to go and throw a bomb and like blow everything. when I feel like I'm gonna, like, I'm gonna get killed. I think only about one thing, my mom. I was like, okay, like, ah, what's going to happen to her? Who's gonna take her? Who's gonna drive her? You know? I've learned things, a lot. Like, a lot, like, in a really good way. Now I know how to handle

people. I know how to talk to this person. I know how to deal with this, like, race situation. I know how to react.

As he shared the ways he feels he has changed since coming to the U.S., he believes that his experiences have aided in his sense of self-efficacy and ability to push through negativity and remain focused on his goals. He added:

We are in America and no matter what you have with you, we are all equal. Don't worry about anyone. Like, this, like, he helped me a lot. When people are looking at you and saying hi, and, like, smiling. That's all we need sometimes.

Then, Maryam adds to this discussion when she talked about her daughter's experience on the school bus one day. She shared:

When she tried to ride the bus.... she didn't wear hijab, but they know she is Muslim. And one of the kids, when she just ride the bus, she said, "Terrorist! ISIS! Terrorist! ISIS!" The hate is awful. It fills your body with negative things, with negative emotion and feeling. And we have to release this kind of thing, because first of all, we are human. Before religion, before everything, we came to this world as a human.

Maryam also shared how she feels discrimination impacts her overall feelings about herself and about living in the U.S. She explained:

And it will push you to just prove yourself, and to go forward, so nothing and no one I blame, ever. It's not because of us, it just happened. Sometimes you blame yourself, because you are the one responsible to do that, or not doing that. But such is that when it happens in your country, you don't have anything to do, and you don't have any choice. This is the situation, and you have to deal with it.

Frederic also shared an experience from when he was in a classroom during the first year of his studies. He explained:

Yeah, some students would start under looking me. They were like, "Hey, why don't you go back to your country? What are you waiting for here?" I'm like, "We have no peace in our country." And they were like, "But, you can go there and make peace." I mean, that thing hurt me, because I really don't like things with politics.

On a positive note, he also shared how he believes his experience in community college has influenced him. He added:

It has changed me because I've come to know a lot of things that I did not before. I got to know more people, and like going to school has helped me feel like I'm in a society of people now. That way I feel like I'm socially welcomed in the community.

Salma also shared experiences with discrimination, but also shared positive experiences in society. She shared that, "normally, I do not feel like noticed" but that some people do notice and react to her hijab. One particular memory offers an example of her experiences with discrimination and her experiences with the kindness of strangers. She was in a grocery store and while she was paying, she realized that she only had her husband's membership card for the store and left her card at home.

The cashier "glared at me and did not speak for some time." The cashier called the manager and said that Salma was trying to "trick her." Salma said she was "so embarrassed and just wanted to leave." Then, a woman who overheard the conversation came to the register and told the manager that the cashier was being rude. The woman told the manager to "use my membership card and apologize to this lady." Salma said that this experience made her feel like

“there’s people feeling with us. There is people understanding the differences. Some people, they don’t know.”

Rabby, like Salma, intentionally focuses on positive aspects of his experiences and does not appear to want to remember negative experiences. Rather than elaborating on struggles he faced, he focused on how he found support after negative events in his life. He talked about how, when he first arrived, “you don’t have friends during the first days.” He alluded to fears of being out alone and talked about how “you have to motivate each other.... it’s normal, you keep going.” Until he began studying at his community college, he stayed with his family and only spoke to others during his English classes at the refugee support center.

Rabby’s intensely positive outlook is mirrored in Ibrahim and Jamal’s narratives. While the participants experienced financial, personal, and culturally-based discrimination as they resettled in the U.S., they displayed resilience in pushing forward and continuing to work toward their goals.

The participants shared multiple experiences with discrimination after coming to the U.S. as refugees. They reflected on how these experiences impacted their sense of self-efficacy, motivation to persist, and psychological health and well-being. Even after experiencing severe and sometimes violent discrimination, the participants were resilient as they continued to move toward achieving their goals for educational, social, and personal success. In the face of traumatic experiences, they were motivated and comforted by the genuine smile from a stranger. As Ahmed shared, “sometimes one person can give you hope for a hundred years.”

Chapter Summary

This chapter included a review of the data collection and analysis process. Then, a narrative introduction of each participant facilitated a deeper understanding of the prior life experiences of each participant and aided in understanding the context for adult refugee students. Then, this chapter introduced the main themes exposed through this study. The narrative analysis of the interview transcripts revealed four key themes: seek to understand and be understood, bird in a cage, power of education, and there is only hope. Seek to understand and be understood includes the categories of language barrier, complex identities, and dualistic realities. Bird in a cage includes the categories of cultural adaptation, alternative reality, struggle to survive. Power of education includes the categories of pathway to success, help-seeking on campus, and impact of prior experiences. Finally, the theme of there is only hope includes the categories of it was like a dream, perception of refugees, experiences of discrimination. Then, this chapter provided examples for each of the main themes and categories.

Chapter 5 will discuss the conclusions drawn from this study as well as implications for practice and implications for a wider audience. Chapter 5 will also include recommendations for further research. Then, the chapter will close with a conclusion.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

Recording and reflecting on the narratives of the nine adult refugee learners was a heartbreaking and awe-inspiring process. The participants gave me hope for the future as their inner strength, courage, and resiliency shone through in their storytelling. The nine participants shared much in common, while also exposing how perceptions of experiences varied due to individual and multidimensional identities. Each participant resettled in the Southeastern U.S. after being forced to leave their original country due to threats of violence and persecution. The nine participants gained access and participation in higher education in the U.S. through community colleges. Expanding their individual identities to include “adult learner” aided in the acclimation and cross-cultural adjustment process for each learner. This chapter begins with a summary of the study. Then, this chapter discusses the research findings in relation to the research questions. This chapter will then discuss the study implications and end with a conclusion.

Summary of the Study

Adult refugees come to the U.S. with dreams to establish a stable and safe environment for their families and possess hope for a future full of opportunity. This population of learners comes to the U.S. with life experiences and prior knowledge that can aid in cross-cultural problem-solving and help build a more global consciousness. Global consciousness can be understood to refer to developing an appreciation for the value of diversity in the world. However, adult refugee students face significant economic, social, and linguistic barriers to success. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, higher education provides a pathway for adult refugees to a more stable socioeconomic future, a means for developing cross-cultural

understandings, and a way to building social and professional networks. However, access and opportunities in higher education can be impeded by language barriers, discrimination, and socioeconomic factors for this population of learners. The problem surfaces in the gap between what is being done and what should be done to support adult refugee learner access to and success in higher education. Even with the increasing demand for higher education from adult refugees, resources are lacking to understand what the students need based on their lived experiences.

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to seek a better understanding of the experiences of adult refugee learners as they navigate higher education in the Southeastern U.S. The participants in this study consisted of nine adult refugee learners who completed at least one semester of study at a community college in a mid-sized Southeastern U.S. city. The research questions that guided this study were:

- 1) How do prior life experiences of adult refugee learners influence the transition to higher education in the U.S.?
- 2) How does the intersection of ethnicity and immigration status of adult refugee learners influence the U.S. higher education experience?
- 3) What strategies do adult refugee learners employ to navigate higher education?

This study used narrative inquiry to better understand the experiences of adult refugee learners in the Southeastern U.S. As Clandinin and Rosiek (2012) explain, narrative inquiry can serve as a window into the lives of participants. This window allowed this study to consider the varied ways each participant experienced the world and what the participants saw as important to share about their experiences.

Each of the participants were resettled in this Southeastern U.S. city as part of the U.S. refugee resettlement program. The participants were recruited using network selection. I connected with each participant through my pre-existing connections in the refugee community. The participants attended or currently attend a community college in same city.

I conducted semi-structured narrative interviews with nine participants in a private study room at a public library space convenient to the participants. I used an IRB-approved interview guide (See Appendix B) to facilitate the interview process. Roulston (2013) and Ellis and Patti (2014) explain that narrative interviews ideally facilitate an environment where participants can reflect on their experiences and consider how they make meaning of their past to inform their that future. Using this guidance, I strove to facilitate a safe and welcoming environment where participants felt comfortable remembering and sharing their resettlement experiences.

During the data analysis process, I examined the interview transcripts, research field notes, and my researcher journal for patterns that emerged during the interview process. I utilized a four-stage narrative coding process, including the following steps: 1) Initial review of data and in vivo coding; 2) Open coding with temporal and structural coding; 3) Chunk coding, linking streams of similar ideas; and 4) Review of data making additional memos. From this coding process, I identified four themes from the narratives which addressed the research questions.

To strive for trustworthiness in this study, I utilized triangulation, member checks, research field notes, and peer debriefing. As described in detail in Chapter 3, I maintained a focus on trustworthiness and credibility throughout this study. Considering my professional experiences with adult refugee learners and my personal beliefs regarding refugee rights and social justice, it was essential to attend to considerations of bias and trustworthiness throughout

each step of this dissertation. This careful attention to trustworthiness in qualitative research is essential to maintain credibility in the field (Given, 2016; Morrow, 2005; Roulston, 2013).

Discussion

Chapter 4 introduced the study participants and addressed the findings of this study. The narrative analysis of the interview transcripts revealed four key themes: a) seek to understand and be understood, b) bird in a cage, c) power of education, and d) there is only hope. Seek to understand and be understood includes the categories of language barrier, complex identities, and dualistic realities. Bird in a cage includes the categories of cultural adaptation, alternative reality, struggle to survive. Power of education includes the categories of pathway to success, help-seeking on campus, and impact of prior experiences. Finally, the theme of there is only hope includes the categories of it was like a dream, perception of refugees, experiences of discrimination. The four themes were drawn from the interview data and constructed to summarize thematic expressions from the participants. In the following section, I will discuss the study findings in relation to each research question and with relevant literature. The overarching response to each research question is provided as the main heading. Within each section, I define the main response and provide sub-responses regarding key points drawn from the participant interviews relevant to each research question.

Prior life experiences. The first research question focused on the prior life experiences of the participants. The research question was: How do prior life experiences of adult refugee learners influence the transition to higher education in the U.S.? The participant narratives exposed numerous instances when prior life experiences influenced the adult refugee learner transition to and experience in higher education in the U.S. and it is closely related to the supporting literature. Prior life experiences is the overarching response to the first research

question and includes four sub-responses: leadership, perception of self, perseverance, and educational goals.

The participants emphasized how prior knowledge of cultural norms no longer facilitated understanding of social expectations. One of the participants, Deena, talked about how she felt confused and fearful when she arrived in the U.S. and realized she no longer could predict what would happen based on prior knowledge of cultural or social norms. Another participant, Jamal, also talked about how fearful he became when he realized he did not know what to say or how to react to peer social behavior. Each of the nine participants shared feelings of uncertainty when trying to understand American social order and systems that influenced their ability to feel free to be themselves and express themselves comfortably in society. In hindsight, the participants realized that they were experiencing a social and cultural adjustment period while they worked to re-establish their lives in a new country.

As is widely encouraged within adult education scholarship, adult learner prior life experiences are integral parts of the adult learning process (Brookfield, 2015; Bye, Pushkar, & Conway, 2007; McCauley, Hammer, & Hinojosa, 2017; Rabourn, BrckaLorenz, & Shoup, 2018; Roessger, Greenleaf, & Hoggan, 2017). As adult refugee learners reflect on their prior life experiences to inform future actions, this prior knowledge is what makes learners unique and can be an integral part of building self-concept (Boucoulalas & Lawrence, 2010; Brockett, 2015; McCauley, Hammer, & Hinojosa, 2017; Rabourn, BrckaLorenz, & Shoup, 2018; Roessger, Greenleaf, & Hoggan, 2017). As adult refugee learners strive to establish stability during the resettlement process, they simultaneously deal with past experiences with trauma, the stress of relocation and resettlement, and the complexity of adapting to a culture - while also learning English (Goulah, 2010; Karimshah et al., 2013; Kim & Diaz, 2013; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-

McGovern, 2015; Museus & Ravello, 2010). This complex adjustment process involves a process looking forward while reflecting on the past.

While the nine adult refugee learners were excited and looking forward to a new start in the U.S., they began to experience frustration when realizing they faced new struggles in a quest to understand and be understood in a new cultural environment. The participants highlighted their feelings of being set-apart from society during the resettlement process. Deena, for instance, felt she was suspended between two cultures when coming to the U.S. She expressed feeling she was perceived as an outsider, regardless of how long since her resettlement. Her positionality as a refugee from Iraq seemed to limit the level of inclusion she felt in her new home country and culture.

Leadership. Leadership is a sub-response to the first research question. The participants talked about how their prior life experiences in leadership roles influenced their experiences in the U.S. and within higher education. The nine participants expressed feelings of fear, entrapment, and isolation during the resettlement process. While they expressed gratitude for the opportunity to begin establishing stability in the U.S., they struggled to make sense of what they expected to happen and what actually occurred. For one of the participants, Ahmed, this adaptation process became an emotional journey where the quest for understanding influenced his sense of self-efficacy and well-being. Ahmed explained how the level of fear and anxiety grew to such intensity after resettlement that he became terrified – eventually leading to physical and mental health symptoms. Ahmed shared his memories of the severe pressure he felt to take care of his family while balancing work, school, language acquisition, and the sociocultural adaptation process. When the stress in his life became too much to maintain alone, he began to seek help for his physical and mental well-being so that he could move forward in his goal for

stability. It appears that finding resources to aid in establishing a balance between the competing priorities for social, cultural, and economic stability could improve the quality of life for adult refugee learners.

Even while considering the struggles for stability after arrival in the U.S., the participants exemplified how their prior life experiences influenced the adaptation process and how they gained access to higher education. Each of the participants shared how they were leaders for their family throughout the refugee experience. The participants also talked about how they used personal strengths to navigate through the resettlement process in a leadership role.

For instance, five of the nine participants served as translators for their families while traveling to the U.S. and upon the initial arrival process. They took this leadership role based on their prior life experiences with English language learning, even when they did not possess a large vocabulary or extensive conversation abilities. One of the participants, Deena, talked about how frightening this experience was since she knew some English, but she was not confident that she really understood the nuances of the language enough to guide her family through the arrival and immigration process at the airport of entry. This example illustrates the immense pressure the participants felt as they strove to achieve the goal of starting a new life in a safe environment.

Each of the participants also explained how they had responsibility to take care of their families while living in their country of birth or while living in a refugee camp. Whether it was Rabby explaining how he was responsible for securing food and water for his family while they lived in the Tanzanian refugee camp for over ten years, or if it was Ibrahim explaining how he did everything possible to protect his small children from the brutality of war, the participants shared the breadth of their familial responsibilities. These past experiences securing housing,

sustenance, and protection for their families served to reinforce the participants' aptitude to lead their families through the resettlement process in the U.S.

The participants demonstrated how the identity as family leaders also applied to the students' educational experiences. The participants became leaders on their community college campuses. For example, Deena was a student worker in numerous campus offices and became a student representative in the office of the college president. Ahmed became an active member of the international student club on campus, becoming the club president and organizing numerous cultural events on campus and social events off-campus.

Perception of self. A second sub-response to the first research question is perception of self. The participant narratives exposed how their prior life experiences influenced their perception of self and acclimation process in the U.S. social and educational systems. The participants exemplified how the multiple positionalities of every individual intersect with context to impact the perception of self and other. For instance, one of the participants, Maryam named her identity as a refugee, mother, and an educated professional. She carried these parts of her self-perception into her life as a student at her community college and pulled from prior knowledge to help others, locate resources, and seek connections on campus. Her complex identity served as reinforcement to her sense of self-efficacy as she became a leader on campus and an advocate for fellow refugee students.

Similarly, another participant, Salma, gained confidence and her sense of self-efficacy grew when she became a student at a community college. Salma came to the U.S. as an 18-year-old wife and mother from Palestine. In college, she was able to build friendships with fellow students that encouraged her to persevere through difficulties during the resettlement and cross-cultural acclimation process. These findings support Dryden-Peterson and Giles' (2010)

discussion of the significant potential of higher education to facilitate empowerment for displaced populations. Through experience in higher education, marginalized or displaced students can find opportunities for personal, social, and economic growth. In addition, higher education can help develop a broader understanding of the U.S. sociocultural environment, economic systems, and pathways for socioeconomic advancement (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010; McBrien, 2005; Phan, 2018).

Prior life experiences also served as motivation for participants as they strove toward their academic, personal, and career goals in the U.S. For example, one of the participants, Sarina, reflected on her prior life experiences in Iraq throughout her narrative. She shared how motivating her father was in her life – encouraging her to question the status quo and follow her dreams. She expressed a strong desire to motivate and encourage others to question the rules and exercise the human ability to think independently. Sarina’s motivation and dedication to strive toward her goals, no matter what stands in her way, was evident throughout her narrative. By using her past experiences as motivation, she works diligently to achieve what she feels would be her best self.

Scholars encourage that motivation is what drives humans to learn (Courtney, 2018; Rocco & McGill, 2018; Sogunro, 2015; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017). Motivation levels may change over time, encountering various challenges along the path toward goal-achievement; however, motivation and prior life experiences can also be linked via neuroscience – opening broader methods of seeking to facilitate motivation for learning (Barrett, 2017; Montague, King-Casas, & Cohen, 2006; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017). This mind-body connection between motivation and neuropathways becomes especially relevant when considering integral nature of prior life experiences in the adult refugee learning process (Brookfield, 2005; Wlodkowski &

Ginsberg, 2017). As Brockett (2015) emphasized, a goal in adult learning facilitation is to encourage learning from life experiences, but not remaining trapped by past experiences or ways of being or understanding in the world.

Perseverance and connection. Another sub-response to research question one is perseverance and connection. The participant narratives exposed perseverance as a main characteristic of the adult refugee learners and emphasized the importance of connection among the participants. For instance, one of the participants, Ibrahim, provides an example of using past experiences to motivate future growth and perseverance. He was proud that he could resettle in the U.S. with his family and strive to build a more secure and stable life. He wanted his children to be able to live the life of children, rather than living amidst violence and hunger. While he admitted that he feels everything in the U.S. is a struggle, he also explained that he felt he could be successful considering all that he and his family had already endured. He prided himself on his positive outlook for the future and his commitment to protect his family. He gave the impression that he reflects on his life in Iraq on a daily basis and considers ways that he could remain connected in Iraq while he establishes a safe environment for his family in the U.S. in the interim.

Another participant, Frederic, also talked about how he remains connected to his roots, while still persisting to succeed in the U.S. From the beginning of his journey to the U.S., Frederic maintained a desire to complete a college degree in America. He believed that a college degree would facilitate his ability to find a good job and support his family. He is proud to be a community college student and considers the faculty, staff, and students at his college his extended family. It is also important to Frederic that others know he is a refugee, even though he believes being a refugee is admitting to having a hard life. He believes that by claiming his roots,

he can achieve better success. Frederic also shared how he works to remain focused on the present rather than thinking too much about the way things were in the refugee camp in Uganda. He shared that he believed he would be stuck in the past if he does not remain future-oriented.

Educational goals. A final sub-response to the first research question is educational goals. This response refers to the high value that the participants attach to education attainment and completion during the resettlement process. Four of the participants, Jamal, Ahmed, Ibrahim, and Sarina, discussed feeling pressure to complete their degree program. Further, the participants pull from prior life experiences to explain the value of education in their personal journey. For instance, two of the participants, Jamal and Ahmed, come from families that are full of doctors, lawyers, educators, and other professionals. They expressed feeling pressure to complete their degree since they believed they should already be finished at this time in their lives. Their studies were interrupted when they had to leave their home country in search of safety.

Two of the participants, Ibrahim and Sarina, expressed a sense of urgency to complete their degrees so that they could move toward reestablishing their professional careers in the U.S. Since they each left behind a successful career during the resettlement process, they were anxious to reestablish the socioeconomic status they left behind. The nine participants also alluded to feeling that others view them as “less-than” or “not educated” simply due to their experience as refugees. Obtaining education in the U.S. appeared essential to bolster the participants’ self-esteem and autonomy.

Additionally, two participants, Frederic and Rabby, both struggled to learn technology and gain computer literacy as they began their educational journey in the U.S. Since they lived most of their lives in refugee camps, they were unfamiliar with computers and other technological advances. Along with the other seven participants, they expressed confusion over

trying to understand the U.S. educational system. Since these two participants were the first in their families to seek higher education, they did not have a frame of reference in order to understand or anticipate what would come next in the education process. From being able to choose a program of study to knowing what to expect in the classroom, the participants were blazing new paths in their families and discovering new information and systems every day.

Social cognitive theory helps to deepen the understanding of the adult refugee learner experiences by focusing on the impact of social interactions on human behavior (Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014). Reflecting on the experiences of adult refugee learners, it appears that social engagement and social observations are integral parts on the acclimation process – or the quest for understanding and being understood. The participants experienced confusion or isolation when previously learned social norms were no longer consistent with experiences in the U.S. culture.

Since these unexpected social outcomes resulted in isolation and confusion for the adult refugee learners, the learners' sense of self-efficacy also decreased as they strove to navigate a new cultural landscape. This was exemplified in one of the participant's, Ahmed, narrative in particular, when he relayed a self-defeated attitude following a negative socio-cultural experience. Self-efficacy is also a central motivational factor in social cognitive theory that influences learner persistence (Courtney, 2018; Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014; Zientek, Fong, & Phelps, 2019). Persistence is particularly relevant in regard to adult refugee learners' motivation to push through social and cultural barriers and remain focused on achieving academic and personal goals (Ishitani, 2016; Ishitani & Reid, 2015). Each of the nine participants discussed ways they persevered through challenges to remain focused on personal goal-attainment.

Community college provided a pathway toward a higher sense of self-efficacy, cross-cultural friendships, and a way to better understand and become active members in U.S. culture and society. Experience in higher education also became a source of motivation for participants, providing evidence of how access to higher education for adult refugee students serves as a means to establish socioeconomic stability and personal well-being following resettlement. All nine participants also shared how they experienced reality of life in the U.S. within a context influenced by prior life experiences.

As the participants remember hardships and losses from the experiences in their home countries, they persist in the quest to succeed in the U.S. economic and social environment. Overall, the participants shared that they are grateful to be in the U.S., but they still experience daily struggles and fears as they work to meet and manage competing economic, social, and personal needs. The participants showed how an appreciation and respect for the past can facilitate personal growth and autonomy.

Intersectional identities. The second research question addressed the intersectional nature of the adult refugee learner experience. Research question two was: How does the intersection of ethnicity and immigration status of adult refugee learners influence the U.S. higher education experience? Considering the intersection of ethnicity and immigration status for adult refugee learners as approached in research question two, the participants shared how their complex identities influenced their higher education experience in the U.S. The overarching response to research question two is intersectional identities and includes two sub-responses: discrimination and intersection of like experiences. Relevant literature also supports these responses and adds to the ongoing academic discussion in scholarly literature.

The study findings revealed how participants felt they were labeled and understood as refugees in the U.S. and how this perception influences the level of welcome and inclusion they feel in society. The participant experiences highlight the importance of recognizing the intersectional nature of human beings. Each person may share some common ground with others, but every person is individual and carries various part of their identity with them into each new experience. The participants also emphasized the importance of promoting mutual cultural understandings and reaching past stereotypes to get to know individual refugees as human beings, rather than as a label of “refugee.”

Intersectionality serves as a lens to consider how the participants made meaning of experiences by recognizing the multiple sides to every person. As Collins and Bilge (2016) propose, recognizing the diversity among groups of people honors uniqueness while also encouraging unity rather than divisiveness. The findings from this study show that recognizing the value of diversity holds power to motivate and facilitate empowerment for adult refugee learners, while also encouraging non-refugee adult learners to consider the integral role of intersectional identity in the process of learning and personal development.

For example, one of the participants, Deena, talked about her thoughts of how refugees are perceived in society. She identified herself as a refugee, but also as much more than a single label. She added that she felt that no one seemed to care about who she was as an individual. She felt that people find out that she is a refugee and then they stop paying attention to other parts of her reality or other sides of herself. She shared times when she felt frustration and anger because she is treated in a certain way only because she is a refugee. She believes it is vital that people treat refugees as individuals and look beyond the refugee status. Another participant, Maryam, echoed this assertion of the importance of pushing back against stereotypes and striving to

encourage others to realize that each person is complex and multidimensional. This study illustrated the impact of appreciating and valuing diversity in order to counter discrimination in society.

Discrimination. The participant narratives support discrimination as a sub-response to the second research question. While participants discussed their intersectional identities, discrimination emerged as a key experience that influenced the participant experiences in U.S. higher education. As one of the participants, Maryam, discussed how she and her family suffered from discrimination in society, she passionately advocated for society to break through stereotypical ideals of a Muslim identity. Six of the nine participants discussed facing discrimination specific to religious identity. The three remaining participants also emphasized the negative impact of discrimination in their lives. Whether the discrimination was based on religious beliefs, ethnic identity, or immigration status, the persecution caused the participants to feel unsafe, unwelcome, and, once again in their lives, at the mercy of a derogatory system.

Another participant, Ahmed, also recalled several instances where racism and discrimination impacted his educational progress, sense of belonging, and self-perception. He was targeted both on-campus and off-campus and endured violence, bullying, and isolation on numerous occasions. While these experiences caused significant psychological and physical challenges, he shared that he feels stronger today after going through these traumas. Further, one participant, Maryam, agreed that traumatic experiences can ignite inner strength to push past the negativity and prove that the individual is stronger than hate. It appears vital that adult educators to consider the lives of adult learners outside the classroom, as experiences outside the classroom greatly impact the learning process and learning readiness.

Importantly, U.S. history includes a harsh reality of consistent discrimination and marginalization of refugee populations – or a staunch effort to deny entry to refugees in need of protection from violence, war, or persecution (McCorkle, 2018). As scholars have also noted, this study also shows how the perception of the refugee population as “outsiders” and the “other” has permeated U.S. culture and continues to impact refugee isolation from American sociocultural, economic, and cultural opportunities (Abramitzky & Boustan, 2017; Gross, 2015; McCorkle, 2018). The participants in this study were consistent with the trend of reporting discrimination as one of the main barriers for refugee access to resources for social, educational, or economic support (Boas, 2007; Elo, Frankenberg, Gansey, & Thomas, 2015).

Additionally, this perception of refugees as the “other” can become culturally-engrained in a society; so much so that when people enter higher education, stereotypes about race, culture, gender identity, and ethnicity can be an unconscious habit of mind, influencing beliefs and actions (Davis et al., 2004; Misawa, 2007, 2010, 2015). As Urdan (2012) reinforces, the level of success during the resettlement process is directly impacted by the level of acceptance offered by the local community; thus, the socially-engrained beliefs about refugee populations can directly influence the level of personal, academic, and professional success for refugee adult learners as they seek to establish a new livelihood in the U.S.

Intersection of like experiences. The narratives also revealed commonalities among participant experiences of the same gender identity or family structure. Therefore, intersection of like experiences is another sub-response to the second research question. While participant narratives illustrated the adult refugee learners’ intersectional and multidimensional identities, they also illustrated the overlap among common age groups and family structures. For instance, three of the participants, Maryam, Sarina, and Ibrahim, shared similar experiences and feelings

about the experiences in their narratives on several occasions. This finding suggests that due to the participants' family structure as having young children and leaving a successful career in their country of origin may lead to similar experiences during the resettlement process. The three participants, Maryam, Sarina, and Ibrahim, shared the struggle to find a job in the U.S., even though they hold Bachelor's degrees from their home country and left successful careers behind. One of the participants, Maryam, in particular, talked about how she feels like she is always in transition. She shared her feelings of frustration as she sought employment in the U.S. and realized that she was turned down for jobs based on her ethnicity, refugee status, or perception of her as a Middle Eastern woman. Two of the participants, Maryam and Sarina, began to apply for entry level jobs at large retailers in order to provide for her family, while another, Ibrahim, began driving for a ride-share company.

All nine participants boldly claimed their intersectional identities, while continuing to struggle with the challenges of social exclusion and discrimination based on parts of their identities. The participants expressed how they maintained motivation to achieve their goals while coping with ways to find a place for themselves in their new home. The study findings also expose how societal trends, political rhetoric, and marginalizing stereotypes impact every day of adult refugee learners' lives.

Strategies for success. The study findings revealed strategies for success as a response to research question three, including three sub-responses: agency and self-efficacy, English proficiency, and balancing priorities. Research question three was: What strategies do adult refugee learners employ to navigate higher education? In relation to research question three, the participants shared strategies they employ to help navigate U.S. higher education that are also supported by existing literature. The participants found support on campus and built cross-

cultural friendships, valued self-directed learning methods, reflected on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and focused on the importance of English language proficiency as success strategies. Each of the nine participants also shared experiences of finding support from faculty, staff, and fellow students on campus.

As Ishitani (2016) and Schunk, Meece, and Pintrich (2014) affirm, learners are more likely to persist when they are supported and encouraged by faculty and staff who strive to create a safe learning environment. Further, the adult refugee learners in this study echo the assertion that multicultural students are more likely to succeed academically and socially in a classroom where they are treated fairly, encouraged, and feel valued (Carlock, 2016; Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016). Each of the nine participants mentioned how a staff or faculty person at the community college helped to support them and encourage them as they struggled to establish stability in the U.S.

For example, one of the participants, Maryam, talked about one of her ESL instructors who she now considers a friend. She felt like the faculty person “adopted” her. While she felt isolated and unwelcomed at times in society, she felt welcomed and supported on campus. Five of the nine participants mentioned that the admission office staff helped them gain entry to the college, even though they did not have official documents to show high school graduation. The staff was understanding of the refugee process and knew that official transcripts are not always possible to obtain from war-torn countries or during times of international political upheaval. This support and understanding from campus staff and faculty could make a significant impact on the lives of adult refugee learners. While the adult refugees encounter challenges in society, having genuine support and a safe place to seek help could facilitate learner empowerment to persist through challenges.

Additionally, six of the nine participants expressed appreciation that faculty and staff on the college campus was available to help them find resources they needed to succeed in their courses such as tutoring services, computer and technology assistance, and library resources. One of the participants, Frederic, also shared how he began to develop anxiety about not understanding what was happening or what he should expect in the U.S. social context of school life. The participant talked about how he found assistance on campus when he faced challenges and he began to think of the faculty and staff on campus as friends, since they helped him any time he felt unsure or needed help.

The nine participants viewed education as path to build a financially stable, safe, and positive life. Maryam, one of the participants, felt like a “bird” when she realized she would be accepted in the community college, regardless of her personal religious or political beliefs. The nine participants stressed the value of building friendships with other refugee or international students on campus. These friendships reinforced the students’ persistence by motivating one another.

Agency and self-efficacy. In sub-response to the third research question, agency and self-efficacy emerged from the study findings. The narratives exposed how refugee students do not necessarily want to be labeled as “refugee” or “international.” The nine participants expressed a desire not to be singled-out from other students, but also to be acknowledged for the struggles and specific challenges that the refugee process can cause in the students’ lives. The participant narratives showed a high level of resiliency as each person shared stories of severe hardships, experiences with violence and exile, and heart-wrenching trials during resettlement, then each participant concluded their story with an optimistic outlook for the future and with a desire to help others in their situation. The participants showed how emotionally-strong, persistent, and

resilient they are as they shared their life journey with a hope to improve the experience for future adult refugee learners.

A combination of transformative learning theory and critical theory help to better understand the depth of the adult refugee learner experiences. Returning to Paulo Freire's assertion that people could organize and transform socially-oppressive systems by first seeking self-transformation (Freire, 1970, 1998; McCloskey, 2016). As the nine participants in this study advocated, after a transformative experience during the refugee resettlement process, they are inspired to be active social agents to improve the reception and services for future adult refugee learners (Baumgartner, 2001; McCloskey, 2016; Robinson & Levac, 2018).

The participants also employed self-directed learning initiatives throughout the narratives. Four of the participants used self-directed research methods to learn about community colleges, the U.S. education and cultural systems, and opportunities for employment in the U.S. In addition, seven of the participants mentioned using online resources to study vocabulary and other course-related material. The participants each stressed the importance of having courage and self-confidence. One of the participants, Ibrahim, further stressed that the individual had to put forth effort and possess inner motivation in order to learn and advance in an educational journey. This study showed that the adult refugee learners took responsibility for their own learning while also valuing support services and the help from others.

Through analysis of the nine participant narratives, a high level of motivation was evident. The participants' intrinsic motivation was clearly evidenced in their desire to become an active participant in society, learn more about the culture and systems in the U.S., feel involved and a part of society, and gain self-efficacy and autonomy. The nine participants' extrinsic motivation was also clearly shown in the narratives as they expressed that they wanted to

succeed in college because they did not want family to suffer, wanted to fulfill family expectations, and needed to expand career opportunities.

English proficiency. In a second sub-response to research question three, the study findings revealed English proficiency as a key factor for strategies for success for the adult refugee learners within the U.S. higher education system. Each of the nine participants focused on the importance of English language proficiency as a success strategy. Learning English as a second language became a top priority for most of the participants. Prior literature also confirms that one of the key issues when discussing education for adult refugee learners in the U.S. is English language acquisition. English language acquisition for adult refugee learners is integral to build or re-establish a professional career, work toward economic stability, and make meaningful social connections (McBrien, 2010; Padilla, 2006, Perry & Mallozzi, 2017).

Three of the participants, Deena, Sarina, and Ibrahim, knew at least some English prior to arriving in the U.S. However, other participants found that as English proficiency grew, the level of inclusion in society also increased. One of the participants, Salma, explained that she felt isolated and lost in the U.S. prior to learning English. She was anxious to have stability in the U.S. and being able to understand and be understood in society through language proficiency enabled her to feel more included.

Eight of the nine participants talked about the challenges of learning English while in a new culture where people do not do as they may expect. Two of the participants, Rabby and Deena, for instance, shared that they felt like they were treated as elementary school children again when they first arrived in the U.S. The participants craved social connection and ways to interact and become active members of their new home community. Another participant, Salma, agreed and added that English proficiency equaled human connection. She explained how she

always wants to help people – this is a part of who she is. When she did not know English enough to connect with people in the U.S., she struggled with the reality that she could not help anyone else. Further, when one participant, Ibrahim, discussed his view of how English language proficiency, he offered insights for how language proficiency impacted his education in the U.S. He stressed the barriers of cultural nuances in English language and a gap between practical English and technical and academic English comprehension.

Higher education institutions are also encouraged to focus on ESL curriculum that goes beyond language acquisition to focus on attending to the learner needs for cross-cultural understanding and a sense of personal place within U.S. society (Kim & Diaz, 2013; Warriner, 2007). This curriculum would ideally surpass language instruction to facilitate a nuanced understanding of the English language within the context of American social, cultural, and economic trends (Lardiere, 2017; Leki, 2017; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016). The transition from knowing to not knowing the language and culture of home was unsettling the participants. Six of the nine participants talked specifically about the feelings of uncertainty, social anxiety, and loneliness caused by language barriers. For instance, one participant, Jamal, experienced fear to interact with people due to anxiety about not understanding or being misunderstood. Another participant, Frederic, shared that he feels like he has to work hard to connect with others and build friendships, but he feels set-apart from his peers due to socio-cultural and linguistic barriers.

One of the participants, Deena, also highlighted how some refugees are treated when they do not speak English. She remembers meeting other workers in the factory where she worked her first job in the U.S. who already completed a college education in their country of birth. Her example exposed how refugees whose second language is English and who completed higher

education in their country of birth are not treated as educated when resettling in the U.S.

Refugees in this situation can be misunderstood as not being ready for professional employment due to language barriers. The participant stressed that refugees with prior education in Engineering, medical fields, and law still get treated “like nothing.”

Tisdell’s (2001) work is relevant here as she stresses the importance for adult learning facilitators to value reflexivity in the classroom through a focus on positionality, identity, and spirituality. In this approach to facilitation, adult refugee learners could find security in an inclusive learning environment – allowing them to reflect on past experiences and consider the paradoxes of seeking identity during the resettlement process. These paradoxes include the relational aspects of perceived identity versus a personal claiming of identity, the contradictory perception of refugee positionality and power, and the conflict between perceived ability and realities of prior experience.

By encouraging learners to critically reflect on the self in multiple contexts, adult learning facilitators help to construct an environment that can empower adult learners to embrace personal identity, while also allowing learners to begin to realize the systems of power that are interwoven into perceptions of positionality and power – further facilitating learner persistence and autonomy. Tisdell and Thompson (2007) summarize how a critical learning environment such as this would strive to facilitate activities to better understand power relations embedded in a society or culture, then capitalize on lived experiences to put new understandings into realistic practice. Adult refugee learners would benefit from this environment by having the space and time to reflect on the past while preparing for the future.

Balancing priorities. The participant narratives revealed balancing priorities as a final sub-response to the third research question. Balancing priorities was a key idea through the study findings as the participants navigated U.S. higher education. Each of the nine participants also worked while attending community college. Six of the participants stated that they had to work full-time while going to school to support their families. While the participants stressed the importance of making social connections to facilitate success in school, they also struggled to balance work, school, and personal responsibilities. Four of the participants, Ahmed, Rabby, Frederic, and Deena, emphasized how they felt that they had to focus so much on having enough money to support their family and escape a financial crisis that they did not have much time left to consider social connections.

The nine participants utilized personal optimism, self-determination, campus support, and built upon prior experiences in order to access and persist in community college. The struggle to survive meant several things to participants: escaping financial crisis, learning to communicate effectively, building social connections, and claiming personal identity and power in a new sociocultural environment. The findings of this study reinforce that higher education can facilitate empowerment, psychosocial development, and socioeconomic advancement for displaced populations (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010; McBrien, 2005; Phan, 2018).

When reflecting on the experiences of discrimination, isolation, and fear the participants shared, the support provided on campus becomes an even more powerful example of how simple acts of kindness and the acts of individuals striving to gain cross-cultural understanding can create a positive shift in the trajectory of adult students' lives. As adult refugee learners claim their intersectional identities, they also persist to learn from the past to succeed in current and

future goals. These findings illuminate the integral role of prior life experience, motivation, and critical reflection in the adult learning process.

Implications for Practice

This study focused on seeking to better understand how adult refugee students make meaning of their life experiences as refugees seeking higher education in the Southeastern U.S. This research provided a window into the lives of the participants and illuminated ways that their experiences can be applied to practice in adult and higher education. As a practicing international student advisor and immigration specialist in a community college, this study contributes to my practice by showing how I can improve campus student support services. These implications for change can be applied across adult and higher education in order to facilitate adult refugee learner success. In particular, I noticed three opportunities for improvement within the field of adult and higher education in relation to adult refugee learners: 1) emphasize the importance of recognizing the intersectional identity of adult refugee learners across campus services; 2) recognize the impact of faculty and staff on the lives of adult refugee learners; and 3) realize the need for cross-cultural understanding and knowledge-sharing in order to build a positive learning community.

The three opportunities for improvement are grounded by an awareness of the reality of adult refugee learner lives. Moving forward to take action on the three opportunities for improvement, the second step is to act on these implications and build upon existing processes to establish programs that address the areas for improvement. The programs are intended to facilitate a positive learning environment for adult refugee learners. The specific programs that could be established within adult and higher education to encourage adult refugee student success include: 1) a faculty/staff mentor program; 2) course-embedded cross-cultural learning

opportunities, and 3) a comprehensive training program for faculty and staff. The field of adult education must better understand the adult refugee experience in order to facilitate learning and encourage persistence.

As Brockett (2015) and Brookfield (2015) encourage, it is important that adult learning facilitators consider the positionality and social context of learners. It becomes essential that adult learning facilitators have the willingness to seek to understand how prior life experiences of learners influence the learning environment, learning style, and level of readiness for learning (Brockett, 2015; Brookfield, 2015). As teachers of adults, the students' life experiences can weave into discussions to illuminate new ideas and ways of seeing the world.

Each of the proposed programs is directly linked to the opportunities for improvement. For instance, in order to emphasize the importance of recognizing the intersectional identity of adult refugee learners across campus services, I would recommend a faculty and staff training program led by an expert in international and multicultural student leadership. This training program would facilitate a deeper campus-wide understanding of the value of the prior knowledge and experience adult refugee students bring to campus and how to facilitate an inclusive learning environment.

This training program would ideally focus on intercultural communication, background of the refugee resettlement process and specific needs of adult refugee learners, and expose the diversity and complexity of the adult refugee population. The training program would also focus on broadening faculty and staff understanding of the refugee process and identify specific challenges that adult refugee learners face. The training would discuss effective and culturally-responsive means to recognize students in crisis and support adult refugee learners to persist

academically and socially. As each of the nine participants in this study emphasized, they are not just one thing, there are multiple sides to every person.

The second opportunity for improvement focuses on the importance of recognizing the impact faculty and staff can have in the lives of adult refugee learners. Establishing a faculty and staff mentor program following the campus training program could ensure that all students have the opportunity to connect in meaningful ways with faculty and staff. The nine participants in this study shared the incredible impact faculty and staff on the community college campus had in their lives. Faculty and staff made efforts to connect and support the students in ways that the students found genuine, compassionate, and integral during a time when they struggled to persist academically and socially.

The faculty and staff mentor program would consist of pairing a faculty or staff member with an adult refugee learner after the faculty and staff complete the training program. The intention of the mentor program is to facilitate a safe space where faculty, staff, and adult refugee learners can discuss campus resources, U.S. educational system expectations and processes, and share prior life experiences. An outcome of this program is to build a positive learning environment, make intentional efforts to include students in the campus community, and build the overall sense of welcome and mutual understanding between adult refugee learners and the campus community.

The third opportunity for improvement involves realizing the need for cross-cultural understanding and knowledge-sharing in order to build a positive learning community. To address this opportunity for improvement, I recommend implementing cross-cultural learning opportunities that are embedded in course curriculum. These opportunities could help build connections and encourage mutual understanding among adult refugee learners and fellow

students. As a result of this program, the campus community can gain a deeper understanding of all students and realize the value of open communication in a trusting and safe learning environment. Examples for cross-cultural learning opportunities include: attending multicultural student activities followed by a reflective class discussion, connecting students with adult refugee learners on campus and ask them to conduct an informal interview, and academic departments could host a student panel discussion with adult refugee learners where the students can talk about their journey to the U.S., what life is like as a refugee in America, and share aspects of their culture with the campus community to build cross-cultural understanding. These opportunities for improvement and relative campus programming are outlined in Table 3. This table also shows examples of how I came to these conclusions from the findings.

Implications for Research

Adult refugee learners could be a difficult population to reach, but the potential impact of

Table 3

Opportunities for Improved Campus Support for Adult Refugee Learners

Opportunities for Improvement	Support from Findings	Programs to Support Adult Refugee Success
1) Recognize intersectional identity of adult refugee learners	Nine participants expressed complex and multilayered sense of personal identity	1) Faculty/staff mentor program
2) Recognize impact of faculty/staff	Nine participants shared how faculty and staff had a significant impact on their ability to persist and feelings of self-worth	2) Embedded cross-cultural learning opportunities
3) Realize need for cross-cultural understanding and knowledge-sharing	Nine participants discussed feeling isolated and set-apart from peers on campus and in the community and felt unsure how to approach others and make connections.	3) Training program for faculty/staff

further research is worthwhile and entirely possible to achieve. Refugee support agencies and non-profit organizations who support refugee populations can be vital resources to connect scholars with the refugee population. I propose six ideas below for further research that could expand understanding of the adult refugee student population and further expand support services for this critical population.

First of all, positive psychology and self-directed learning theory could be used as a framework to explore resiliency and persistence among adult refugee learners. This dissertation exposed characteristics of resiliency and persistence among adult refugee learners. A study focused on positive psychology and self-directed learning could further advance understanding of the adult refugee experience and illuminate pathways for developing opportunities for economic and sociocultural inclusion.

I would also recommend an action research study focused on developing and implementing a faculty and staff mentor program with adult refugee learners in a community college setting. Action research facilitates an in-depth analysis and evaluation of on-going work with a purpose of improving practices or outcomes (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; McNiff, 2017). This study could evolve from the implications of this dissertation and explore the academic and interpersonal impacts of a faculty and staff mentor program with adult refugee students.

Additionally, a longitudinal study of adult refugee learners as they navigate resettlement, seek higher education, and professional careers post-graduation could expand understanding of this population of learners and further advance the field of research. This type of study would help to better understand the progressive experiences of adult refugees throughout the resettlement process. There is potential for a longitudinal study to expose aspects of the resettlement process which serve as turning points in the adult refugee experience.

I would also recommend an additional narrative inquiry seeking to understand the experience of LGBTQ refugees who resettle in the Southeastern U.S. This study could provide information to better understand the support necessary for marginalized groups during the resettlement process. This dissertation did not focus on marginalized individuals within the adult refugee population, however one of the participants briefly discussed his feelings of isolation as a gay man during the resettlement process. Further research is needed to explore the experience of marginalized groups within the adult refugee population.

I also see significant value in conducting a comparative study of the refugee resettlement programs in the U.S. and Canada. Canada emerged in the literature review process as the home of prominent scholars in the study of refugees and the refugee process. An international comparative study could expose gaps in refugee resettlement programs and highlight means for improvement.

Finally, more research is also needed to better understand how cultural, religious, and ethnic identity may impact the experience of refugees. There are seemingly endless opportunities for further research on this topic and within this population. It would also be beneficial to explore collaborative research opportunities with scholars outside of the U.S. to compare adult refugee learner opportunities, barriers, and experiences.

Conclusion

Following traumatic experiences with war, violence, religious or ethnic persecution, and starvation, refugees seek safety, freedom, and stability through the U.S. refugee resettlement program (U.N. Refugee Agency, 2019). Adult refugees also bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise that can contribute to cross-cultural problem-solving and increased understanding of a globalized society. The participants in this study exuded hopefulness as they sought to rebuild

their lives in the U.S. The study shows how adult refugee learners dream about seeing U.S. culture evolve to be more accepting and inclusive of varied cultures and ways of being in the world.

Even with the increasing demand for education from refugee students, the landscape of higher education lacks the resources to understand what the students need based on their lived experiences. In order to meet the needs of this critical population, adult and higher education must expand awareness of how adult refugee learners view and experience the world. During this time in our history, where discussions about international and immigrant populations are especially politically-charged and at the forefront of popular media, it is even more vital that scholars seek to highlight refugees' voices so that their personal stories can serve as a testament to the importance of social justice and education access for refugees in the U.S. As Riessman (2008) advocates, narrative inquiry holds the potential to inspire social change as the voices of participants share life experiences. As participants seek to make meaning of lived experiences, opportunities for an expanded worldview and mindset can emerge. In order to push against discrimination and inequities in our social systems, refugee voices could hold power to expand sociocultural awareness and open pathways to educational advancement.

This narrative inquiry added to the existing limited body of research on adult refugee learners and sought to humanize the refugee experience to enhance public understanding of the challenges, hardships, motivations, and lived experiences of refugees in the U.S. By hearing the voices of adult refugee learners, a larger audience could begin to understand on a deeper level what it is like to be a refugee and how social interactions and experiences can impact the life trajectory and mentality of refugees.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEW PROJECT

A Narrative Inquiry on the Experiences of Refugee Adult Learners in Community Colleges in
the Southeastern Region of the United States

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in an interview as part of research study I am conducting as a doctoral student in the Adult Learning PhD program in the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. This research will focus on learning about refugee students' experiences while seeking higher education in the United States. The overall purpose of the interview is to seek a better understanding of a refugee's experience while seeking U.S. higher education. Higher education may include a college, university, or a college or university that offers English as a Second Language programming for adult learners.

INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

Participation in this research study includes one 60-minute interview session which will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and location. The interview will involve questions about the experience as a refugee seeking higher education in the U.S. With participant permission, the interview will be audio recorded and I may take notes during the interview in order to accurately record the information provided. The recorded files will be used for transcription purposes only. If participants have questions about the content or design of the interview they are encouraged to ask at any time.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information discussed within the interview will be kept confidential. Interview data generated for this study including individual names or identifiable information will be given pseudonyms or otherwise de-identified. The study records will be kept in a secure password protected file and will only be accessible to research personnel. All data will be kept for no more than three years after the conclusion of the study, after which time it will be destroyed.

PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants may decline to participate without penalty. Participants may withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty and without any loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled. Participants may choose to skip a question or end the interview at any time. Upon withdrawal from the interview, data will be either returned to you or destroyed.

RISKS

The level of risk associated with the current study is minimal. Most research involves some risk to confidentiality and it is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but the investigators believe this risk is unlikely because of the procedures we will use to protect your information. Participants may find that some of the questions may be uncomfortable to answer due to the personal nature of the content. Please answer every question as honestly and detailed as possible. However, if participants become uncomfortable during the interview, they are free to decline to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time.

BENEFITS

While there are no direct benefits for participating in this interview, the information gathered could help to improve the experience for future international and refugee students.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions about the interview, or if you experience adverse effects as a result of your participation you may contact the primary researcher, Patricia Higgins, at phiggin5@vols.utk.edu or (813) 389-4021. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Mitsunori Misawa in the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling at the University of Tennessee Knoxville at mmisawa@utk.edu or (865) 974-5440. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the University of Tennessee Knoxville Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-7697.

CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your own records. If you wish to participate in this study, please sign and date below.

Participant's Name (please print) Participant's Signature Date

Researcher's Name (please print) Researcher's Signature Date

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW GUIDE

A Narrative Inquiry on the Experiences of Refugee Adult Learners in Community
Colleges in the Southeastern Region of the United States

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The purpose of this study is to seek a better understanding of the experience of adult refugee learners as they seek access to higher education. The research questions that will guide this study are:

1. How do adult refugees' prior life experiences impact the transition to higher education in the U.S.?
2. How does the intersection of adult refugees' ethnicity and citizenship status impact the U.S. higher education experience?
3. What strategies do adult refugee learners employ to navigate higher education?

SCRIPT:

Hello, my name is Patricia Higgins and I am a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I am currently conducting a research study, as we previously discussed. Today's interview will last 60 minutes and is completely voluntary. If at any time you are uncomfortable or wish to stop, please let me know, and I will end the interview immediately. Please also do not hesitate to ask for clarification about any of the interview questions. I want to remind you that I am recording the interview for transcription purposes, but your identity will remain confidential. Do you understand?

Are you ready to begin?

I first want to thank you for your time and willingness to share your reflections about your experiences with me. Would you like to choose a name for me to use in place of your real name in my paper?

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS:

I would like to begin by asking a few questions about your personal background. Please remember that you do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender identity?
3. What is your ethnic identity?
4. Did you work or go to school in your home country?

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: How do adult refugees' prior life experiences impact the transition to higher education in the U.S.?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Briefly tell me about how you came to live in the U.S.?
 - a. Where did you live before coming to the U.S.?
 - b. When did you arrive in the U.S.?
 - i. Where did you first enter the U.S.?
 - ii. How old were you when you entered the U.S.?
 - iii. How long have you lived in your current city?
 - iv. Did you come to the U.S. with other family members or another group of people?
2. Why did you decide to seek higher education in the U.S.?
 - a. How did you begin your application process?

- b. Did anyone help you?
- 3. What type of institution are you currently attending?
 - a. Why did you choose this type of higher education institution?

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: How does the intersection of adult refugees' ethnicity and citizenship status impact the U.S. higher education experience?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 1. As a refugee, do you feel like you are treated differently from other students who are not refugees?
 - a. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?
- 2. Can you talk about an experience that you think explains how you felt as a new student on campus?
 - a. What do you think made you feel this way?
 - b. Has your experience changed since you began studying?
- 3. When you are not in school, do you generally feel welcomed in society?
 - a. Can you tell me more about that?
 - b. Do you think that being in school has changed your experience in society?

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: What strategies do adult refugee learners employ to navigate higher education?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 1. Could you talk about any resources, offices, or people that help you reach your goals for education?
 - a. Tell me a little bit more about this.

2. Can you recall a time where you faced a challenge in your education? How did you manage this situation?

a. Did anyone help you?

Final Question: Is there anything that you would like to add to this conversation that we have not discussed?

Thank you again for taking your time to talk with me about your experience. I greatly appreciate your perspectives and insights. I will contact you by email to share a copy of our discussion after I finish transcribing. You are welcome to provide me additional feedback or thoughts at any time.

Appendix C

List of Support Services

If you are a **student at Pellissippi State Community College**, you have access to free and confidential counseling services. Services include counseling related to: Mental Health, Stress, Depression, Grief/Loss, Anxiety, and Trauma: **865.539.7277 or 865.539.7293**.
<http://www.pstcc.edu/counseling/personal/index.php>.

If you or someone you know are in immediate danger to self or others, please contact 911 right away, or call the **Mobile Crisis Unit** at (865) 539-2409.

ULifeline is a mental health service for college students: Text "START" to 741-741 or call 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

TIES: Tennessee Immigrant Empowerment Solutions. 865.315.8437 or
www.tiesknoxville.org.

- Citizenship interview and naturalization process classes
- Employment preparation: interview practice, resume preparation, job search assistance
- Driver License test practice

Centro Hispano de East Tennessee: 865.522.0052 or info@centrohispanotn.org.

- ESL classes
- GED Prep classes
- After school programs
- College preparation programs
- Women's wellness group
- Translation services (Spanish only)

Appendix D

Example of Code Book

Themes and Subthemes			
Seek to understand and be understood	Bird in a cage	Power of education	There is only hope
language barrier	cultural adaptation	pathway to success	it was like a dream
complex identities	alternative reality	help-seeking on campus	perception of refugees
dualistic realities	struggle to survive	impact of prior experiences	experiences of discrimination
Categories			
between cultures/traditions (adaptation)	Education as priority/pathway to "better life" "success"	Motivation: Intrinsic/Extrinsic	intersection of immigration status and ethnicity (RQ)
insider/outsider	Prior life experience impact/prior knowledge as strategy	Positionality	marginalization/discrimination
perseverance/persistence	strategies to navigate HE	Sociocultural Capital	perception of refugee
resilience	education: central focus, power of, changed life, transformative, path to success, support on campus, self-concept improves with school	perception vs. reality (U.S.)	independence - freedom - safety

finding self - critical reflection	Strategies for navigating HE(RQ)	trust-mistrust (missing something?)	marginalized/discrimination /stereotypes - protect children from fear; prove self as a human being - Ibrahim and Salma did not want to accept or remember the bad
importance of family - circle of trust, head of household, supporting entire family, family motivation	prior knowledge to help survive, assumption of prior knowledge, impact of prior experiences (RQ)	social and cultural capital (culture shock; systems different)	immigration status - captive and at their mercy
importance of religious beliefs	connections - seeking help	Same behavior - different outcome	perception of refugee community: negative - gives us a bad image or positive - how are they going to make it (illegal immigrants) we are all different, but equal
identity-positionality - multiple sides to everyone, we are not just one thing; self-efficacy, autonomy		low SES; struggle to survive, can I make it	media impact on experience
leadership - desire to help others		lack of Computer Literacy	
emotionality: fear, stress, isolation, loss, hope, duality of emotions - fear v. glad to be here			
language proficiency: barriers, connections, ESL support in classes and from ESL classes; want to understand and be understood			
Resilience/Persistence/Persistence			
Complex Identities/Self-efficacy			
Emotionality			

Initial Codes (Sample):

Deena	Rabby	Ahmed	Maryam	Salma	Sarina	Jamal	Ibrahim	Frederic
between cultures	importance of family	low ses and social capital	family separation	family central to plans	prior experience working in HR field	feared language and cultural changes in U.S.	hardest decision in my life - language and cultural difference	English proficiency barrier to jobs
between traditions and desires	have to adapt	low self-efficacy upon arrival	central role of family	safety v. unknown future in U.S.	degree in British literature	fear permeated life in Syria, had to mistrust everyone	torn between home and safety	he works to support family of seven
insider/outsider	systems different - in every way	like a dream - hope for a better future	remembrance of harder times	torn between family and new start	fresh start in U.S.	loyal to home, but reality of fear	always in process of learning new culture	looking for security and stability
perseverance	social systems - power and positionality	terrifying	seeking safety	responsibility to husband here and missing family in Palestine	U.S. as a country with hope	when he arrived, felt insecure that he would get to stay	They don't teach you if you don't try by yourself.	perception of America vs. reality of American life
hope	complicated life change	family as central focus	religious beliefs gave comfort	hope for opportunities	empowerment through communication	"so different"	value hard work	arrival like an alternate reality
independence	education as first priority	responsible for family	low ses, social and cultural capital	cultural balance	English proficiency opens doors	language barrier to understanding	look for help in like people	not what thought it was

						and being understo od		
building relations hips	everyth ing is going too fast	found help in ESL classes	alone after coming to U.S.	Our main goal here is educatio n. Educati on is here.	found transition "easy"	nervous all the time	strateg ies: read a lot, researc h online, people like him help	it's differe nt but it's the same
access to education changed life	making connect ions to access school	sense of belong ing in ESL classes	struggle to survive	educatio n as path to success	not afraid to ask for help	easy to access school when he came to campus	educat ional system s differe nt	hard life as refuge e

Appendix E

University of Tennessee IRB Approval Letters



May 29, 2018

Patricia Jean Smith Higgins,
UTK - Coll of Education, Hlth, & Human - Educational Psychology & Counseling

Re: UTK IRB-18-04497-XP
Study Title: "It was like a Dream" : Refugee Narratives Seeking Higher Education in the
Southeastern United States

Dear Patricia Jean Smith Higgins:

The UTK Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed your application for the above referenced project. It determined that your application is eligible for expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1), Category 7. The IRB has reviewed these materials and determined that they do comply with proper consideration for the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects.

Therefore, this letter constitutes full approval by the IRB of your application (version1.3) as submitted, including:

Informed Consent Form - Version 1.1
StudyDocument_322687 - Version 1.0

The above listed documents have been dated and stamped IRB approved. Approval of this study will be valid from May 29, 2018 to May 28, 2019.

In the event that subjects are to be recruited using solicitation materials, such as brochures, posters, web-based advertisements, etc., these materials must receive prior approval of the IRB. Any revisions in the approved application must also be submitted to and approved by the IRB

Institutional Review Board | Office of Research & Engagement
1534 White Avenue Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
865-974-7697 865-974-7400 fax irb@utk.edu

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prior to implementation. In addition, you are responsible for reporting any unanticipated serious adverse events or other problems involving risks to subjects or others in the manner required by the local IRB policy.

Finally, re-approval of your project is required by the IRB in accord with the conditions specified above. You may not continue the research study beyond the time or other limits specified unless you obtain prior written approval of the IRB.

Sincerely,

Colleen P. Gilrane

Colleen P. Gilrane, Ph.D.
Chair

Institutional Review Board | Office of Research & Engagement
1134 White Avenue Knoxville, TN 37996-1129
865-974-7697 865-974-7400 fax irb@utk.edu

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

May 24, 2019

Patricia Higgins,
UTK - Coll of Education, Hlth, & Human - Educational Psychology & Counseling

Re: UTK IRB-18-04497-XP

Study Title: "It was like a Dream": Refugee Narratives Seeking Higher Education in the Southeastern United States

Dear Patricia Higgins:

The Administrative Section of the UTK Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed your application to **continue** your previously approved project, referenced above. It has determined that your application is eligible for **expedited** review under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1). The IRB reviewed your renewal application and determined that it does comply with proper consideration for the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects.

Therefore, this letter constitutes approval of your renewal application, including the consent form dated and stamped IRB approved. Approval of this study will be valid from 05/24/2019 to 05/27/2020.

In the event that subjects are to be recruited using solicitation materials, such as brochures, posters, web-based advertisements, etc., these materials must receive prior approval of the IRB. Any revisions in the approved application must also be submitted to and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. In addition, you are responsible for reporting any unanticipated serious adverse events or other problems involving risks to subject or others in the manner required by the local IRB policy.

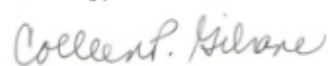
Finally, **re-approval** of your project is required by the IRB in accord with the conditions specified above. You may not continue the research study beyond the time or other limits specified unless you obtain prior written approval of the IRB.

Institutional Review Board | Office of Research & Engagement
1534 White Avenue Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
865-974-7697 865-974-7400 fax irb@utk.edu

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Sincerely,



Colleen P. Gilrane, Ph.D.
Chair

Institutional Review Board | Office of Research & Engagement
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865-974-7697 865-974-7400 fax irb.utk.edu

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Appendix F

Pellissippi State Community College IRB Approval Letter



May 21, 2019

Patricia Higgins
263 17th St. NW
Cleveland, TN 37311

Dear Ms. Higgins,

The Institutional Review Board at Pellissippi State Community College has received your application for permission to conduct your study, *"It was like a Dream": Refugee narratives seeking higher education in the Southeastern United States*. The Board believes the design of your study meets the Federal requirements for protection of human participants. Your application has received approval as required by PSCC Policy 08:02:01 Conducting Research at Pellissippi State.

Any significant changes in the research project must be reviewed by the IRB at Pellissippi State. Please submit any changes in writing. The College looks forward to seeing the results of the study.

Sincerely,

Nancy A. Ramsey, Chair
Institutional Review Board

Vita

Patricia Jean Smith Higgins was born to Nancy Eugenia Johnston Smith on January 23, 1980 in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. She earned her Bachelor of Arts Degree in American Studies from Eckerd College in 2001. She earned her Master of Science Degree in Educational Psychology from the University of Tennessee Knoxville in 2017. Patricia's primary professional experience includes working in the field of International Education with international and English as a Second Language students. She also has professional experience working to design, market, and manage study abroad programming within higher education. Patricia will graduate with a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology and Research with a concentration in Adult Learning in December 2019.