Developing A Sense of Belonging During Resettlement Amongst Former Refugee Young Adults

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctoral of Philosophy
in
Counselling Psychology

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Abstract

Sense of belonging is believed to be a fundamental human characteristic (Maslow, 1987), however there has been little discussion on the belongingness need in psychology. One unique population that has also been neglected in this body of literature is refugee young adults. Prior to migration, some refugees experience separation, loss, isolation, and discrimination and these experiences can persist in resettlement countries. Developing social connections is a key factor in mediating the impact of pre and post-migration stress (Kovacev & Shute, 2004; Simich, Beiser, & Mawani, 2003). Furthermore, refugees themselves have identified a sense of belonging as an indicator of successful integration (Ager & Strang, 2004; Hogarth, 2011). Although, research with refugee children and youth has increased in regards to positive mentoring relationships (e.g., Brar, 2010) and sense of belonging in educational settings (Chopra et al., 2004; Howland, Anderson, Smiley, & Abbott, 2006; Rueda& Genzuk, 2007), little is known about the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Using a qualitative interpretive description (Thorne, 2008) methodology, six former refugee young adults were interviewed and data were analyzed thematically. Specifically, the study explored the conditions, actions, and behaviors that facilitate belonging. Five pathways to belonging were identified: (1) Feeling comfortable, (2) Feeling confident, (3) Feeling accepted, (4) Sense of purpose, and (5) Integration. Practice implications for psychologists who work with refugee young adults are discussed.

Preface

This dissertation is an original work by Novjyot Brar-Josan. The research project, of which this dissertation is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board 1, "Sense of Belonging And Refugee Young Adults," No. 42639, October 22, 2013.

Dedication

To my parents, Amarjit and Manjit Brar, my greatest source of belonging. Without you, none of my success would have been possible. Thank you for teaching me the value of believing in myself, determination, and having a strong work ethic.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to the individuals who generously participated in this research as part of their own efforts to improve the psychological well-being of refugee youth and young adults. It was an honor to learn about the various pathways to developing and maintaining a sense of belonging. Through my interactions with the participants I acquired a number of insights that will greatly inform my work as a multicultural therapist and researcher. I would also like to thank the various post-secondary institutions and settlement agencies for distributing information about the present study. Specifically, I am indebted to Joseph, Fatima, and Patricia for the time they invested in the present study.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Sophie Yohani, for providing me with the opportunity to continue my work in this field. I was fortunate to learn from your expertise, guidance, patience, and support. Your commitment over the years has truly transformed me into the researcher I am today. I will always look to you for inspiration. To my supervisory committee members, Dr. Robin Everall and Dr. Denise Larsen, I am grateful for the invaluable insights and encouragement throughout this endeavor. Finally, I would like to extend my appreciation to Dr. Solina Richter, Dr. Linda Kreitzer, and Dr. Julie Drolet for their feedback, expertise, and insights provided.

Thank you to my friends, colleagues, and clinic supervisors in my doctoral program. You have contributed to my growth as a professional and have made this journey an amazing process. The completion of my graduate studies would not be possible without my internship experience. No words can express how fortunate I am to have Janet Caryk and Wes Miller as my mentors. Goethe once said "treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them to become what they are capable of being." Through their mentorship I have gained the confidence to become the therapist I am today.

Many thanks to my family and friends for believing in me, reminding me that life exists outside graduate school, and celebrating all our milestones no matter how big or, small. To Raj and Sim thank you for showing your support and being so generous with your compliments. You always give me more credit than I deserve, and I'm so proud to have two of the best siblings in the world. To my parents, thank you for instilling the importance of education and hard work. I appreciate all the sacrifices you have made in order to give us opportunities to succeed. Most importantly, I would like to thank my husband, Navi, who has been with me since the start of this program. You inspires me every morning to chase after my dreams, and your patience is a constant reminder to enjoy life one day at a time. You continue to bring immense joy in my life, and it is through our relationship that I can understand what Mark Twain was trying to get at when he said "to get the full value of joy; you must have somebody to divide it with." This dissertation is one of the many accomplishments that will define the support we provide to one another.

Finally, I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Government of Alberta, the University of Alberta's Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, and the University of Alberta Graduate Student Association for their generous support of this project.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

My interests in cross-cultural counselling and research stem from my experiences of being a second generation immigrant and taking an undergraduate course on adolescent developmental psychology. In taking this course, I became aware of the incongruence between popular developmental theories and my personal experiences. I recall feeling that my adolescent experiences were deviant from the norm, and I was disappointed that my cultural experiences were not represented. I realize that it is not realistic for a four month course to uncover all the cultural differences that influence adolescent development. However, I believe that the topic of acculturation and its impact on development could have been discussed. Similar to what Erikson (1959) suggests, establishing a sense of belonging was critical during my adolescent years. Growing up in an immigrant household, I had learned quite early that having a sense of belonging in Canada is not guaranteed. My parents have lived in Canada longer than they did in India, and despite obtaining citizenship 35 years ago establishing a sense of belonging has been a constant struggle for them. It seems that being labeled as an immigrant, as well as living in an environment with limited supports or opportunities to integrate, led them to identify themselves as foreigners. As a second generation Indo-Canadian, I also experienced mixed messages regarding where I belonged - was I Canadian, or East Indian like my parents? For instance, my parents often told me "don't become too Canadian" due to their fear that I would not fit in with my ethnic community. Moreover, when strangers questioned where I was from, I felt my identity as a Canadian citizen, and ultimately my sense of belonging, was being challenged. Given the discrepancy between what I knew about my experiences of growing up in Canada and what I was being taught about adolescent development in Canada, I made a conscious effort to interpret my understanding of research and clinical practice through a cross-cultural lens.

My master's thesis explored the collaboration between educational cultural brokers and mental health practitioners in supporting the well-being of refugee youth. Cultural brokers are individuals that are well immersed in their own ethnic culture as well as the mainstream culture (Owen & English, 2005). My study involved interviewing individuals from both professions to gain insight regarding the type of supports they provided. Although the aim of the study was not to explore sense of belonging, it was a central theme that emerged across the interviews. Specifically, the educational cultural brokers promoted belonging through their after-school culture and homework clubs. Positive outcomes such as completing high school, finding employment, and developing friendships across ethnic communities, were attributed to the development of a sense of belonging. Interestingly, the participants also shared that at times, a major obstacle to their work as cultural brokers was the youths' inability to establish a sense of belonging due to multiple personal and life challenges in the context of normal adolescent development. The participants speculated that, in extreme cases, academic, settlement, and financial challenges drove youth to associate themselves with local gangs in an attempt to belong.

Although the educational cultural brokers in my study identified two, there are likely many more pathways to belonging that have not been revealed. From these insights emerged new questions. Where else do former refugee young adults find belonging in Canada? What happened to the students who found a sense of belonging in in-school settlement programs once they completed high school? Where would they find their sense of belonging as young adults? Would they maintain contact with the cultural brokers outside the school settings or become involved with settlement programs and agencies? Would they continue to form relationships with various ethnic communities? Finally, it was unclear if their experiences of finding a sense

of belonging in a school environment helped them develop strategies they could use in other contexts. Although my thesis made it apparent that refugees were making active decisions regarding where they would like to belong, information on how they acted on these decisions was missing. This dissertation aims to respond to these unanswered questions by exploring the process in which former refugee young adults foster a personal sense of belonging in Canada.

The remainder of this introduction presents a short overview of the international context for refugees, followed by a brief description of refugees in Canada. The relationship between integration and sense of belonging is discussed, followed by a summary of the research problem and the purpose of the current research study.

Definition of Key Terms

This section lists and defines key terms used throughout the dissertation.

Former refugee. This term refers to individuals who no longer identified with the label "refugee." The participants in the present study self-identified themselves as permanent residents or as Canadian citizens at the time of the study, but migrated to Canada as refugees.

Refugees. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, a refugee is a:

> a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution" (UNHCR, 2007, pg. 10).

Young adult. Young adult is defined as the life stage that bridges adolescence and young adulthood and typically takes place between 18-30 years of age (Arnett, 2007). This newly defined stage is a response to the phenomenon of "extended adolescent" or "delayed adulthood" found in Western societies.

Sense of belonging. Sense of belonging is a fundamental human motivation that drives people to form social bonds and influences well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Sense of belonging consists of the following dimensions: (1) valued involvement, (2) fit, (3) frequency of affectively pleasant interactions, and (4) stability of relationship (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992; Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Settlement. Settlement refers to the period when refugees are focused on learning about the mainstream culture, meeting basic needs, housing, healthcare, establishing economic independence, enrolling in the school and work system, and integrating socially (Beiser, 2009).

Background Information

Following the end of World War II, millions of people were displaced across Europe. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was founded in 1950 in response to this crisis. Half a century later, the UNHCR continues to seek long-term solutions by promoting international refugee agreements, monitoring government compliance with international refugee law, relocating refugee camps away from border areas, documenting refugee need for resettlement, and assisting governments with the development of refugee policies, laws, and practices (UNHCR, 2001). The UNHCR has identified the following solutions to refugee populations: "returning to a home country (voluntary repatriation), settling permanently in the country where the refugee has found protection (local integration), or relocating to a third country which offers the refugee permanent residence (resettlement)"

(UNHCR, 2012, pp. 12). While this international organization does not explicitly talk about belonging, these solutions imply the underlying importance of rebuilding a sense of belonging in the aftermath of displacement from one's homeland.

According to the *UNHCR Global Trends 2013 Report*, there were 16.7 million refugees, 33.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), and 1.2 million asylum seekers worldwide (UNHCR, 2014). Furthermore, 10.7 million people were newly displaced across international borders, accounting for the highest record since comprehensive statistics on global forced displacement have been collected (UNHCR, 2014). Approximately half of these refugees and asylum-seekers were children below 18 years of age (UNHCR, 2014).

Canadian Refugee History

Canada's reputation as a world leader in protecting refugees has greatly improved since the holocaust. According to the Canadian Council of Refugees (CCR, 2008), "Canada was one of the worst offenders" (pp. 2) in failing to offer asylum to Jewish refugees. Furthermore, in 1951, the Canadian government refrained from signing the UNHCR convention because it would place restrictions on deporting individuals they considered a security risk; the convention was signed 18 years later on June 04, 1969 (CCR, 2009). Although the Canadian government was slow to respond to the needs of refugees, Canadian citizens have since played a vital role in the resettlement of refugees. In 1979, the Private Sponsorship of Refugee (PSR) program was launched. This program made it possible for refugees to be sponsored by: (1) Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs), (2) Community Sponsors, and (3) Groups of Five. According to the Handbook for Sponsoring Groups (Refugee Sponsorship Training Program [RSTP], 2011), "A Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) is an organization that has an agreement with the Government of Canada" (pp. 19). Unlike SAH, a Community Sponsor is not required to be

incorporated under provincial or federal law and can consist of organizations, associations, or corporations (RSTP, 2011). The final category, Group of Five, is a group of five or more Canadian citizens or permanent residents, 18 years of age or older, and live in the same community as the sponsored refugee (RSTP, 2011). The sponsorship period consists of 12 months in which the sponsor is responsible for providing financial resources as well as a settlement plan that includes "plan for reception, care, lodging, and settlement assistance" (RSTP, 2011, pp. 14). A total of 6,277 privately sponsored refugees were admitted in 2013 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014a).

Refugees can also enter the country as a government-assisted refugee (GAR). The application process begins outside Canada and could take up to six months or more to process (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014b). The Canadian government provides a loan to cover the cost of medical examinations and travel which must be paid in full between one to six years depending on the amount. Government assisted refugees are provided with 12 months of financial supports and they are connected to settlement services immediately. In 2013, 5,756 government assisted refugees were admitted (Canada Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014a). Finally, individuals can make a claim for refugee protection as a claimant at any port of entry in Canada or any Citizenship and Immigration Canada office inside Canada (Canada Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2015). There are some restrictions as to who can apply for refugee status. Those who are recognized as a Convention refugee by another country, being granted protected person status in Canada, having arrived via the Canada-United States (US) border, or having a previous refugee claim that was withdrawn, rejected, or found ineligible may not be eligible to apply (Canada Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2015). Qualified claims are then referred to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), and the refugee's

claim is in the adjudication process. This is when their case for a Protected Persons in Canada status is determined by the IRB. In 2013, 8,149 applications were granted protected persons status.

As a province, Alberta accepted 1,979 refugees in 2013. Of those, 544 were protected persons in Canada, 762 were government assisted refugees, and 673 were privately sponsored refugees (Canada Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014a). According to the latest facts and figures (Canada Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012), 20,461 refugee claimants entered Canada in 2012. Alberta was the fourth largest receiving province, with 781 refugee claimants resettling in Alberta.

Integration and Belonging

According to the UNHCR (2002), integration is a shared, dynamic, complex, and on-going process, which allows refugees to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society while maintaining their cultural identity. Similarly, Canadian Immigration and Citizenship (2002) defines integration as "a two-way process that encourages adjustments on the part of both newcomers and the receiving society" (pp. 28). One of the primary components of integration is social connections (Ager & Strang, 2008). That is, relationships, connections, and networks that provide links to other people and services (Ager & Strang, 2008). Specifically, there are three social connections that are associated with integration: (1) maintaining social bonds with one's ethnic community, (2) creating social bridges with other communities, and (3) strengthening social links with structures of the state (Ager & Strang, 2008). In addition to helping refugees adapt to their new home, social connections mediate the impact of pre and post-migration stressors (Kovacev & Shute, 2004; Lustig et al., 2004; Simich, et. al., 2003).

Refugees represent a high-risk group who are in need of attention due to pre-migration conditions that threaten optimal development. These may include exposure to direct combat, vulnerability to death, food and water shortage, sexual abuse, torture, forced separations, and murder of family and friends (Beiser, 2009; Lustig et al., 2004). Literature in this area also suggests refugees can remain at risk within resettlement countries during early years of settlement due to challenges in meeting basic needs including housing, healthcare, establishing economic independence, enrolling in the school system, and integrating socially (Beiser, 2009; Silove & Ekblad, 2002). Displacement-related and settlement stressors, such as lack of social support and loss of social roles, can place refugees at further risk for depression, anxiety, and chronic post-traumatic stress disorder (Miller & Rasco, 2004, Silove, Steel, & Psychol, 2006). However, with the right supports, most refugees go on to settle and integrate well in their new host countries (Silove & Ekblad, 2002).

In order to understand and minimize the psychological impact of displacement-related stressors, researchers have explored the pre-arrival contexts, prevalence of psychological disorders, and barriers to accessing mental health services. However, focusing on the deficits has consequently left service providers with limited knowledge of factors that contribute to positive adjustment, such as promoting integration. One of the most recommended areas for research on integration is exploring how refugees themselves define successful integration (Castles, Korac, Vasta, & Vertovec, 2001; Hyndman, 2012). Preliminary work on identifying local understandings of the concept of integration in the United Kingdom was undertaken by Ager and Strang (2004). They interviewed 14 refugees and 16 non-refugees in Pollokshaws; and 15 refugees and 18 non-refugees in Islington. The participants ranged from 14 to over 35 years in age, and the regions of origin included Africa, Eastern Europe, Middle East, and Latin

America. The following principles were identified by both refugees and non-refugees as characteristics of an integrated community: feeling safe from threats by other people, toleration, welcome and friendliness, belonging, feeling part of the community, and having friends. The authors further observed "a strikingly common thread among [the responses] was that it was the nature of relationships that most clearly defined a sense of integration" (pp. 3). Expectations of relationships ranged from experiencing "no trouble" on one end of the spectrum and "belonging" on the other. Belonging was characterized as "having close ties with family members, committed friendships within and across the groups making up the local community, and a sense of shared values" (pp. iv). The following quote by a participant highlights the importance of belonging "well you lose the feeling that you belong to any particular group or specific place or something. So you [are] always looking for a place, a group, or something to feel that you still belong to" (pp. 6). Hogarth's (2011) study of immigrant women in Canada also identified integration as a critical step in achieving an overall sense of belonging. These recent developments in defining integration from the refugees' perspective have led to a renewed interest in refugees' experiences of sense of belonging in their resettlement countries (CCR, 2011).

The Research Problem

Most would agree that the need to be accepted, cared for, valued, or appreciated by others is a fundamental characteristic of being human. This view is supported by Yalom (2005) who writes "people need people – for initial and continued survival, for socialization, for the pursuit of satisfaction. No one- not the dying, not the outcast, not the mighty – transcends the need for human contact" (pp. 24). Belonging is a critical component to a variety of psychological theories. For instance, Maslow's (1987) motivational hierarchy of human needs indicates that

belonging takes precedence over esteem and self-actualization, but does not emerge until basic needs including food and safety are met. According to Adler's Individual Psychology theory (1932), individuals are born with the need to belong, and a lack of belonging results in psychopathology (as cited in Shifron, R, 2010). Moreover, in their seminal article, Baumeister and Leary (1995) propose that "belonging provides a point of departure for understanding and integrating a great deal of the existing literature regarding human interpersonal behavior" (pp. 497). To date, this article provides the most complete integration of empirical evidence that supports the hypothesis of belonging being a fundamental human motivation. However, despite the overall importance of the concept, sense of belonging amongst refugees has not been widely researched within the field of psychology. Of the limited research that exists, the focus has been on the experiences of belonging (Caxaj & Berman, 2010; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Keyes & Kane, 2004; McGregor, Melvin, & Newman, 2015; Oikonomidoy, 2007) rather than understanding the process of developing a sense of belonging. Specifically, how is it that young adults who had pre-migration experiences of disruption restore their sense of belonging?

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

Using a qualitative interpretive description research design, the present study was guided by the question: how do former refugee young adults develop a sense of belonging during resettlement? The objectives are to: (1) document participants' description of belonging, (2) describe the pathways that facilitate belonging, (3) describe actions and behaviors that promote a sense of belonging, and (4) document the outcomes of achieving a sense of belonging to the host society. This in-depth exploration placed emphasis on the meanings that former refugee young adults used to describe their own process, thus overcoming the main limitation of ignoring the 'refugees' voice' in refugee studies (Hyndman, 2012; Kirkwood, 2011; Korac, 2003). In-depth

information collected from refugees themselves may help highlight the importance of belonging, as well as provide recommendations that best meet their need to facilitate belonging. In particular, this study focused on the cultural and contextual factors that influence the development of sense of belonging that has not been accounted for in existing theories.

The participants in the present study were from two urban cities, Edmonton and Calgary, located in the province of Alberta. Both urban cities have a large number of immigrant and refugee serving agencies, as well as ethno-cultural organizations. Calgary is the fourth largest city in Canada with the highest immigrant population, and Edmonton is the sixth highest (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine how former refugee young adults describe the process of achieving a sense of belonging as they make the transition from adolescence to adulthood. This investigation provides an opportunity to capture the relationships, activities, circumstances and places in which former refugees find a sense of belonging in their host society. The study advances our understanding of this understudied population, and provides information that can inform future clinical practice.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This chapter examines literature on sense of belonging amongst former refugee young adults. The first section reviews various definitions of sense of belonging and related terms in light of the present study. The section ends with a conceptual framework of belonging that was used to guide the study. The second section presents three developmental perspectives on sense of belonging, followed by a review of existing literature on sense of belonging amongst refugee young adults. The literature review consists of academic peer-reviewed journals, books, and government reports. The academic databases that were consulted include: PsychLit, PsychInfo, ERIC, and Medline.

Conceptualizing Sense of Belonging

In psychology and psychiatric nursing, sense of belonging is often used interchangeably with social support, sense of community, and social capital (Cobb, 1976; Hagerty et al., 1992; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Putnam, 2000). Within education, sense of belonging is also referred to as the need for relatedness (Faircloth, 2009). This section provides a working definition of sense of belonging, followed by a description of related terms.

Sense of belonging. In 1954, Maslow wrote "we have very little scientific information about the belongingness need, although this is a common theme in novels, autobiographies, poems, and plays" (p 43). Almost 40 years later, Hagerty and her colleagues (1992) utilized Walker and Avant's (1988) content analysis strategy to identify the defining attributes and use of the concept. The following definition emerged as a result of the analysis:

> The experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment.

> A system can be a relationship or organization, and an environment can be natural or cultural. (Hagerty et al., 1992, pp. 143)

Hagerty et al. (1992) further delineated two dimensions of belonging:

> (1) valued involvement: the experience of feeling valued, needed, accepted; and (2) fit: the person's perception that his or her characteristics articulate with or complement the system or environment. (pp. 173)

As noted in the above definition, a sense of belonging is based on the perception of being an integral part of a system and includes both affective and evaluative features. Behavioral components such as participation in activities and proximity to others do not necessarily indicate a sense of belonging. Take the example of an individual who actively participates in a group and is in close proximity to them yet does not feel valued, appreciated, or accepted in the group due to conflicting values. On the flip side, an individual with an online friend, who is not close in proximity, might share common characteristics that can lead to a greater sense of belonging despite the distance that exists between them.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) also noted that sense of belonging was underappreciated by the field of psychology. Their contribution to the field was to evaluate the hypothesis that belonging is a fundamental human motivation. Their belongingness hypothesis specifically states:

> Human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships. Satisfying this drive involves two criteria. First, there is a need for frequent, affectively pleasant interactions with a few other people, and, second, these interactions must take place in the context of a temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern for each other's welfare.

> Interactions with a constantly changing sequence of partners will be less satisfactory than repeated interactions with the same person(s), and relatedness without frequent contact will also be unsatisfactory. (pp. 497)

Baumeister and Leary (1995) critically evaluated their hypothesis by drawing upon a large body of empirical findings that were pertinent to the notion of belongingness. Table 1 summarizes the metatheoretical requirements that were used by the authors to evaluate their hypothesis.

Belonging is a fundamental need, if it.....
operates in a wide variety of settings and does not require a specific type of circumstance for it to occur.
guides cognitive and emotional responses. Specifically "real, potential, or imagined changes in one's belongingness status will produce emotional responses, with positive affect linked to increases in belongingness and negative affect linked to decreases in it." (pp. 505)
influences health, adjustment, or well-being. "People who lack belongingness should exhibit pathological consequences beyond mere temporary distress." (pg 498)
motivates people to form social bonds
transcends cultural boundaries
is not a derivative of another motive
influences a broad variety of behaviors

Table 1. Baumeister and Leary (1995) Belongingness Hypothesis

Social support. Similar to a sense of belonging, various definitions of *social support* emerge in the literature. For instance, social support has been defined as a coping resource and

"usually refers to the functions performed for the individual by significant others, such as family members, friends, and coworkers" (Thoits, 1995). Similarly, Cobb (1976) conceptualized social support as information provided by others that lead "the subject to believe that he is cared for and loved, is esteemed and valued and belongs to a social network of communication and mutual obligation" (pp. 300) The most cited definition of social support is "a set of exchanges that provide individuals with material and physical assistance, social contact, and emotional sharing, as well as with the sense that they are the continuing focus of concern by others" (Pilisuk & Hillier Park, 1986, pp. 17). As noted in Cobb's (1976) definition, belonging is a component of social support, and taps into the dimension of *perceived valued involvement* and *stability of relationships*. Specifically, the distinction between the two terms is that social support refers to the perceived behaviors of others, such as providing information and material assistance; whereas, sense of belonging is the outcome of receiving social support and refers to feeling valued and cared for.

Sense of community. From a psychological perspective, sense of community refers to an individual's perceptions, feelings, and attitudes about their relationship to a community. The most influential theory on sense of community is McMillan and Chavis' (1986) sense of community model. They defined the concept as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (pp. 9). The model consists of four elements: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Of importance to the present study is the element of membership, that McMillan and Chavis (1986) define as "the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness" (pp. 4). Integration and fulfillment of needs is also important because it refers to the

resources received through membership in the group (social support). Belonging is also mentioned in Blow and Timm's (2002) definition of community. They define community as:

> ... a network of significant relationships characterized by understanding, genuineness, connection, mutual meaning, belonging and commitment. It is a network of people who interact with each other in a significant way on an ongoing basis. The people that we experience a sense of community with are those people with whom we can be ourselves. It is the group which we feel accepted, cared for and loved. (pp. 67-68)

In this definition belonging refers to the dimensions of *valued involvement* and *stability of relationships*.

Social capital. Social capital has been approached by various fields including sociology, public health, criminology, education, and political science. Similar to the above terms, various definitions and theories exist in the literature. For instance, Bourdieu (1986) describes social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (pp. 248). On the other hand, Putnam (1995) defines social capital as the "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (pp. 67). The common thread that exists across the two definitions is that "social networks have value" (Putnam, 2000, pp. 19). That is, individuals tend to benefit when they act as a collective.

Although social capital has made its mark in the social sciences, the discipline of psychology has been slow to embrace the concept. A probable explanation is that social capital "seemed to be about context (networks of individuals and organizations) without much specific concern about individuals" (Perkins, Hughey, & Speer, 2002, pp. 36). However in 2002, Perkins

et al. made the argument that social capital is a multi-level framework that consists of both individual psychological and behavioral conceptions as well as conceptions of institutional and community network. They argue psychological factors exist in the development of social capital, for instance, sense of community is an individual-level attitude that promotes social capital. A strong sense of community can act as a catalyst for the behavioral dimension of social capital, including increased participation and civic engagement. Furthermore, once social capital is achieved, individuals gain access to the following types of social support: (1) shared expectations, values, or world views (communal), (2) tangible or task-oriented assistance (instrumental), (3) access to new contacts and information (informational), and (4) emotional support (Perkins et al., 2002, pp. 40). It appears that having social capital becomes the foundational context from which sense of community, social supports, and ultimately belonging emerges. To date, no direct link has been established between social capital and belonging.

Conclusion

Upon reading the various terms, I began to conceptualize these related terms in an embedded pattern whereby each construct functioned as an element of the other, with sense of belonging being at the centre of the framework (figure 1).

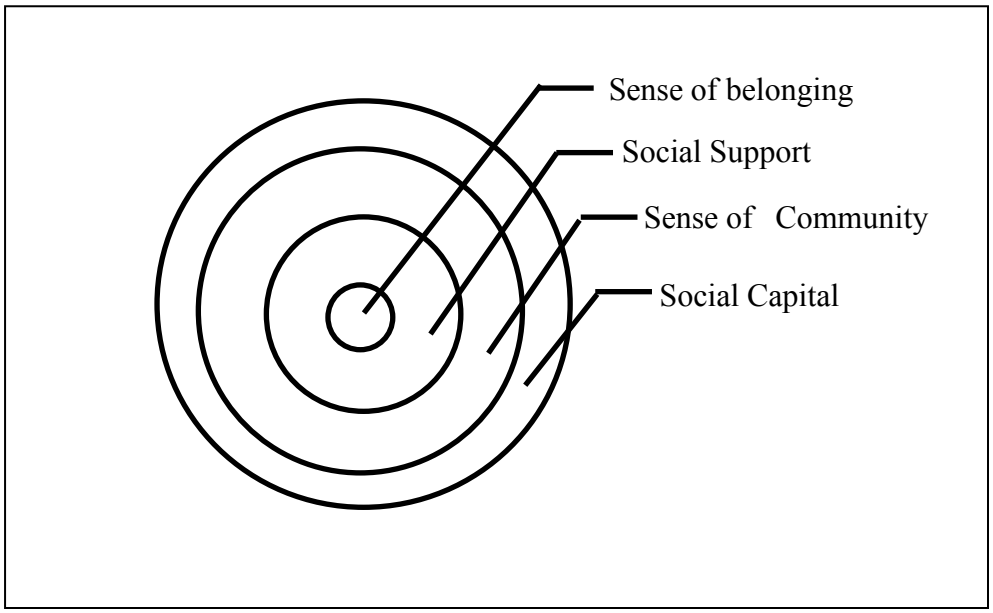

Figure 1. Belonging Framework

In defining sense of belonging, the present study merged the following dimensions of sense of belonging as identified by Hagerty et al. (1992) with Baumeister and Leary (1995): (1) valued involvement, (2) fit, (3) frequency of affectively pleasant interactions, and (4) stability of relationship (i.e. long lasting bonds vs. series of partners, mutual and reciprocal concern and affection). Furthermore, based on my review of the literature, I also perceive belonging as a fundamental human motivation that drives people to form social bonds and influences well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Developmental Perspectives on Sense of Belonging

From an evolutionary perspective, humans have adapted to form attachments with others in order to accomplish survival tasks, such as cooperative hunting, competing for limited resources (i.e. food, mate), defending against external threats, caring for offspring, and enhancing reproductive success (Stevens & Prince, 2001; Yalom, 2005). This ability to form bonds for survival emerges in infancy through care giving relationships that support children's ability to trust people in their environment (Erickson, 1959). That is, an infant's likelihood of

survival is increased if they are able to form a bond with a caregiver. It is well accepted in child developmental literature, that for normal development to occur, an individual needs at least one primary caregiver who is responsive and sensitive to their needs (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1969). According to Ainsworth (1967), infants who are able to depend on their caregivers are characterized as securely attached, whereas poor maternal availability or neglect will produce an ambivalent or avoidant attachment style, respectively. It seems these early attachment experiences influence the thoughts, beliefs, and expectations one has about the self in relation to others (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1969) and therefore likely serves as the first group to which an individual experiences belonging.

Sense of belonging is often conceptualized as a lifelong developmental process. Three relevant theoretical models of development include: (a) Erikson's psychosocial development theory (Erikson, 1959), (b) Kestenberg and Kestenberg's (1988) model of development, and (c) Bronfenbrenner's human ecology framework (1994). A common theme across these models is an emphasis on the environmental influence on development.

Erickson's psychosocial development theory categorizes human development into eight stages that occur across the life span (Erickson, 1959). Furthermore, development is the result of the interaction between the individual and their environment. When an individual fails to accomplish a developmental task it results in a crisis, and could result in difficulties in following stages. The eight basic conflicts in each phase are: (1) trust vs. mistrust, (2) autonomy vs. shame and doubt, (3) initiative vs. guilt, (4) industry vs. inferiority, (5) identity vs. role confusion, (6) intimacy vs. isolation, (7) generativity vs. stagnation, and (8) ego integrity vs. despair. The notion of belonging is most dominant in the identity vs. role confusion and intimacy vs. isolation phase. Although, the theory addresses major developmental tasks that occur during the life span,

Erikson's psychosocial development has been criticized for being grounded in European male cultural values and does not account for cultural or gender variations (Ferguson, 2006; Gilligan, 1982). As Hendry and Kloep (2012) explain, stage theories "…cannot really describe everyone's life. There are far too many exceptions to general stage descriptions for us to accept them as universals theories. They are, at best, broad and general descriptions of lifespan change" (pp. 15). Based on these criticisms, stage based theories does not seem applicable for the present study.

Kestenberg and Kestenberg's (1988) model explored the development of sense of belonging and altruism amongst child survivors of the holocaust. This theory indicates that the need for belonging changes in each stage of development. The concept of belonging is introduced by the end of the first year, when children begin to respond to experiences of exclusion. By age four, an understanding of sense of belonging is achieved through lived experiences of inclusion and exclusion. In the next phase of Kestenberg and Kestenberg's (1988) development model, children become exposed to the school environment and are presented with the opportunity to transfer their pattern of relating to other groups, mainly their peers and teachers. The need for belonging is at its peak during puberty and individuals continue to broaden their sense of belonging to a broader social context (Kestenberg & Kestenberg, 1988). External attributes contribute to a sense of sameness. Furthermore, adolescents gain sense of belonging in regards to a cause or set of ideology. In adulthood, Kestenberg and Kestenberg (1988) note that sense of belonging changes once again, the social groups in which most adults feel similar to include friends, work colleagues, spouse, and children. Taken together, one can conclude that as an individual continues to grow, their sense of belonging becomes progressively more complex and requires an individual to interact with an environment that consists of multiple contexts and

players. Although this model accounts for war experiences, it was developed with a singular group. More research would be needed to determine if this model fits for all refugees. Thus, this model provides a general description of one historical context and cannot be accepted as a universal model.

Bronfrenbrenner's (1979) human ecology framework consists of two defining properties. First, human development "takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment. To be effective, these interactions must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, pp. 38). Based on this definition, at least two assumptions can be made. First, development is the result of interactions that take place between an individual and their environment. Unlike the previous developmental theories, the human ecology framework acknowledges that the individual is an active player in exerting influence on the environment in which they interact with, but is also affected by that very same environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The second defining property according to Bronfenbrenner (1994) is that "form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes affecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person, of the environment – both immediate and more remote – in which the processes are taking place, and the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration" (pp.38). *Proximal processes* refer to what an individual actually experiences during their interaction with the environment and is perceived to be "the primary engines of human development." (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, pp. 6). Based on this assumption, one can conclude that: (1) the environment presents an individual with conditions and restrictions to which they must adapt, (2) the environment consists of multiple layers, in which the developing

person is in the center (fig. 2), and (3) relationships can range from immediate and direct to distant and indirect depending on which system they are in (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Saarine, Ruoppila, & Korkiakangas, 1994 as cited in Harkonen, 2007). Thus, in order to understand former refugee young adults' sense of belonging, one must examine the relationships and multiple layers that exist in their environment.

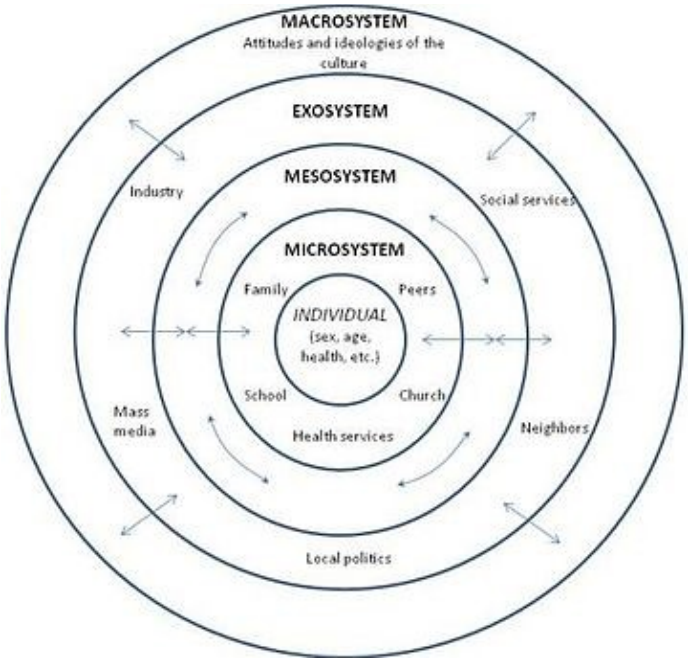

Figure 2. The Ecological Approach (Picture printed from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecological_systems_theory).

The human ecology framework consists of the following five interdependent levels: (a) the microsystem, (b) the mesosystem, (c) the exosystem, (d) the macrosystem, and (e) the chronosystem. *Microsystem* refers to the "pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interactions with, and activity in, the immediate environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, pp. 39). Common examples cited in the literature include family, extended family, school, peer group, and workplace (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Penn, 2005).

Family is perceived as the most important microsystem during childhood, given that most of the child's time is spent with the family. It is important to note that microsystems are not defined by the geographical location, but by the degree in which the individual is an active participant (Harkonen, 2007).

The second level consists of *mesosystem* which is the "linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, pp. 40). This layer defines the connections between the various microsystems, for example, the linkage between family and school. Whereas, the third level of the environment, *exosystem,* entails the "linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in which the developing person lives" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, pp. 40). For instance, the linkage between the child's home and their parents' workplace (industry).

The fourth level, *macrosystem* "consists of the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other broader social context, with particular reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, life-styles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life course options that are embedded in each of these broader systems" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, pp. 40). In other words, it is a system that contains the cultural values, laws, ideologies, and traditions of a given society. Cultural institutions including family, congregation, school, and workplace transfer the characteristics of the macrosystem from one generation to another. The influence of this system penetrates the micro-, meso-, and exosystem and is often noticed when making cross-cultural comparison of individuals growing up in different societies (Saarinen, Ruoppila, & Korkiakangas, 1994 as cited in Harkonen, 2007).

The final system, *chronosystem*, refers to the "change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person but also of the environment in which that person lives (i.e. changes over the life course in family structure, socioeconomic status, employment, place of residence, or the degree of hecticness and ability in everyday life)" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, pp. 40).

The current discussion focusing on the contextual influences on the development of sense of belonging is best represented by Bronfrenbrenner's human ecology framework. This framework takes into account the various cultural factors that influence development, and it allows for the examination of multiple sociocultural contexts which appear relevant to young adult refugees.

Belonging Amongst Young Adult Refugees

The notion of belonging seems central to the refugee experience given the inherent losses one experiences as a result of having to flee one's country. Yet, there is little research that explores belonging in former refugee young adults. In this section, a brief overview of the pre-migration experiences that may threaten belonging among refugee youth is presented, followed by a review of post-migration experiences and belonging. This information will provide an understanding of the sociocultural contexts which shape former refugee young adults experience of belonging.

Pre-migration experiences of belonging amongst refugee children and youth. There is limited research that links belonging in young refugees to pre-migration experiences. However, one can extrapolate that threats to safety, exclusion, and multiple losses can potentially impact one's sense of belonging (Kestenberg & Kestenberg, 1988). Referring back to Maslow's (1987) notion that sense of belonging is an evolutionary trait that enhances survival, it can be assumed that belonging is highly sought after when one's safety and security is threatened. In

the case of war, trauma and threats to survival can be aimed at the individual, familial, and group level (Rousseau, Drapeau, & Corin, 1997). Threats to safety can also take place in refugee camps after people have escaped life threatening events in their counties of origin. For example, Rothe et al. (2002) found that 80 percent of 87 Cuban children and adolescents confined to a refugee camp at Guantanamo Bay witnessed acts of violence, 37 percent saw someone attempt or commit suicide, and 19 percent were separated from their family members.

At any time, children can experience separation; this can happen during war or during the flight to refugee camps (Lustig et al., 2004; Merali, 2008). Consistent with the evolutionary perspective on belonging, when children lose their caregivers they begin to look elsewhere for safety and protection. Accordingly, when children separate from their most important microsystem (family) they are required to find new social roles and interpersonal relationships. It is well known that children and youth are often recruited or forced to engage in war combat and terrorist activities (Davies & Webb, 2000; Derluyn, Broekaert, Schuyten, & De Temmerman, 2004; Kline & Mone, 2003; UNICEF, 2002). Interestingly, in a meta analysis of children involved in combat, Lustig et al. (2004) noted "youth combatants [in East Asia and South Pacific] described a sense of belonging and a support system within armed groups that served as surrogate family, particularly for children separated from their biological families due to war conditions" (pp. 26). Therefore, while many young people succumb to the effects of separation from family and exposure to violence both as victims and perpetrators in war, some manage to cope (Wessells, 2002) and reestablish their microsystem.

For some refugees, oppression and exclusion in relation to religious, political or ethnic identity abolishes opportunities for youth to belong. In such situations, children and youth can be deprived of the opportunity to attend school, engage in recreational activities, practice their

religion, or use their language (Kestenberg & Kestenberg, 1988). These experiences are indicative of Bronfenbrenner's (1994) chronosystem, given that it describes a change in one's environment over time. Furthermore, the macrosystem is threatened given that their cultural values, belief systems, and laws are at risk of being extinct. The refugee experience is also characterized as a journey of multiple losses, including personal possessions, home, friends, community, and way of life (Blackwell & Melzak, 2000). The individual is faced with the reality that items and people that once belonged to them no longer exist. For children and youth, these experiences of loss can contribute to a diminished sense of worth.

Refugees can continue to struggle in their search for belonging, even after they have escaped a war zone. For instance, refugee camps located at bordering countries deny refugees of the same rights as citizens because citizenship implies privileges of belonging. These experiences persist when applying for asylum to a resettlement country, such as Canada. Similar to the refugee camp experiences, refugees at the claimant stage are limited in access to health, social welfare, employment and educational opportunities (Lacroix, 2004). Being denied access to the privileges of mainstream society can negate a sense of belonging. In Hogarth's (2011) study of immigrant women in Canada, numerous participants reported that their sense of belonging did not improve once citizenship was granted. Hogarth (2011) concludes that "the trauma of experiences in the years immediately following immigration has long term impact on belonging. From the experiences of participants the early years of immigration are the most unsettling, and it is in these tumultuous times the stage for belonging, or in the case of participants unbelonging is set" (pp. 70).

Post-migration threats and supports for belonging amongst refugee children and youth. Sense of belonging amongst refugee youth and young adults during resettlement emerges

in literature that explores acculturation, identity development, school experiences, and social capital. In this section, I will review the factors that threaten, as well as facilitate, sense of belonging in these four areas.

Acculturation. Acculturation is the process of cultural groups adopting the beliefs and customs of other groups (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). From an ecological developmental perspective, it is the process of adopting to a new macrosystem. Psychological acculturation refers to the experience of being exposed to the values, norms, and expected behaviors of a given culture and the internal changes that take place in an individual (Berry, 2005). According to Berry's (2005) acculturation framework, individuals within a particular group can undergo the acculturation process in different ways depending on three components: (1) preference in maintaining ethnic heritage, (2) interest in connecting with the larger society, and (3) attitudes and preferences of the dominant group. The interaction between the first two components can result in the following four acculturation strategies. *Assimilation*, is characterized as abandoning ones heritage culture and adopting the mainstream culture of the host country. *Separation,* on the other hand, is when one rejects the new culture and maintains their heritage culture. If an individual abandons both their old and new culture, they are using a *marginalization* strategy of acculturating. Finally, *integration* refers to the strategy of maintaining one's heritage while adopting aspects of the larger mainstream culture. The ideologies and political policies of the dominant groups can either facilitate or hinder the choices of refugees in terms of acculturation strategies (Berry, 2005). For instance, the integration strategy is a viable option if policies regarding cultural diversity and multiculturalism are adopted by the host country (Berry, 2005). On the other hand, refugees who migrate to nations

that favor a melting pot ideology are restricted to choose between assimilation and marginalization.

It can be argued that the four dimensions of belonging*: valued involvement, fit, frequency of affectively pleasant interactions*, and *stability of relationship* can influence the level of interest in maintaining a connection to the mainstream cultural group and one's own cultural group. For instance, societies that are accepting of cultural pluralism perceive diversity as a communal resource (*valued involvement*), thus a greater sense of belonging can emerge. In contrast, refugees living in societies that enforce cultural change are more likely to "experience hostility, rejection, and discrimination" (Berry, 2005, pp. 704). In this example, the attitudes and preferences of the dominant group decrease sense of belonging due to poor *fit* and infrequent *experiences of affectively pleasant interactions*. Furthermore, despite an individual's preference to belong, "constraints are often imposed by the dominant group so that individuals are not entirely free to act according to their preferences" (Berry, 2005, pp. 704). Therefore, only refugee groups who are not discriminated against by mainstream society truly have the option to maintain or abandon one's involvement.

Stress associated with balancing both the old and new cultures is commonly referred to as acculturative stress (Berry, 2005) and can also threaten sense of belonging. Failure to adopt the mainstream culture can alienate refugee youth from their peers (Baffoe, 2007) and limits opportunity to expand their microsystem. Conversely, losing one's heritage culture can lead to intergenerational conflict due to alienation from parents. An example of this is youth adopting English as their primary language, but their parents preferring them to communicate in the language of their country of origin (Hyman, Vu, & Beiser, 2000). Disagreements between adolescents and parents can also include beliefs regarding autonomy and freedom, such as

curfew and clothing, and pressure to succeed academically (Anisef & Kilbride, 2000; Hyman et al., 2000). Immigrant and refugee youth who lack a healthy sense of belonging at home or school are particularly vulnerable to recruitment into gangs (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). Furthermore, being unable to balance the conflicting cultures requires the individual to choose one culture while abandoning the other, thus, limiting opportunities to belong.

The literature on acculturation stress is mostly focused on the experience of children and youth. However, research on the experiences of young adults is beginning to emerge. For instance, acculturation stress during this period is associated with increased vulnerability to clinical depression (Hwang & Ting, 2008), suicidal ideation (Cho & Haslam, 2010), and past suicide attempts (Gomez, Miranda, & Polanco, 2011; Kessler, Berglund, Borges, Nock, & Wang, 2005). Both acculturation and young adulthood experiences are characterized as being 'in between.' In the case of acculturation, the individual feels in between two cultures. Similarly, one key attribute of young adulthood, is feeling like an adult in some regards and an adolescent in others. Making the differentiation is further complicated when both cultures ascribe to different indicators of adulthood. Numerous cross-cultural studies have noted the concept of adulthood can be different across cultures based on the unique values and beliefs that exist (Arnett, 2003; Nelson, 2009). Western cultures perceive adulthood as moving towards individualization and self-sufficiency, whereas aboriginal and Eastern cultures perceive it as being less self-oriented (Cheah & Nelson, 2004; Kundu & Adams, 2005). Thus, prior disagreements regarding autonomy and freedom may persist into early adulthood. To date no research has explored the conflicting expectations that take place during this developmental period and its impact on sense of belonging.

Identity development. According to Erikson's (1959) psychosocial development theory, adolescence and young adulthood is the period in which the need to belong is at its peak. Identity refers to the cultures and groups where one perceives he or she belongs. A personal identity consists of several narratives that relate to the following questions: who am I as a person, what am I not, who do I aspire to become, and how do I fit in to the rest of society (Erikson; Yuval-Davis, 2010). The development of an identity is an ongoing complex process of "becoming" (Dlamini, Anucha, & Yan, 2009; Yuval-Davis, 2010) and is most prominent during adolescence and young adulthood (Kiang & Fuligni, 2009; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Schwartz, Cote, & Arnett, 2005; Seider, 2007). For refugee young adults, their ethnic and national identities play a significant role in the reconstruction of identity (Phinney, 2006).

Ethnic identity. Ethnic identity is most prominent during young adulthood (Phinney, 2006). During this developmental period, individuals move away from their immediate microsystem of family, friends, and neighborhood and into the larger society (Phinney, 2006). Ethnic identity theory (Phinney, 1989) consists of the following components: *ethnic affirmation* and *ethnic exploration*. Ethnic affirmation is similar to Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory which states that individual's have a personal identity that is based on one's individual attributes and, a social identity which is based on one's membership in social groups. Social identity is based on the perception of belonging to a group and the attitudes and feelings that are derived from group membership. Feelings of attachment and belonging help individual's obtain a positive social identity and a strong commitment towards the group (Padilla, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Ethnic exploration is the process of individuals exploring, learning, and becoming involved in their ethnic group. This process is complicated when opportunities to learn about the

ethnic group are limited, such as being born in a refugee camp, having a history of long-term displacement, aggressors interrupting rituals, or the destruction of cultural artifacts (Mollica, 2006). Migrating to a new country and macrosystem inevitably leads individuals to re-evaluate their current identity in comparison to the social customs, norms, and expectations of the host country. Furthermore, racial differentiation is a new construct for those migrating from homogenous societies. For instance, many Somali youth report taking on both racial and ethnic identities after resettlement (Bhatia, 2010; Forman, 2001). In Hogarth's (2011) study of Canadian immigrant women, a sixteen year old Somalian women explained "it was only when I came to Canada I realized I was Black...my blackness never defined me before" (pp. 73). It appears that resettlement can expand an individual's awareness of multiple groups in which they can belong. Yet this process of sorting out one's identity and sense of belonging in the Canadian multicultural milieu can be a complicated process for young refugee youth as articulated by a cultural broker in a study of refugee children's post-war adaptation in school and community settings (Yohani, 2010):

> Who should they follow? Should they follow the Canadian mainstream or somebody from their race or are they going to follow the religious flow? Say, for example, somebody is black. Do we imitate somebody who is black and their way of life in this country or should he imitate his core religious people or the mainstream religious people? You see the confusion that they are living with. So they don't know if they want to be a Sudanese Canadian Christian or a Black Canadian and start to imitate the way of the Blacks here. For the Muslims, should they follow their religious leader or the American Muslim way of life? This is a huge problem that they are having. (p. 869).

National identity. National identity refers to the shared identity of a nation, including the boundaries, ideals, and principles of that country (Hymans, 2005; Lee & Hebert, 2006). In Canada, 11 percent of immigrant youth report having a predominant Canadian identity in comparison to their ethnic identity (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2002). These same immigrant youth shared their perception that only individuals of Anglo-Saxon decent without an accent and born in Canada are representative of true Canadians (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2002). Thus, despite having shared ideals and principles as the host country, it appears that one's national identity can be challenged by their ethnicity.

Developing a national identity is also challenged when ethnic youth and young adults feel unwelcomed or discriminated against by their new macrosystem (Dlamini & Anucha, 2009; Rodriguez, Schwartz, & Whitbourne, 2010; Syed & Azmitia, 2008). According to Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder (2006), discrimination is negatively correlated with the desire to connect with the host country. A person's response to discrimination can influence sense of belonging. To date no studies on the influence of discrimination and belonging among young adults have been conducted with Canadian refugee populations. However, the following coping strategies were identified in a study of Ethiopian young adult immigrants between the ages of 19 and 25, living in Israel: racism-free, proactive coping, fighters, and avoiders (Walsh & Tuval-Mashiach, 2012). The first two categories consist of individuals who either deny the existence, or acknowledge its existence around them but are not personally experiencing discrimination. Proactive individuals believe the way they present themselves influences how others treat them. The last two categories reported discrimination occurring on a regular basis, but differed in their response. Fighters directly confront racism by either challenging people, or engaging in public discourse through educating and advocating, whereas avoiders, "ignore the insults and

humiliation, and try to prove their abilities in a quiet and non-confrontational way" (pp. 64). In this study, avoiders reported a lower sense of belonging, whereas fighters and proactive coping was positively related to sense of belonging.

Hybrid identities. Many refugee youth and emerging adults have been found to successfully incorporate the social practices and cultural materials of the host country with those of their country of origin (Bhatia, 2010; Rodriguez et al., 2010). For example, Forman's (2001) study of Somali youth identified military clothing as providing a context in which participants could successfully incorporate materials from both cultures. Specifically, military clothing in Western society can be representative of the hip-hop culture, and these same clothing are representative of patriotism in their home country (Bhatia, 2010; Forman, 2001). Hybrid identities can represent an integration acculturation strategy, where individuals develop an integrated sense of self by making choices that transcend both cultures. To date the impact of hybrid identities on sense of belonging has not been explored.

Interestingly, when refugee youth and young adults meld together their pre- and post – migration experiences, one aspect they hope to shed is the *refugee* label. In Kumsa's (2006) study of Oromo youth and young adults in Toronto, many participants perceived the label of 'refugee' as an insult. Addooyyees, a participant in Kumsa's (2006) study, described a refugee as "a displaced person with no country or place" (pp. 244). Dinsiri, another participant voiced the following question that many participants struggled with: "does a person pass the stage of being a refugee? Are we still considered refugees? Like, I don't understand that." (Kumsa, 2006, pp. 243). As these quotes suggest, the maintenance of the refugee identity can possibly impair one's sense of belonging to the mainstream society.

School experiences. A considerable amount of literature has been published on school experiences and belonging. These studies identify belonging as having an influence on student motivation, engagement, and academic achievement (Anderman, 2002; Goodenow, 1993; Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer, and Hutchins, 2011; Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2010; Walker & Greene, 2009). According to Goodenow (1993) sense of belonging consists of being "accepted, respected, included, and supported" (pp. 80). In regards to adolescents, Wallace, Ye, and Chhuon (2012) investigated the sub dimensions of belonging amongst a sample of 890 ethnically diverse high school students. Their findings suggest the following school experiences that contribute to sense of belonging: generalized connection to teachers, connection to a specific teacher, identification and participating in official school-sanctioned activities, and perceptions of fitting in with peers. Connecting with teachers was based on "gaining authentic personal knowledge of students" (pp. 128) and demonstrating a commitment to their academic success. These findings are consistent with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) dimension of *frequent caring and positive interactions*. In contrast to relationships with their teachers, belonging with their peers was dependent on gaining acceptance. Interestingly, students demonstrated greater control in obtaining peer acceptance. As Wallace et al. (2012) note "adolescents presented managing one's acceptability within a peer network as fluid, dynamic, and in some sense, able to be manipulated" (pp. 127). Specifically, gaining acceptance was achieved through altering one's behavior and dress.

The school system aspires to provide refugee students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are required to become self-reliant and contributing members of society. Furthermore, it provides an avenue for refugee youth to expand their microsystem. It is often the first place refugee children and youth learn about the Canadian culture (Baffoe, 2007;

Oikonomidoy, 2007; Wilkinson, 2002). Recent evidence suggests that in-school settlement programs serve as a unique sub-dimension for refugee students (Brar 2010; Yohani, 2013). Specifically, cultural clubs provide youth with the opportunity to connect with other newcomers, discuss culturally relevant topics, share cultural customs, learn about multiculturalism, and engage in cultural celebrations. Educational cultural brokers also demonstrate to refugee students a commitment to their academic success by providing one-on-one tutoring, facilitating afterschool homework clubs, and advocating for appropriate grade placement (Brar, 2010, Yohani, 2013). The cultural brokers also have a role in facilitating the development of a mesosystem in Canada. For instance, they would mediate disciplinary hearings between the home and school.

Social capital. Robert Putnam's (1993) social capital theory has been incorporated in Ager and Strang's (2008) *conceptual integration framework*. This particular framework identifies elements of 'successful' integration for refugees in resettlement settings. Based on Ager and Strang's (2008) findings from the *indicators of integration* study, many refugees identified social connections as a defining feature of integration. According to Putnam (1993) there are three types of social capital in societies: *bonding*, *bridging,* and *linking*. These categories represent the different levels of support systems and connectedness of individuals, families, communities, and societies. The category of *social bonds* consists of relationships individuals have with others that share the same ethnicity, religious identity, or country of origin (Ager & Strang, 2008). This category is similar to Bronfenbrenner's microsystem given that the relationships consist of one-on-one engagement with the individual. According to Ager and Strang (2008), the capital obtained from social bonds leads to the development of bridging capital and is necessary for integration. *Social bridges* are characterized as connections between

diverse groups. There are numerous factors that contribute to the development of social bridges. First, individuals must be willing to participate in shared activities such as sports, religious worship, and political activity (Ager & Strang, 2008). In other words, the individual must have a shared macrosystem with the groups they want to bridge with. Acceptance of mainstream values, including music, sports, video games, and gestures can provide individuals with a common ground (Ager & Strang, 2008; Young, Spigner, Farwell, & Stubblefield, 2006). In regards to sense of belonging, these factors align with the dimension of *fit* in Hagerty's et al. (1992) definition. Second, reciprocity and trust must exist between bonded groups, this is similar to the dimensions of *frequent affectively pleasant interactions* and *stability of relationship* proposed by Baumeister and Leary's (1995) *Belongingness Hypothesis*. Lastly, confidence and sense of safety needs to be established in order for refugees to approach other groups (Goodson & Phillimore, 2008). The final category, *Social links,* consists of the connections between a person and the structures of the state, such as non-profit organizations and government services (Ager & Strang, 2008). Societies that have established refugee programs and policies increase the likelihood of developing this form of social capital.

In terms of the three types of social capital, the literature suggests that refugees are mostly invested in social bonds than bridges and links (Kirkwood, 2011). In line with this, one of their top priorities upon arrival is to unite with close family members; hence, they are more likely to relocate from one province to another (Simich, Beiser, & Mawani, 2003). The parent-child relationship is another form of social bonds that refugees invest in. The role of parental support in the psychosocial adjustment of refugees has been documented across broad groups including African, Latin American, Vietnamese, and Bosnian (Rousseau, Mekki-Berrada, & Moreau, 2001; Tingvold, Hauff, Allen, & Middelthon, 2012; Weine, 2008). According to Latin

American and African refugees in Montreal, family members facilitate the continuity between their past and present worlds (Rousseau et al., 2001). Furthermore, refugees are less occupied by painful memories when family members are present (McGregor et al., 2015). Other forms of support identified in the literature include: sharing good memories, focusing their conversations on positive dimensions of life, deepening interpersonal connectedness by expressing emotions, learning to trust again by sharing problems with one another, and obtaining settlement information (Weine et al., 2006). A participant in Weine's (2008) study conveys the importance of family for Bosnian refugee youth as:

> The reason that our people have survived so much hardship is because of our families. We believe very much in families, and we work to keep them strong. Everybody has a place in the family, and they know where they belong. They know that they can always count on others in the family to help them if they have a problem. (pp. 518)

As a response to the limited social bridges and links, a number of programs have been developed by non-profit organizations, school systems, and governmental organizations in Canada. These programs provide *social links* between an individual and the structures of the state. One form of social links is mentoring programs targeted at assisting immigrant and refugee youth (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2002; Griffiths, Sawrikar, & Muir, 2009). For instance, in Edmonton a local immigrant serving agency and the public school board organized an after school culture club (Brar, 2010; Yohani, 2013). One of the key components of this club was to take students on field trips to places they otherwise could not access; such as engaging in activities at leisure centres. Similarly, a monthly African Community Lunch in Bankstown Senior College, Australia (Cassity & Gow, 2005) worked together to organize monthly lunches, community presentations, and a bilingual newsletter for newcomer youth. The

intent of these programs was to provide newcomers with the opportunity to gain a sense of attachment and belonging to their new society (Cassity & Gow, 2005). According to Correa-Velez, Gifford, and Barnett (2010), these linking relationships provide newcomer youth the opportunity to become contributing members of society by engaging in social, economic, and civic life.

Conclusion

Based on the literature, it appears that gaining social support, sense of community, and social capital results in having a sense of belonging to a particular group. This study defined belonging as experiencing (1) valued involvement, (2) fit, (3) frequency of affectively pleasant interactions, and (4) stability of relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hagerty et al., 1992). The development of belonging becomes increasingly complex in each stage of development. Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecology Framework was most suitable for the present study, given that it takes into account the unique cultural and sociocultural factors that influence the resettlement of refugee young adults. For instance, threats to safety, exclusion, and multiple losses are potential pre-migration experiences that influence sense of belonging. Furthermore, sense of belonging emerges in literature that explores acculturation, identity development, school experiences, and social capital.

Although the literature has focused on experiences of belonging amongst former refugee populations, there remains little knowledge as to how belonging is fostered and how counsellors can assist clients in developing a sense of belonging. This study was the first to explore the process of achieving a sense of belonging from the individual's perspective. The intention was to create an enhanced understanding of the process of belonging and to collect information that could be used to inform clinical practice.

Chapter Three - Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore how former refugee young adults develop a sense of belonging during resettlement. This research question emerged from my master's thesis which identified sense of belonging as a crucial component of psychosocial well-being. However, information regarding the development and maintenance of sense of belonging was not well documented in the literature, making it challenging to apply to practice. An interpretive description method was selected, given its utility for generating "new insights that shape new inquires as well as applications of 'evidence' to practice" (Thorne, 2008, pp. 35) aligned with my research intentions.

Qualitative Research Paradigm

To better understand the development of belonging amongst former refugee young adults, a qualitative method of inquiry was employed. This paradigm views reality as complex and diverse (McLeod, 2001). According to Richards and Morse (2007), qualitative methods are suitable for the following purposes: (1) to better understand an area where little is known, (2) to make sense of complex situations, (3) to learn from the participants in a setting or a process the way *they* experience it, and (4) to understand a phenomena in detail.

Many researchers argue that one of the main limitations of refugee studies is that the voice of "refugees" is ignored in regards to what integration and intercultural contact means to them (Hyndman, 2012; Kirkwood, 2011; Korac, 2003). In order to overcome this limitation, the present study placed emphasis on the meanings that former refugee young adults used to describe their process of developing a sense of belonging in the context of resettlement. Another goal of the study was to "develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study. This involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and

generally sketching the larger picture that emerges" (Creswell, 2009, pp. 176) as it relates to developing a sense of belonging during resettlement. The present study aimed to report multiple perspectives on the process of developing and maintaining a sense of belonging among former refugee young adults.

Social Constructionism Paradigm

The design and implementation of a study is guided by the researcher's theoretical perspectives on the nature of reality and knowledge (Creswell, 2009). A paradigm refers to basic belief systems that represent one's worldview (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), three interconnected fundamental questions that define inquiry are: ontological, epistemological, and methodological.

Ontological assumption. Ontological questions refer to one's assumptions regarding the nature of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For the purpose of this study, I took a social constructionism worldview. Unlike the positivist stance of an absolute true reality, the social constructionist paradigm endorses ontological relativism indicating that there are multiple, often conflicting, realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007; Schwandt, 1994). According to Crotty (1998), "different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon" (pp. 9). Since multiple meanings of an experience can emerge, the goal of research is to uncover the complexity of meaning rather than narrowing it to a universal idea (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). Thus, constructions are not evaluated based on an absolute truth, but are based on sociohistorical relevance (Schwandt, 1994) and can consist of multiple constructions. Constructions are determined to be truthful when they are more informed than any of the predecessor constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 111).

The social constructionism paradigm aligned with my assumptions about the reality of former refugee young adults. The migration pathways for refugees vary across individuals and may result in different interpretations of belonging. For example, individuals arriving with family members and unaccompanied minors may have different opportunities and challenges to develop a sense of belonging. Furthermore, as noted in the literature review, variation in acculturation, identity, and social capital may result in different interpretations. As a final point, an absolute definition or theory on belonging does not exist in the literature. Given the complexity of the construct, multiple definitions and dimensions, as well as related terms, exist. Thus, the goal of the study was not to discover an absolute definition or theory of the process of belonging, but to provide a credible and enhanced level of understanding of the development of belonging in the context of former refugee young adults.

Epistemological assumptions. Epistemology refers to "a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, pp. 3). According to the social constructionist paradigm, meaning is brought forward through the interaction between the researcher and participants, and as a result the findings are socially co-constructed (Burr, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). Therefore, knowledge is constructed and not discovered (Schwandt, 1994). Furthermore, knowledge is constructed between people through the use of a shared language (Burr, 2003). As individuals interact with one another, they continue to refine concepts, categories, and constructions (Burr, 2003). It is important to note that constructions are historically and culturally specific (Burr, 2003). Thus, a construct such as belonging may vary across cultures.

In order to co-construct a more informed understanding of the process of developing a sense of belonging; I started my interviews with open-ended questions (Crotty, 1998). The

overall goal of the interview was to elicit an in-depth description of the process, and obtain information on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the participants. The open-ended questions achieved this by providing participants the space to provide any answer they choose without forcing them to select from predetermined options. Second, in order to arrive at a construction that was less limited by my personal experience, I included member checks in the design of the study. Participants had an opportunity to read my first draft of analysis and verify whether the themes and patterns resonated with their experiences and understanding of belonging. Two of the participants indicated minor modifications that were made to the findings.

During data collection and analysis, I attempted to position myself in the cultural, historical, or personal experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007). As Creswell (2007) notes, "qualitative researchers seek to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally" (pp. 8). I achieved this by asking clients to descriptively share three important examples of belonging in Canada. With each example I unpacked the complexity of the experience by asking them to provide a play by play of the incident including the contextual factors surrounding the experiences. By doing so, I transformed my existing understanding of sense of belonging by seeking consensus with the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

From a social constructionism perspective, the construction of knowledge was also influenced by the researcher's position in the world. As such, I acknowledge that my interpretations of participant's accounts have been filtered through my position in the world as a second generation immigrant in her early thirties, a Ph.D student, a psychologist, and a qualitative researcher with previous academic understanding of the refugee migration experience.

Methodological Framework: Interpretive Description

Interpretive description is a qualitative research framework that is best used to explore questions that emerge from the field (Thorne, 2008). This design is similar to other methods of qualitative inquiry in that the primary objective is to obtain a richly descriptive account of a phenomenon in order to enhance our understanding (Thorne, 2008). It is important to note the aim of interpretive description is not to make new discoveries or advance theories, but to generate insights that will provide "sufficient contextual understanding to guide future decisions that will apply evidence to the lives of real people" (Thorne, 2008, pp.35) in relation to clinical practices (Thorne, Kirkham, & MacDonald-Emes, 1997). Interpretive description is underpinned by the following assumptions:

- Conducted in as naturalistic a context as possible in a manner that is respectful of the comfort and ethical rights of all participants
- Explicitly attends to the value of subjective and experiential knowledge as one of the fundamental sources of clinical insight
- Capitalizes on human commonalities as well as individual expressions of variance within a shared focus of interest
- Reflects issues that are not bound by time and context, but attend carefully to the time and context within which the current expressions are enacted
- Acknowledges a socially 'constructed' element to human experience that cannot be meaningfully separated from its essential nature
- Recognize that, in the world of human experience, 'reality' involves multiple constructed realities that may well be contradictory, and
- Acknowledges an inseparable relationship between the knower and the known, such that the inquirer and the 'object' of that inquiry interact to influence one another (Thorne, 2008, pp. 74).

As the name suggests, the two important components of this framework are *description* and *interpretation*. Sandelowski (2000) explains that 'descriptions' serve the purpose of

documenting what is observed when one examines a phenomenon. For qualitative studies, descriptions are based on inductive reasoning, thus they are more exploratory and open than quantitative methods (Thorne, 2008). In the context of interpretive description, the term 'interpretation' refers to the clinician's inclination to move beyond descriptions of a phenomenon to seeking "associations, relationships and patterns within the phenomenon that has been described" (Thorne, 2008, pp. 50). Thus, interpretative description research questions extend beyond descriptive questions (i.e. what is happening here?) into questions that seek interpretative explanations (What patterns exist? And how do they operate?). Given the exploratory nature of my study, this framework assisted in developing a coherent description of commonalities and patterns that characterized the process of developing a sense of belonging amongst former refugee young adults, rather than simply describing what belonging means to this population. The aim of the present study was not to develop a theory on belonging, but to collect information that would inform future clinical interventions that aim to mediate the challenges of resettlement, for instance, shedding light on specific actions that foster sense of belonging, and specific settings in which one can belong to.

Data Collection

Participant selection and recruitment. Eleven former refugee young adults completed a pre-screening interview, all but one met the criteria for the study. Six of the ten eligible individuals participated in this study. This sample size is consistent with the 5 to 30 participant range utilized within the Interpretative Description framework (Thorne, 2008). Moreover, a sample of this size was also considered practically feasible given the unique set of challenges sometimes faced when accessing refugee populations for research (i.e. linguistic barriers, frequent relocation of former refugees, etc.). According to Sulaiman-Hill and Thompson (2011),

when accessing refugee communities additional time is required to build personal relationships and establish credibility and acceptability within the group. Recruitment procedures were implemented for a total of twelve months. Overall, the data collected from the six participants provided an in-depth understanding of the process of developing and maintaining a sense of belonging by this group of young adults in Alberta, Canada.

Sampling. The participants were selected through purposive sampling procedures. According to Patton (2002), participant selection should be based on an individual's expertise and competence with the purpose of inquiry. Furthermore, Thorne (2008) suggests individuals who have a "particular affinity for observing and thinking about the situations within which they found themselves rather than simply living them" (pp. 91) are considered ideal participants. Participant selection was based on the following criteria: (a) young adults (18 to 30 years of age), (b) migrated to Alberta at least three years prior to participating, (c) arrived in Canada between the ages of 12 to 17 years of age as a refugee, (d) attended a junior high or high school with intentional settlement supports, such as after-school clubs, (e) reported having a sense of belonging in Canada, (f) fluent in English, and (g) they were willing and able to discuss their experiences in-depth in English. The criterion related to residing in Canada for a minimum of three years was implemented to allow participants enough time to address immediate settlement challenges such as finding housing and settling in a work or school environment. The criterion regarding adolescent experiences (i.e. age, in-school settlement supports) was included to assess whether their adolescent experiences helped inform their sense of belonging in later years.

The recruitment strategy consisted of contacting ten immigrant-serving agencies in Edmonton and thirteen in Calgary, submitting an ethics application to four post-secondary institutions (as well institutions that provide high school upgrading courses) in Edmonton and

seven in Calgary, and contacting five community members from numerous ethnocultural groups in Edmonton and ten in Calgary. Initial contact was made by phone or email, in some cases a meeting was scheduled to discuss the project in person. The recruitment package consisted of a letter describing the study (please see Appendix A), recruitment posters (Appendix B) and recruitment letter (Appendix C) to distribute to eligible participants. Recruitment posters were also placed in local ethnocultural community stores. Interested participants directly contacted me by e-mail or phone found in the information letter. A pre-screening interview (Appendix D) was conducted over the phone to determine eligibility. Participants were assured, in writing and verbally, that participation in this study would not affect their school or work status, and information collected would remain confidential. Snowball sampling was also utilized. That is, at the end of each interview, I provided a copy of the recruitment poster and letter to the participant. They were asked to give the information to anyone they knew who may be interested in taking part in this study.

Sample size. Participants were recruited within two months in Edmonton and seven months in Calgary. In Edmonton, five participants were recruited through a community organization and one heard about the study through her post-secondary institution. A total of five participants were recruited in Calgary through an immigrant-serving program. My initial phone contact with the eleven interested participants consisted of providing a brief explanation of the study, completing a pre-screening interview, and scheduling an appointment at a convenient time and location for the participant. They were also informed that participation in the study would not impact the services they received in any way. Of the ten participants that originally agreed to participate, six followed through with the research interview.

Demographics of sample. The final sample consisted of three participants in Edmonton: Fatu, Gina, and Chris, and three participants from Calgary: Brown, Paru, and Muskan. For the purpose of this study, each participant chose a pseudonym to ensure their anonymity. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 28, and arrived in Canada between the ages of 12 to 17 years of age. The number of years living in Canada ranged from three to 16 years. Two of the participants were from South Sudan, two were from Nepal, one from Iraq, and one from Liberia. An overview of the participant demographics is provided in Table 2.

Pseudonym	City	Age	Gender	Number of years in Canada	Country of Origin	Age of arrival
Fatu	Edmonton	21	Female	3	Liberia	17
Gina	Edmonton	28	Female	15	South Sudan	13
Chris	Edmonton	19	Male	8	South Sudan	12
Paru	Calgary	19	Female	5	Nepal	14
Brown	Calgary	20	Male	3	Iraq	17
Muskan	Calgary	18	Female	4	Nepal	15.5

Data Generation

Semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit rich descriptions of participants' process of developing a sense of belonging. Thorne (2008) suggests that the overall goal of the interview is to elicit the meaning of an experience at a deeper level "and to foster elaboration, clarification, and even correction of [...the researcher's] initial understandings and interpretations" (pp. 129). Therefore, rather than simply obtaining a description of belonging, interviews sought to obtain an in-depth explanation of the process of developing a sense of belonging, the contributing factors, challenges, and opportunities. Prior to the interviews, participants were asked to bring an object, picture, or a photograph that symbolized their sense of belonging. The purpose of the activity was to help build rapport and to

use the object to generate dialog about belonging. Fatu and Chris identified an article of clothing. At first, Chris mentioned he forgot to bring an item but then quickly linked the research question to his involvement with the soccer league. Fatu brought her African clothes that she bought in Edmonton. Gina brought her Canadian passport as a symbol of the legal recognition of living in Canada. Interestingly, none of the participants in Calgary brought a symbol of their belonging to the interviews - often quoting they forgot to bring something in or they had difficulties identifying a symbol of their belonging. The participants agreed to send a picture of the symbol to my e-mail address, however they did not follow through with the request and I decided not to pressure them and honour their choice. Upon further analysis of the data, the information collected from the Calgary interviews were as in-depth as the Edmonton interviews. In all cases, the participants were prepared to discuss the critical experiences of belonging in detail. Rapport was quickly established despite the absence of a symbol. Finally, in-depth information occurred when the participants engaged in sharing their narrative about the experience as opposed to talking about the symbol.

All interviews were scheduled at a time and location that was most convenient to the participant. Participants were reimbursed $20 for travel and parking expenses. Three interviews were conducted at an immigrant-serving agency, two were at a mall, and one was at a post-secondary institute. All interviews were conducted in a quiet area with little distraction. The interviews were approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Prior to the interview, I reviewed with the participant the intent of the study, as well as the risks and benefits associated with participating. This information was provided in both a written and oral format and consent was obtained (Appendix E). Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of research and their right to withdraw at any point. Interviews started with the individual's background information (i.e.,

how long have you been in Canada, what is your country of origin) followed by asking participants to recall three important experiences in which they felt a sense of belonging in Alberta. The purpose of this activity was to facilitate reflection of the process, as well as provide a detailed description of the context and actions that promote a sense of belonging. An open-ended interview guide (Appendix F) provided a degree of consistency across the interviews. In each interview, the participants were given space to discuss or elaborate on specific aspects of their experiences in-depth. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim immediately after the interviews.

Research journal. Thorne (2008) recommends that researchers should enter the interview as "curious learners" (pp. 130), setting aside knowledge obtained from clinical experiences and reviewing the literature. For example, rather than asking specific questions about the in-school settlement programs based on the literature, I introduced the programs in a neutral manner (i.e. "in HIGH SCHOOL did you have people who offered afterschool club or homework club....can you tell me if that linked to your sense of belonging"). After each interview, I documented my observations of non-verbal behaviours and any impressions that resulted from the interview. The purpose of these notes was to document my assumptions, follow-up questions, and early thoughts that contributed to the analysis. The journal also kept track of memos. Memo-writing is a critical component in developing novel categories, making connections between categories, and tracking my preconceptions, beliefs, and values (Hunt, 2009; Thorne, 2008). This reflexive practice provided opportunities to discover my own as well as the participant's interpretations.

Data Analysis

Within the interpretive description framework there is not a prescribed method for analysis, but instead Thorne (2008) provides general guidelines on how to complete a meaningful analysis. For instance, similar to other qualitative methods, data is collected and analyzed simultaneously (Thorne, 2008). Furthermore, new knowledge is inductively generated and is derived from the data. With regards to how data is sorted, organized, conceptualized, refined, and interpreted, this approach commonly draws from the constant comparative analysis strategy (Thorne, 2000).

Constant comparative analysis strategy. The first phase in the data analysis was to become familiar with the interview transcripts. A research assistant transcribed one of the interviews while I transcribed the remaining five interviews. Prior to transcribing the interview, the research assistant signed a confidentiality agreement form. I reread each transcript several times to increase my familiarity with the data. Additional ideas, reflections, and patterns were recorded in my research journal after each round of reading the interviews.

The second phase of analysis consisted of coding the data contained in each transcript. Thorne (2008) explains that "within the thousands of words exchanged in the course of an interview, some choice words or phrases are very likely to 'stick' in our minds – to take prominence in our attention and demand consideration. It is useful to reflect on why this occurs" (pp. 143). During this process, I "flagged" data elements that could be potentially meaningful by highlighting thematic similarities and writing memos on the margins of the transcripts. Specifically, model cases, contrary cases, poignant or representative cases, elements that had not been previously encountered and quotable quotes were highlighted (Thorne, 2008). At this

stage, I also used a computer aided qualitative data analysis software (ATLAS.ti) to track and organize the data.

The next step was to engage in generic coding. Thorne (2008) recommends assigning meaningless labels, such as Category A, to groups of similar data over assigning codes. Thorne (2008) explains that premature coding can derail analysis by creating a rigid structure in which the researcher is inclined to follow. For this reason, Thorne recommends using broad-based codes or generic coding schemes (i.e. Category A). I referred back to the research questions and identified seven generic labels:

A = participants description of belonging - words they used to define the concept

B = conditions that facilitate belonging

C = actions and behaviors of the former refugee young adult that promotes belonging

D = actions and behaviors of others that promote belonging

E = barriers to belonging

F = people identified as providing belonging

G = outcome of belonging

After reviewing the codes several times to ensure consistency across transcripts, it became evident that label F represented contextual information and was better suited as a memo. A total of 90 codes were identified after the first round of generic coding. I further refined the codes by comparing them to one another for two rounds constantly pondering if the relationships made sense, which resulted in collapsing the 90 codes into 41. I completed this task manually. At this point, I also maintained a reflexive journal where I reflected and documented my reasoning behind the relationships identified. One by one each of the codes were fine-tuned into groupings sometimes referred to as themes (Thorne, 2008). The six themes were: feeling important, feeling

accepted, sense of purpose, acculturation, feeling more confident, and feeling comfortable. Upon further reflection and discussion with my supervisor, it became evident that "feeling important" was an element of "sense of purpose", thus the two codes merged into the latter.

Once I organized the data into various fine-tuned themes, the next step was to make sense of the relationships within the various grouping that “move beyond the self-evident and superficial” (pp. 149). I achieved this by reviewing my research journal to refresh my memory of patterns, questions, and relationships that I had encountered in previous steps. At the same time, I engaged in memo writing, and asked complex questions about what the data groupings mean individually and in relation to one another. Specifically I asked myself: how do the two codes interact? How are they similar/different? and What are the consequence between the codes? I then looked at one theme at a time and compared the codes in each theme to understand the relationship. I decided to use the relationship descriptors (Table 3) from Atlas.ti Version 6 (2010) with the exception of "cause of" which was replaced by "contributes to." When two or more of the relationship descriptors were applicable, I used the logic of falsification to determine the interaction. For example, when exploring the relationship between *Bond* and *Social Support* the initial descriptors were "Contributes to" and "Property of." The following excerpt is directly from my analysis journal:

> *When describing bonds they identified individuals that helped them navigate the new country early on in settlement. The data suggests that the relationships all started with the individual assisting them with resettlement, in some cases the role subsided but the relationship continued - thus since helping participant navigate is a role that can change and does not have to exist later in the relationship it appears to be more of a "contribution" instead of "property.*

Descriptor	Formula	Synonyms
associated	c1 is associated with c2	linked, connected, related, allied, coupled
part of	c1 is part of c2	element, ingredient, component, portion of,
Contributes to	c1 is contributes to c2	Reason for, leads to, or makes happen
contradicts	c1 contradicts c2	disagree with, cancel out, conflict, at odds with
is a	c1 is a c2	
property of	c1 is a property of c2	characteristic of, quality, distinctive attribute/trait

Table 3. Analysis Relationship Descriptors

Furthermore, Thorne et al. (2004) recommend asking the following questions when engaging in intellectual inquiry: What is happening here? Why is this here? Why not something else? And what does it mean? These questions helped provide findings that went beyond observations and descriptions. For example, during the initial phases of analysis "government policy" was a sub-theme that described the policies that were identified by the participants as being critical to the development of belonging. Upon asking the above questions and exploring what the policies meant to the participants and how it was interacting with their sense of belonging it became evident that "government protection" was the appropriate label to use. The analysis was deepened by providing more contextual information that could be used to evaluate whether a government policy will contribute to a sense of belonging or not. In concluding the data analysis process of, “patterns and themes within the data are ordered into a story, or a professional narrative” (Thorne et al., 2004, pp. 15). During this phase, the "story" of each theme, as well as how it relates with the overall research question, was identified. Direct quotes were incorporated into the definition of the themes.

Evaluating the Study

The present study was evaluated through two sets of criteria: Thorne's (2008) criteria and Lincoln & Guba (1985).

Thorne's (2008) interpretative description criteria. Thorne (2008) suggests that to ensure rigor or credibility in interpretive description, four criteria should be evaluated: epistemological integrity, representative credibility, analytic logic and interpretive authority.

Epistemological integrity. According to Thorne (2008) in order to demonstrate epistemological integrity "there is a defensible line of reasoning from the assumptions made about the nature of knowledge through to the methodological rules by which decisions about the research process are explained" (p. 223-224). To ensure all my decisions were consistently based on the assumptions of interpretive design, I kept research notes to explain the decisions made during the research process and their congruence with the approach. I also shared my notes with my thesis supervisor. From an epistemological standpoint the findings were constructed rather than revealed (Thorne, 2008).

Representative credibility. Thorne (2008) argued that to demonstrate representative credibility, studies must show that the claims made are consistent with the sampling method. In the present study, findings were considered to be primarily reflective of former refugee young adults residing in Alberta who arrived as adolescents. Also, to help confirm study findings, I emailed a summary of the research findings to the participants, along with their introductory summary in Chapter 4, to elicit their response about my interpretation of the research findings. Finally, the findings were triangulated with current literature in the discussion chapter to describe their applicability to other former refugee young adults in Canada.

Analytic logic. This criterion requires the researcher to make explicit each step of the research process (Thorne, 2008). Thorne suggests the use of an audit trail that another researcher could follow. Furthermore, thick descriptions of the findings were included so the reader could follow the reasoning behind the interpretations and knowledge claims that were made.

Interpretive authority. Thorne (2008) states "we need assurance that a researcher's interpretations are trustworthy, that they fairly illustrate or reveal some truth external to his or her own bias or experience" (p. 225). To identify how my own biases might influence the findings, I maintained a reflective journal in which I explored my responses to the data and to particular participants. Thorne also suggests that a method to verify analysis with research participants is used. Thus, member checks were implemented in the research design.

Lincoln and Guba criteria for rigor. Given that Thorne's (2008) criteria do not allow for evaluation of a study until data analysis is finalized, an alternative set of criteria was required in the initial phases of designing the present study. The following standards to evaluate methodological rigor were used in the present study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility. Credibility is evidenced by confirming the fit between the participant's views of the process and the researcher's representation of the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to ensure the accurate representation, member checks were implemented in the design of the study. The credibility was also maintained by providing in-depth descriptions and clarifying personal biases through journaling and supervision (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Finally, prolonged engagement with the data, such as reviewing any changes in the description of a code on a consistent basis, ensured the fit between the data and the analysis.

Transferability. Transferability is evidenced by the readers' ability to transfer the findings to their own practice (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The intention of this study was to provide recommendations for mental health practitioners who are interested in facilitating the integration of former refugee young adults. The detailed information on the methodology, participants, social settings, and the views and values held by the participants allow the readers to transfer the findings to their own clinical experiences. Furthermore, by ensuring that multiple views and themes identified are well presented helps to increase the readers' ability to generalize the findings.

Dependability. Dependability is evidenced by the extent to which the finding could be replicated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure the dependability of the study, I used an audit trail as a way to document the research process, including decisions used to determine sampling techniques. Also, my dissertation supervisor provided an ongoing external review of my findings by reviewing my memos, analysis, and overall writing process. My supervisory committee also provided guidance on my analysis and writing.

Confirmability. Confirmability is achieved when the interpretations of research findings are derived from the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, close attention to participant views and meanings were attended to throughout the analysis and report writing. For example, to further strengthen confirmability, I incorporated excerpts of the data in the final report (McLeod, 2001). These thick descriptions strengthen the themes. Furthermore, my supervisor and committee members' review of my analysis and writing process is another form of confirmability. Since the social constructionist approach acknowledges that data is co-constructed, it is important to explicitly state my own interpretations from the participants. I made my role explicit by incorporating reflexive practices through the use of a research journal

and memos in the design of the study (Ahern, 1999; Burr, 2003). Finally, the data collected will be preserved for a minimum of five years and it will provide others with the opportunity to confirm the findings.

Ethical Considerations

The present study adhered to the core principles of *respect for persons, concern for welfare,* and *justice* at each stage of the research project (CIHR, NSER, SSHRC, 2010, pp. 8). In addition to these guidelines, I took into consideration the unique nature of the researcher-respondent relationship, such as developing mutual respect, trust, and access to intimate details of the lives of respondents, throughout the inquiry process (Magolda & Weems, 2002).

An ethics application was submitted to the Research Ethics Board (REB 1) at the University of Alberta. I also completed an application for approval of external research project at Norquest College, application to conduct research at Calgary Catholic School District, ethics application to Mount Royal University Human Research Ethics Board (HREB), and application for ethics review at Bow Valley College. Once I received approval, program coordinators of immigrant and refugee serving agencies and educators were contacted. In some cases, an appointment was arranged to discuss the purpose of the study, use of findings, and potential risks. Voluntary consent was ensured by providing eligible participants with an information letter (see Appendix C) that informed them of the study's purpose, participant expectations, and methods to ensure privacy and confidentiality. In keeping with the principle of *respect for persons,* participants were assured they had the freedom to withdraw from the study without consequence. (CIHR, NSER, SSHRC,2010). In order to prevent undue influence and manipulation from individuals in a position of authority, interested individuals contacted me directly.

Prior to data collection, informed consent was reviewed and obtained. During this discussion, participants were provided with the "purpose of the research, what it entailed, and its potential risks and benefits both to the participant and to others" (CIHR, NSER, SSHRC, 2010, pp. 9). Terms that heighten fear and distrust such as "investigator" or "investigations" was replaced with "researcher" and "research study" in the description of the study (Pernice, 1994). Participants were encouraged to ask questions or discuss any concerns they might have. Since there were limits to my ability to anticipate what can come out of the research (Magolda & Weems, 2002) informed consent was perceived as an ongoing process. Furthermore, reminders of the voluntary nature of the study and their right to withdraw their data was provided. Participants were not required to provide any reason for withdrawing (CIHR, NSER, SSHRC, 2010, pp. 29). They were also reminded of the voluntary nature of the follow-up interviews. No incentive for participation was offered, and participants were informed the $20.00 remuneration was for travel compensation and would not be revoked if they withdrew from the study.

During the analysis stage, a number of actions took place to safeguard privacy and confidentiality. First, participants selected pseudonyms that I used throughout the study to maintain their confidentiality. The findings were written in a manner in which participants could not be identified. Confidentially was further maintained by ensuring all electronic files were password protected. Upon completion of the study, all of the data would be stored in a secure location (password protected files and locked filing cabinet) for a period of five years, after which data will be destroyed in a manner that ensures anonymity of participants, such as shredding paper and erasing audio recordings.

Finally, harm reduction during the dissemination stage of the project begins with careful consideration in writing the research findings. First, I ensured the direct quotes and thick

descriptions included in the report would not disclose the identity of the participants, as well as individuals and groups who were indirectly referenced in the study (Magolda & Weems, 2002). I also considered the following questions as guidelines to ensure my findings were written in a respectful manner: "How might the data be heard? Misread? Misappropriated? "Do you need to add a warning about potential misuse?" (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000, pp. 127).

Conclusion

This qualitative interpretative description study examined the process of developing a sense of belonging during resettlement amongst former refugee young adults. Specifically, information regarding the conditions that facilitate belonging, as well as actions and behaviors were noted. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with six participants residing in Alberta. The constant comparative strategy (Thorne, 2000) guided the data analysis. The goal of this study was to create an enhanced understanding of the process of belonging and to collect information that could be used to inform clinical practice. The following chapter outlines the results.

Chapter Four - Results

Six former refugee young adults participated in this study. During the interviews, these young adults shared their experiences of developing and maintaining a sense of belonging in Canada. The participants' interviews were analyzed, and their common experiences and processes were described through five main themes: (1) Feeling Comfortable, (2) Feeling Confident, (3) Feeling Accepted, (4) Sense of Purpose, and (5) Integration. The themes represent the specific pathways identified as essential to fostering a sense of belonging. This chapter will begin with an introduction to each of the participants. A discussion of the themes that resulted from the analyses of their interviews will follow.

Introduction to the Participants

Fatu. Fatu is a 21-year old female student attending a post-secondary college. Originally from Liberia, Fatu resided in a refugee camp for 10 years in Sierra Leone. The notion of moving to Canada produced mixed feelings for Fatu. On one hand, she was excited about the new opportunities available to her, yet on the other hand, she questioned if she would find traces of her Liberian culture in her new home. In March 2010, Fatu and her immediate family migrated to Canada as a government assisted refugee. Their first destination was a reception house in Edmonton. Within two weeks, they had moved into an apartment that she identified as her earliest experience of belonging in Canada.

Fatu's second experience of developing a sense of belonging took place at a catholic high school. Although she arrived at the age of 17, she was placed at the grade 10 level mostly with 15-year-olds. Initially, her transition to the school system was challenging. She described herself as a very shy person who was afraid others would ignore her, and she attended a high

school where no one spoke her language. However, her homeroom teacher "Ms. Jones" was more than willing to assist Fatu settle in her new country.

> After school one day she called me. She was like “Fatu, I know you might need help and I can see that. So don’t be shy. I know you don’t know how to speak English but tell me anything. I will find a way to help you.” And I was like, “the help that I need right now, I need someone that will able to speak my language because I speak Bandi, Mende, and Creole. Someone who is able to speak one of those languages.

Ms. Jones introduced Fatu to Marwa, a social worker who had moved to Canada from Sierra Leone ten years prior and was a helpful bi-cultural role model. Marwa first met Fatu and her family at their home. Fatu described this experience of belonging as:

> When she greeted me in my language, we say hi is “bisyuh” in my language. I was like (gasps). I couldn’t believe, like, oh my god. This is, I found someone that know how to speak my language. I can’t believe it. I couldn’t think of nothing. I’m like, “is it real?”I have someone here that know about me or where I came from. Oh my god. I just cry. I just cry right away and she came, she was kind of like hugging me and said, “oh, it's okay. I’m going to help you guys whatever it is.” I think that was the best moment of my life when I met that lady. So she was the one that introduced us to the community, like other people from my home country.

Marwa introduced Fatu to the African stores in Edmonton, connected her to a group program where other Liberian women met every Sunday, and even reunited Fatu with an extended family member.

> After the war from my country, everybody scatter so we don’t know where this lady was. We came here and she was like, there is someone who came from Liberia too but I think you guys might be relative. So she took us to this program and we met this lady, like, oh my god, we are just speaking my language, shouting all over.

Although Fatu no longer calls Marwa on a weekly basis, Marwa continues to be a source of belonging for Fatu and her family. She is considered an aunt and close friend. It is important to note that although Fatu did not share any explicit story consisting of her family members facilitating her sense of belonging, she frequently mentioned her relationship with her son and mother.

At the time of the interview, Fatu identified her post-secondary college as a place of belonging. Specifically, she gained a sense of belonging through her participation in two student programs offered by the college. The first program was designed for English as a second language (ESL) students who wish to focus on increasing their academic and personal communication skills. The second program was an ambassador program where students represent the college, while they learn to improve their communication, public relations, and interpersonal skills at the same time. When asked how she felt about herself in these programs, Fatu shared:

> I feel like I belong. Because, like I say I am not shy anymore. So even like I'm talking to people I just feel like they are one of my family, like, my mom talking to her at home. I don't feel like anything. That's what I feel. I feel like "oh I belong" and then someone teaching me what to do, how to get along with the community and where to go to get a help and what to do to help myself.

Through these programs, Fatu is able to network with her peers as well as other influential members of the city.

Gina. Gina's journey to Canada started when she was 12-years old. She lived in Sudan for the first seven years of her life, and then moved to Egypt for five years. Through word of mouth, Gina was aware of the strong South Sudanese presence in Alberta. As a result, she did not worry about losing her culture. Instead, she welcomed the move with excitement. In 1998, she arrived in Calgary, Alberta where she resided for the first three years of settlement. She then moved to another prairie province for two years, and then settled in Edmonton where she has lived for the last 10 years. During her stay in Calgary, Gina was in the midst of adapting to a new and foreign environment, thus she identified herself as an immigrant. She identified Edmonton as the first place where she experienced a true sense of belonging in the new country. At the time of the interview, Gina was 28 years old.

In her first year in Canada, Gina enrolled in a junior high school in Calgary. She attended ESL classes during grade 7 and then transferred to the regular classes for the remainder of junior and high school. Despite regular access to Canadian born students, Gina recalled experiences of gravitating towards students with an immigrant background. In junior high, she quickly formed a close relationship with two girls who were also from Africa. She continues to maintain a friendship with these girls despite living in a different city. Although Gina established friendships in junior high, it was not until her high school years that she started to feel a sense of belonging in the school setting. At this point in her life, she started to branch out and join extracurricular activities including joining the basketball team and playing the flute with her high school band. When asked about how she started the process of joining these activities, Gina indicated her desire to become a part of something paired with encouragement she received from her teachers.

Throughout our interview, Gina stated that her earliest and greatest sense of belonging comes from the South Sudanese community in Alberta. According to Gina,

> I am very much into being connected with my community, the South Sudanese community, and I think that's where my biggest sense of belonging comes from. If I cut ties with them, I think that is when I would feel like I am nobody. That is how I look at belonging is belonging to a certain group or certain community.

At the time of the interview, Gina was actively looking for opportunities to connect with her community. Through word of mouth, she learned about a new youth office the South Sudanese community was putting together a few years prior. Gina made the decision to run for a board position and was elected for the position. The youth office consisted of 7 to 8 youth who worked together to develop workshops, events, and fundraisers. Gina found this to be a rewarding experience and was acknowledged for her efforts by her community. Although the youth office

is no longer an ongoing project, Gina is now active in a political group that provides new opportunities to connect and feel a sense of belonging with her community.

> I decided to join this office because I wanted to learn more about my country. I left Sudan when I was so young and all I know is there was a war going on and this hit me when people would ask me what's going on in South Sudan and I didn't know, and just to me I was ashamed not even understanding that, not even taking the time to ask my family one day or asking anybody. Through this political office, I think I learned so much more about the political aspect of what is going on back home.

As a young adult, Gina is attempting to broaden her group of friends to consist of people outside her ethnocultural group. Unfortunately, other than the workplace, Gina is struggling to find opportunities that would allow her to broaden her social network. Another role that provides Gina with a sense of belonging as a young adult is acting as a mentor to South Sudanese youth. She has taken on this informal role with her younger cousins and younger family members of her friends. She also maintains a strong connection with her own family members.

Chris. Chris is a 19-year-old male who moved to Edmonton in 2006 with his family. His country of origin is South Sudan, and prior to living in Canada, he was at a refugee camp in Uganda. Chris was 12-years-old when he moved to Edmonton. During our interview, he wore a sports jacket with the year 2006 and the name of his soccer team. It was evident early on that soccer had a special place in his life. Chris enjoyed playing the sport at a young age, and when he arrived in Edmonton a family friend registered him with a community soccer team. In high school, he continued to thrive as a soccer player, and in his grade 12 year, he scored the winning goal for the championship game. He also experienced a sense of belonging with his high school handball team, a sport he never heard of until he tried out for the team. The opportunities to participate in sports provided Chris with the experience of having his peers recognize him as a star player, which led him to feel important. As a young adult, Chris maintains a connection with the coaches and high school soccer team by taking on the role of assistant coach. He also

maintains the identity of a soccer player by joining a men's soccer club that he found online. Chris has developed a strong relationship with his coaches and team members. He described that the team provides him with opportunities to become a stronger player and hopes it will provide him with a bright future to look forward to.

The second place of belonging Chris described was the school setting, which consisted of his junior high and high school. He felt connected with the teachers, students, and principals. He also maintained the friendships he developed in junior high. At the time of the interview, he identified his Canadian, Mexican, and Thai friends as his core group of friends. His Canadian friend stood out the most for him. He met this individual within his first year of living in Edmonton, and although Chris did not know English too well he forced himself to engage in random conversations with this individual. Over the years, they become good friends and would spend a lot of time together. They went to the same high school, had the same first job, and continued to work at the same place of employment on two other occasions. At the time of the interview, Chris was preparing to move to another city to pursue a program in becoming a police officer. He was hopeful about finding a sense of belonging in this new school setting.

His final description of belonging consisted of his family. He described his family members as supportive and working well as a team during moments of stress. One of the challenges he experienced was limited time to interact with his family. Everyone had busy schedules. For instance, both Chris and his mom work Monday to Friday during the day, and his dad works nights. By the time Chris comes home from work he is too tired to do anything. When they do manage to find time, they spend time together watching TV, music videos from Sudan, and attending community dances. He hears about these events from a local immigrant-serving agency. These community events were important in maintaining a sense of belonging

"...it makes me feel like we still have a community out there and there's something we can still do. When we dance it makes everyone happy, everyone just smiling and they forgot the pain in the past." Thus, although Chris does not have the luxury to spend a large amount of time with his family they continue to be a source of belonging. He has been with his family his whole life and he can depend on them when he needs them.

Paru. Paru is a 19-year-old female who moved from Nepal to Calgary with her family in 2009. Throughout the interview, Paru described Canada as her home and at times, she feels as if she lived in Canada her whole life. She further explained "I don't feel I'm new in here. I feel that I was here all the time." In Nepal, she was wearing western clothes, speaking English, and listening to Western music. The only difference was the food and some of the slang language students were using. Currently, Paru has a permanent residence card and is working towards her Canadian citizenship. She explained she has no desire to move back to Nepal. Canada is her home for many reasons including the fact that she can find everything from her home country in Calgary, and her personal values align more with Canadian values. Specifically, Paru appreciates the values of freedom and equality. According to Paru in Canada "...you can be whoever you want to be." For instance, she explained "...in Nepal I see lots of Nepali people so sad, girls stay home, boys go out. I don't like it. I like the equal."

When asked about her experiences of belonging in Canada, Paru started by describing her first day in Canada as critical to the development of her belonging. Paru recalled meeting a member of an immigrant-serving agency at the airport, who took them to a reception house. Although she stayed at the house for 19 days, Paru felt a sense of belonging with the staff members and three other families residing at the house. She described everyone in the house as very friendly and willing to talk with one another. When Paru first arrived, she described her

English as "weak", however the small amount of English she did know helped her gain a sense of belonging more quickly than her peers who came to Canada without this skill. Paru and the program manager also shared Hindi as a common language.

Over the years, the immigrant-serving agency has developed a good working relationship with the Nepali ethnocultural group that Paru belongs to. When a new refugee from Nepal arrives at the reception house, the agency will contact previous Nepali refugees who visit the new family. Paru recalls that this process took place within a couple of days of their arrival. Given the significance the visit had on her own belonging, Paru has now become one of the individuals who visit newcomers from Nepal. According to Paru, the immigrant-serving agency also played an important role in helping her family address settlement issues such as finding a new house to live in. They were fortunate to settle in a neighborhood that consists of a number of Nepali and Indian families. Within the first month, the agency also helped the family learn to commute around the city, bank, and shop. To this day, Paru continues to stay in contact with the agency and is in contact with one of the African families that resided at the reception house around the same time. Her contact with the agency consists of volunteering and attending extra-curricular activities. For example, she went on a camping trip with nine other girls, and attended a bowling event. Paru continues to meet many new friends through these events.

The second place of belonging was the high school Paru attended for three years after arriving in Canada. Because she arrived in the summer, Paru had to wait three months before attending school. During this time, however, she made friends in her neighborhood who were also attending the same school and some were in the same grade. For this reason, Paru was not nervous on her first day. In her first year of school, she enrolled in an ESL program and then moved into the regular program for the next two years. In comparison to the teachers in Nepal,

Paru described her ESL teachers as nice, encouraging, and not strict. The ESL program provided a safe place to improve her English. Her prior experience with English allowed her to help other students. Helping others is a personal value that Paru holds, and the more she could express this value the more she experienced belonging. In high school, Paru completed Science 20 and 30 and obtained good marks. These classes allowed her to talk with other students including Canadian born peers. Given Paru's talkative and friendly personality, she was not shy or nervous to talk with her peers. In terms of extracurricular activities, Paru heard about a peer ambassador program from one of her teachers. She attended the field trips organized by the program, including a trip to Edmonton and Banff. Although she was aware of the after school homework and culture clubs, Paru did not have the time to attend these programs. Currently, Paru is attending upgrading courses at a community college. She has successfully utilized the same strategies she used during high school to gain a sense of belonging in college.

Brown. Brown is a 20-year-old male who was born in Iraq and lived there until 6 years of age. From ages 6-11, his family moved to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Jordan. In 1995, they settled in Syria for six and a half years. Initially the first two to three years in Syria consisted of exclusion and racism. He recalled experiences of name-calling, and was discriminated for his color and nationality. Despite the racism, Brown forced himself to communicate with the Syrian peers and established soccer as a common interest. Brown was good at soccer and became a part of the Syrian team; he also started playing with the school team. When it was time to leave, Brown was sad since he considered Syria his home. His peers also wanted him to stay. Although Brown had pre-existing relationships in Calgary (i.e. uncle and cousins), his pre-migration experiences led him to wonder if he would be accepted in Canada. At the time of the

interview, Brown had lived in Calgary for three years, and was completing his last year of high school.

The first experience of belonging Brown shared was at his high school. Although he completed high school in Syria, it was decided that Brown would attend grade 10 upon arriving in Canada. On his first day of school, he met a settlement worker who spoke Arabic and told him she was there to help along with his teachers. Despite the formal settlement supports in the school setting, Brown's greatest source of assistance came from his peers. Brown met his best friend in construction class. This particular individual approached Brown and started a conversation by asking where he was from. There were no language barriers given that both of them spoke Arabic. His new friend then introduced him to the rest of the group and showed him around. According to Brown, he felt a true sense of belonging when he learned English. Many people were identified in helping him acquire a new language. First, he talked about his present girlfriend and an ex-girlfriend that helped improve his communication. Second, he used technology such as Facebook or downloading iphone apps that provided opportunities to practice communicating. Finally, his ESL teachers were supportive and approachable. One of his teachers encouraged him to apply for a scholarship, which he won. Currently as a young adult, Brown has two close friends he can rely on. Furthermore, he has a diverse group of friends that consist of people from Canada, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Africa.

The second place of belonging was an after-school program for newcomers. When Brown arrived in Calgary, he recalled staying home after school and having "nothing else to do". He then heard about the club through his friend. Brown decided to go so he would have something to do after school. He described the club as:

> So they would come two days in a week after school and we would do activities. We learned part of language and then we talk and we do some games, we eat, we go out on

> field trips. That kind of helped me a lot because by that time I broke that shyness because I was thinking 'would I fit [in] this society', 'would they like me or not' something like that. So I started talking and making friends from different kind so they were accepting me and by then I started talking to them, start take their Facebook, communicate with them more, see them at school, and hang out with them.

At the time of the interview, Brown was volunteering for the same afterschool program. He described his role as:

> I'm a leader so I take the newcomers and take them to field trip, help them how to open their locker, close their locker, show them their classes, how to use the map of the school so things like that they need help.

Brown also volunteered for a homeless centre and he informally supports newcomers at his high school.

In addition to attending school and volunteering, Brown also works a part-time job at a fast-food restaurant. He identified his workplace as another place of belonging. Brown feels appreciated and validated at work. He is a co-trainer and his manager is supporting his transition to become a swing manager. He also reported having a good relationship with his co-workers; some of them he had helped get the job.

Brown identified his relationship with his family as his third experience of belonging. Like most newcomers, his family experienced the challenge of balancing their Muslim culture with the new Canadian culture. The strength of their relationship allowed Brown to incorporate new behaviors that were not previously accepted, such as bleaching his hair or having friends that are of the opposite gender. His uncle played a supportive role in helping communicate the cultural differences. The following excerpt demonstrates Brown's appreciation for his parents:

> They are there for me. The minute I finish high school and take a year off and start working and saving money, the first thing I'm going to do is buy them a house. Yeah buy them a house so they can feel better and not worry about anything. My mom she has followed my dad everywhere, she left her family in Iraq, and she didn't care about what was going to happen. She cared for her husband and for us, so I want to return something back to them.

Muskan. Muskan is an 18 year-old female who has lived in Calgary, Alberta for four years. Prior to arriving in Canada, she lived in a refugee camp in Bendigo, Nepal and her country of origin is Bhutan. At the time of our interview, Muskan was granted an additional year to complete her high school program. Thus, her adolescent experiences of belonging were similar to her young adult experiences. Her first experience of belonging in Canada consisted of her family moving from the reception house to their first home in Canada. She described feeling a sense of belonging in Canada because she felt comfortable in their Canadian residence. This level of comfort was similar to what she felt in her house in Nepal.

Muskan also identified her current ESL program as a place of belonging. When she first arrived in Calgary, she attended grade ten and eleven at High School 1. She described herself as a quiet and shy student for the first two months. Although Muskan was proficient at comprehending English, she was not confident in her abilities to respond in English. Her teachers and peers were kind and friendly, which allowed her to gain confidence in having conversations and making new friends. Many of the students at High School 1, and her favorite teacher assistant, were fluent in Hindi, a language Muskan was familiar with. However, this was a double-edged sword. On one hand, it allowed Muskan to overcome language barriers. On the other hand, Muskan found she was learning more Hindi than English. This was counterproductive in achieving her goal of gaining proficiency in English. Another threat to Muskan's sense of belonging was her disappointment with the ESL curriculum. Unlike some refugee experiences, Muskan attended a school in Nepal where she had experiences of studying and learning a large amount of material. She vividly described carrying 8-13 large textbooks home. Prior to Canada, she described herself as a smart student with a "big brain." However, she now feels her brain has become "small." She attributes the change in her intellectual abilities

to the teaching approach; specifically she described it as "they teach us like small kids." For instance, in Nepal she recalled learning complex math problems, whereas her ESL class focused on subtraction, addition, and multiplication. Muskan was frustrated with her experiences, and as a result, acknowledged spending more time in class talking than paying attention to the teacher. She also described the ESL program failing to provide depth of instruction; often her teachers relied on students to learn on their own by completing worksheets. Despite the warmth and support she received from her peers and teachers, the ESL curriculum was beginning to not only threaten her identity as a smart individual but also her sense of belonging in living in an English-speaking city.

After two years at High School 1 Muskan transferred to High School 2, because she was discouraged by the fact that it took her two years to move from ESL level 1 to level 2. She initially tried to express her concerns to her teachers; however, the typical response was "...little by little you will get better." When Muskan transferred to High School 2, the school granted her request to repeat grade 11. At the time of the interview, Muskan was nearing completion of ESL level 3 and she was looking forward to moving up to level 4. Her progression towards her goal of completing the ESL program paired with the supportive environment has enhanced Muskan's sense of belonging. Furthermore, her life-long dream is to become a nurse. By completing the ESL program, it provides her with opportunities to pursue a post-secondary program in nursing.

Muskan identified her relationship with her friends and her cousin sister as another source of belonging. Her cousin sister attended High School 2 and introduced other people to Muskan. Fortunately for Muskan, the Nepalese community has a strong presence in Calgary. Currently, her friends consist of individuals of Nepali, Indian, Arabic, and Pilipino background. According to Muskan, her friends contribute to her belonging by providing advice and support

when she needs help. She also has a great amount of trust in her friends, which further enhances her sense of belonging amongst this group. When asked about Canadian-born friends, Muskan shared she had one close relationship with a Canadian who was her "house friend" that was assigned to her family by the reception house. Muskan's house friend assisted her with settlement activities, which further contributed to Muskan's sense of belonging in Calgary.

Similar to her friends, Muskan derives a sense of belonging from her immediate family. Throughout her life, she has felt supported by her parents and younger brother. They frequently encouraged her to learn English and supported her in moving to a different school. Her parents would often encourage her by saying, "don't be afraid, don't feel shy, you have to speak you have to live forever in this place, so never be scared of people they are also like us." Currently, all of her family members are preoccupied with their work schedule, thus limiting the time they have together. Despite these challenges, Muskan and her family manage to spend quality time during cultural holidays and festivals.

Themes on Developing and Maintaining a Sense of Belonging

Five primary themes were identified that describe the pathways of developing belonging amongst former refugee young adults: (1) Feeling Comfortable, (2) Feeling Confident, (3) Feeling Accepted, (4) Sense of Purpose, and (5) Integration. The sub-themes represent the condition that facilitate belonging and the behaviors that promote sense of belonging.

Feeling comfortable. Feeling comfortable was a prominent descriptor that was mentioned in all six interviews. When asked to elaborate on the term *comfortable*, the participants had difficulties articulating the concept, perhaps due to language barriers. Therefore, when I engaged in the data analysis I paid attention to the context and it appeared the

participants referred to the concept of comfort when they discussed experiences where they felt secure and at ease.

Compared to the pre-migration experience, settling in Canada was perceived as a permanent solution to feeling secure and at ease. In particular, the participant's resident status was identified as the catalyst to feeling comfortable. Specifically, resident status represented the legal right to live in and call Canada home (figure 3).

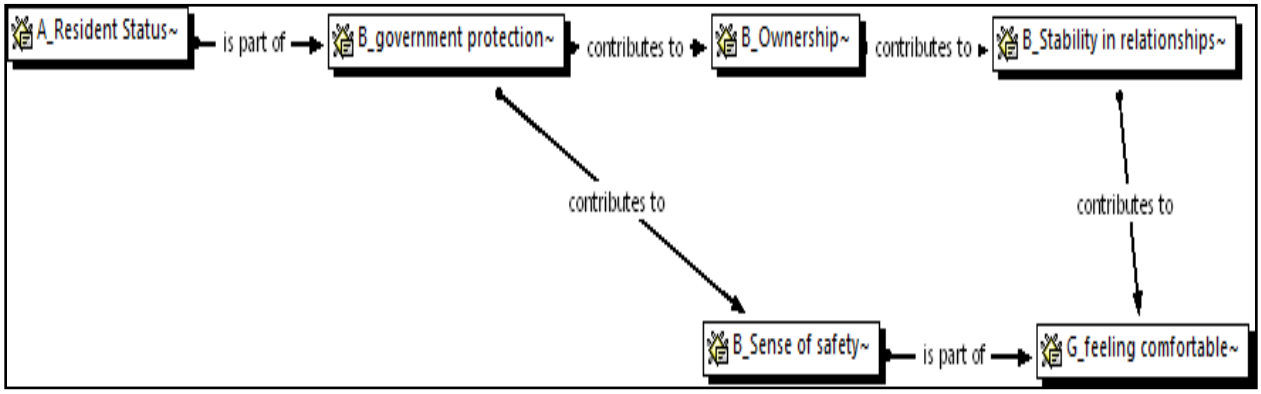

Figure 3. Feeling Comfortable Interaction

Furthermore, a permanent resident card or Canadian citizenship was viewed as providing participants with access to legal rights and government assistance programs. When discussing her citizenship and her Canadian passport, Gina noted "It's not just living here, you are now affiliated with Canada in a more legal way right. So I think legally, and emotionally as well, it does create a sense of belonging." Fatu described the following when she discussed the relationship between government assistance programs and her sense of belonging in Canada.

> Here, even though you are not working, or you are not doing something the government will still assist you until you stand for yourself and you have a job. Here you can get a job easily and you can work and make your own money. Nobody will take that money from you. Canada is very safe place. I feel like I have my own right as a lady.

Several participants further reported that government assistance led them to feel safe from both physical threats and discrimination. Gina commented "...when they say this is a free country it

really is because nobody is going to stop you from anything." Brown also discussed sense of safety while making comparisons to his life in Syria and Canada. Specifically, he stated

> There I did not have a car, we did not have a home, friends were too hard [to make]. We still feel like that strange person. Here [Canada] first of all you feel safety, no racism, you feel you belong here.

In contrast to their pre-migration experiences, government protection also created opportunities for former refugee young adults to obtain possessions that belonged to them. The sub-theme *ownership* represents new experiences of having material and non-material possessions that belong to the individual and without the threat of being taken away from him or her. Talking about ownership Brown said "I have a job, I have friends, I have my house, my family around me, and safety and I feel belong here." Housing was a unanimous form of ownership that was identified by the participants as a critical condition to acquiring a sense of belonging. The following excerpt from Fatu describes the importance of her own bedroom in relation to her sense of belonging:

> I have my own place. I was having my own bedroom which never happened in my life. Growing up as a kid and even when I was sixteen or seventeen, that never happened, having my own bedroom, no. But when I came here my sister was having her own bedroom, my brother was having his own bedroom. But my son, he is used to me now, he is used to my body so he couldn't sleep by himself, he was with me. Everybody was having their own bedroom. Like "wow, my own bedroom, what am I going to do?" Sometimes I would go inside just dance because when I am really excited I would just dance. Put on music, dancing and talking to myself like "this is me. This is my bed. Oh my God. This is my clothes, my shoes"...I put everything in order, decorate the place. All those things made me [feel] like I belong to Canada.

Acquiring permanent residence and ownership of material goods also allowed participants to maintain long-term relationships with other people in Canada. When asked if her long-term friendships in Canada contributed to her sense of belonging, Gina articulated the following:

> I never really thought of it that way. Yeah I think it brings back those moments on how the relationship started with that person and so in a way I think it can tie it in to having that sense of belonging because it all started in Canada and this is home to me.

The participants in this study identified long-term relationships with: family members, ethnocultural community members and organizations, junior and high school friends, friends from extracurricular activities including sports and youth groups, teachers, coaches, and coworkers. Overall, this pathway indicates that providing newcomers with a refugee background with legal rights, citizenship status, and access to various government assistant programs contributes to a greater sense of safety and assurance for permanent residence in Canada. As a result, the participants in this study reported increased opportunities to own material and non-material possessions and develop long-term relationships. Feeling comfortable ties in with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) criteria of providing a "...temporally stable and enduring framework" in which stable relationships can develop. Therefore, one of the outcomes of belonging that emerged from this pathway is living in a stable environment.

Feeling confident. Feeling confident was also observed when examining the phenomenon of belonging. In this study, confidence represented experiencing a sense of accomplishment, success, or making positive progress, all of which emerged from a sense of belonging. The participants initially perceived themselves as outsiders when they arrived. Lacking proficiency in English was the greatest hindrance to developing confidence. The following quote provides a description of the impact of language barriers as described by Gina:

> I remember that feeling of not understanding people, just feeling like I was deaf, just lost. I think you kind of feel lost and you just can't wait to get to the point where you can actually speak English and everyone can understand you.

Similarly, Chris noted the following when discussing language barriers, "**…**the language was the hard thing when I got started because I didn't know English very well so I couldn't understand what the [soccer] players were saying." Despite having prior instruction on English, Muskan also doubted her language abilities. She described the first couple of months of her ESL class as:

> I actually did not know that much English, I just sit quiet and looking. I understand but I don't know how to reply. It was hard for me, I know if I reply then my answer maybe it is wrong, I just feel like that so I never reply.

The findings suggest there are two different approaches to help refugee young adults gain confidence. The first approach (figure 4) was facilitated by the young adult and the second (figure 5) was facilitated by another caring individual in his or her environment.

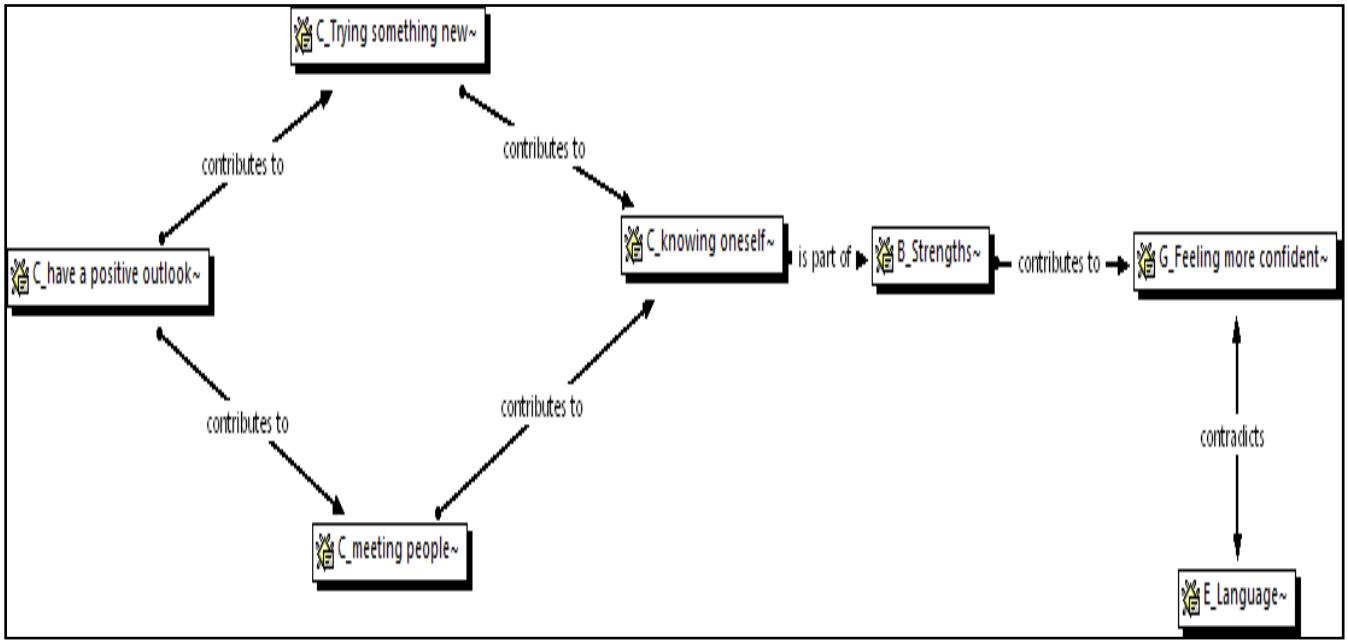

Figure 4. Feeling Confident Interaction - Self

Feeling confident interaction - self. One commonality among the participants was having a positive outlook on their experiences. In other words, they had the ability to take a difficult situation, such as being in a foreign environment, and reframe it as an opportunity to grow and learn. When specifically asked what the difference was between her experience and those who struggle to belong, Fatu explained a difference in locus of control, from external to internal. Fatu reported a strong belief in taking action to make change. In the following excerpt, Fatu explains the importance of believing in oneself.

> So if they think they do not belong, they have to go around and ask questions. Like what I did, and find someone that will help them or find something that will make them

> feel they belong. So be able to do something better for themselves, because if you think "I don't belong somewhere", or if you don't believe in yourself, you will do nothing.

Despite language barriers or the fear of not being good enough, the participants channeled their positive outlook into trying new things, such as joining sports teams, and participating in extra-curricular activities. As mentioned in the participant introductions, Chris enhanced his confidence as an athlete by joining his high school sports team. In addition to joining familiar sports, he also had a positive outlook on learning new sports. For instance, Chris shared the following process of trying out for the handball team:

> I never played the game before, I never seen it before. I heard they say there is a try out so I was like why not, it's a sport just try. So I went in there and tried and somehow I became top [player]. I don't know how. Back home we throw rocks so I was like you have to use your hand to throw the ball in the net. I didn't even know the rules; I've never seen it before.

Chris made the handball team and was voted the Most Valuable Player (MVP), a recognition that he was proud of. As a young adult he identified his athleticism as a personal strength.

Having a positive outlook also motivated the participants to take an active role in meeting new people by networking, attending events, volunteering, and identifying people they felt comfortable approaching, all of which contributed to confidence that led to a sense of belonging. For example, the following excerpt demonstrates Brown's positive outlook towards an after-school club for newcomers and his willingness to try the group activity. As a result, Brown was able to meet new people.

> I was like okay I will go because my friends were going there. Then I was like okay I will go, why not? If I have nothing to do why would I go home to nothing, then I went there and we started going to field trips and I started meeting new people from different schools.

It was also suggested by Gina that meeting new people is a skill that continues to grow in young adulthood. As a young adult, she adopted a positive outlook that facilitated meeting new people and sharing information on her cultural background.

> I'm learning so much and I think it comes with maturity as well. As you grow older you start to break down a lot of the walls, you realize that's not a big deal you can go up to someone and open up to someone about your culture. You don't worry about being judged or what that person has to say because it's a part of growing up and maturing.

Trying new things and meeting new people contributed to knowing oneself. That is, they started to believe they had to capacity to do more than they originally thought they could. As a result, they started to embrace their differences in a positive light. As Gina put it, "I think to me it's just realizing this is me and just accepting where you come from and embracing it. That's the biggest thing and just realizing that not everybody is the same." Similarly, Fatu reported, "...what makes me feel I belong to Canada is [thinking] I was like this and now look at me! This is me now." Knowing oneself is a component of recognizing personal strengths. The participants reported making positive evaluation on their ability to master new skills, such as learning English, playing a new sport, or learning a new instrument. Heightened awareness of strengths ultimately led the participants to feel confident.

Feeling confident - others. Figure 5 represents the second approach to increasing confidence in refugee young adults. Whereas the previous approach focused on the actions taken by the youth to achieve a sense of accomplishment, this particular approach explores the specific actions that a caring individual can engage in to cultivate confidence.

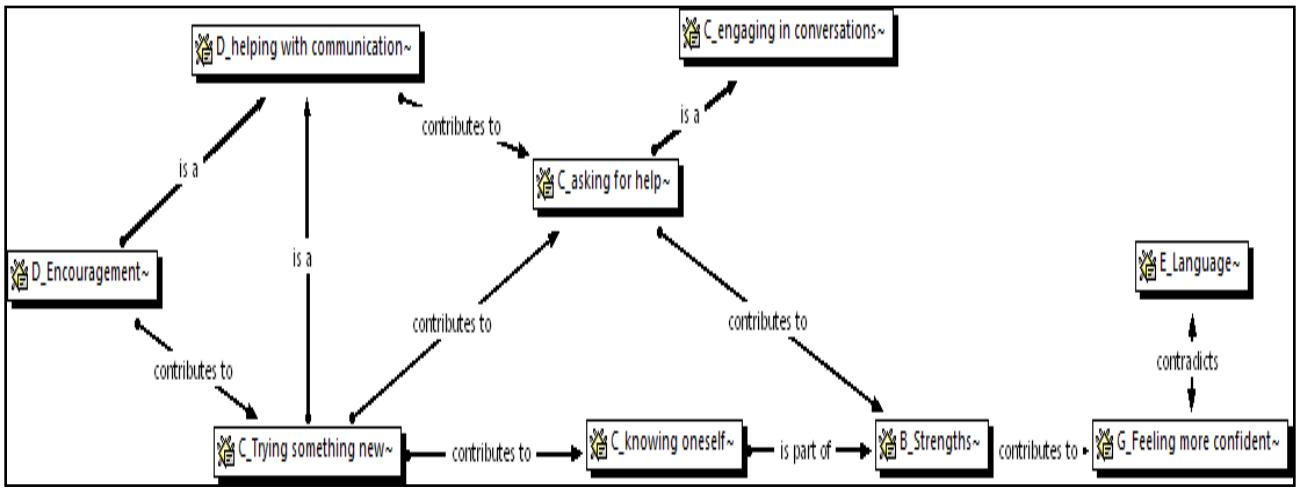

Figure 5. Feeling Confident Interaction - Others

This process begins with a caring individual encouraging the youth to pursue opportunities, such as joining a school activity or enrolling in a post-secondary institution. The following quote provides a description of encouragement as described by Gina:

> It's even the four or five people that said 'hey why don't you do this, like you should try out' even something as simple as 'you should try for this basketball team', and then you start to think uhmm right maybe I can, maybe I can do it. It's not as bad as I thought it was.

She further provided the following example of being encouraged by her math teacher:

> my math teacher was very supportive and I guess I used to be good in math. He would say 'you can't speak English but yet you do so good in math.' So him making that little statement I was like "wow" that was very encouraging to me.

When asked to describe the actions associated with encouragement, the participants identified that the people in their lives highlighted their strengths and persuaded them to believe in themselves. Formal recognition was also perceived as a form of encouragement. For example, Paru commented on receiving three awards of excellence in ESL, which according to her was the "first time in my life. I feel it's a great achievement."

When reflecting on their earlier experiences, the participants identified improving their communication skills as an important form of encouragement. This was achieved by having other individuals engage the participant in a conversation, which further promoted the acquisition of a new language. The encouragement allowed them to feel comfortable making mistakes, Paru shared "...when we are making mistake in writing they say 'don't worry you will do next time better." Brown also described his teachers as encouraging, he shared

> ...these days teachers are helpful, if you tell them 'I don't know how to spell that word' they don't care. It's like 'I don't care I will just mark it. I'm not going to take off the mark [for spelling]."

Actions that were associated with supportive communication include: talking without laughing, translating, gently correcting errors, and teaching the youth different types of communication styles (i.e. verbal, nonverbal, formal, informal). These initial interactions prompted participants to explicitly ask for help and engage in small talk. For example, Muskan used the following process:

> There are a lot of my Indian friends in my ESL class, few Pakistani people so they know Hindi. I start talking with them in Hindi and both languages mixed. English and Hindi, I just keep starting conversation with them so I learned a little bit.

Consequently, acquiring and mastering a new language was identified as a personal strength, which ultimately led to an increase in their confidence. One of the unanimous pieces of advice the participants shared for future newcomers was to push past their shyness. According to Gina, "I think human beings should push their limits as far as they can go. I think a lot of it comes through forming relationships and just pushing yourself out of your comfort zone that's when a lot of good things happen."

Together, these results provide important insights into the importance of fostering an environment that encourages refugee youth to thrive and gain confidence. In this study, this was achieved by highlighting opportunities that allowed the youth to express their personal strengths, such as athletic abilities or learning a new language. Encouraging youth to pursue these opportunities increased their awareness of their personal strengths, which was associated with increased confidence. Consequently, one of the outcomes of belonging that emerged from this pathway was experiencing valued involvement in their environment.

Feeling accepted. This theme refers to having a caring mutual relationship with another individual and refers to the affectionate aspect of belonging. According to the participants, this process begins when another individual demonstrates interest in them. The participants identified the following actions initiated by the caring individual: smiling at them, knowing their

name, asking questions (i.e. where are you from?), starting a conversation, and using humor to make them laugh. The findings suggest that once an interaction is initiated, there are two approaches that can lead to feeling accepted: joining a group and receiving social support (figure 6).

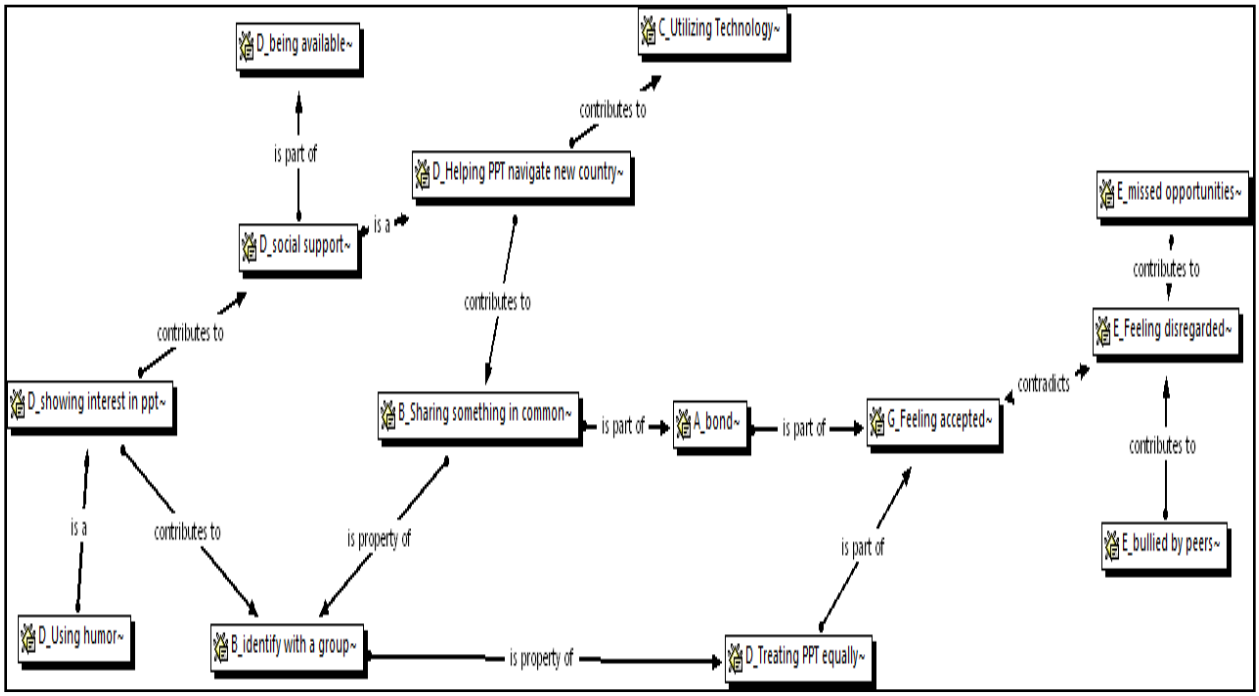

Figure 6. Feeling Accepted Interaction

Joining a group. Becoming a member allowed each participant to begin to identify with a group or organization who shared similar interests. The participants in this study identified with the following groups: sports team, volunteer programs, after-school programs, and ethnocultural organizations. Identifying with a group allowed them to be treated equally as everyone else. As young adults, many of the participants continue to be involved in similar programs and organizations. For example, after high school Chris used the internet to find a men's soccer league in Edmonton that shared the same passion and matched his skill level. Although Chris is the youngest player, he is treated as an equal amongst his team members and coaches. He described their bond as:

> All the teammates are like brothers and best friends, some of us we don't have any family members here so if you are playing with these guys, they are talking to you nice. It makes you feel you have a family out there, brother out there.

Chris further explained that when he had to sit out for three months due to a wrist injury, his team members were asking about his absence and followed up with him. This experience demonstrated to Chris that he was an accepted member of the team.

Receiving social support. The second approach occurred when the caring individual offers to provide social support. As noted in the participant introductions, a number of individuals made themselves available and helped participants settle in Canada. It is important to note that some refugees come to Canada afraid to ask for help because they assumed Canadian society operated in a similar manner as their previous country. As Fatu illustrated, refugee youth may have different perceptions of the teacher's role and the consequences of asking for help. Thus, in Fatu's case, her teacher's willingness to answer questions and offer help allowed Fatu to feel comfortable in seeking assistance.

> ...when I came here, I used to be afraid. I'm like maybe they gonna hit me. So I used to sit so quiet and my teacher would be like "Fatu don't be shy or don't think I'm gonna do anything to you. I'm not gonna beat you. Just ask any question. Feel free to tell me anything."

Therefore making oneself available also required asking how one can help. In Fatu's case, her teacher provided assistance outside the academic context. She found an individual that was familiar with her home country, food, and language. In this study, social support consisted of helping the young adult with their day-to-day tasks (i.e. food bank, public transportation, banking, shopping), providing material and physical assistance, and providing information. For instance, Paru reported receiving immediate medical support from an immigrant-serving agency. She shared "...when I came here, we submit all our reports. Thank god they gave me the medicine and they take me to the hospital." Consistent with their developmental stage, friends

were also identified as an important source of social support. This was captured in Muskan's comment:

> ... my friends they always help me, like if I get in trouble or if I need their help they give me advice. Like good ideas they just give me and they say "you have to do this one." They help me with my work, school, and how to study.

Similarly, Brown shared how his friend from high school showed him where his classes were and who to avoid hanging out with. Brown continues to see this particular friend as a primary source of social support.

In addition to providing social support and a group to identify with, these interactions provided participants with opportunities to share something in common with another person. The participants discussed shared interests, cultural background, values, and goals. Technology and social media also created further opportunities to find people who shared something in common. Brown identified finding a common ground as a strategy to make friends. He explained "...let's say Arabic we always find something in common because 'do you speak Arabic' oh let's start talking." Chris also offered the suggestion of exploring your own interests and then looking for other individuals or groups online that share the same interests. Sharing something in common is an important component of developing a bond. In this study, a bond represents the relationships that hold the participant's social world together.

The findings also point to a number of threats to feeling accepted. Although many of the participants reported Canada as a safe country, Fatu reported an incident of discrimination in her high school that negatively impacted her sense of belonging. Two male students teased her about her cultural dress and physically pushed her. When she brought it to the principle's attention, the students accused Fatu of lying. She had to verify the incident by reviewing the school video cameras. Feeling mistreated by others was associated with feeling disregarded. In this study, the sub-theme *feeling disregarded* refers to feeling lonely, isolated, not being

acknowledged by others, or fearing rejection. Gina provided the following example of not feeling acknowledged at work " There's been places where I would say something and no actions would be taken versus someone else saying it and they would be taken more seriously. So it's discouraging a little bit." Another form of feeling disregarded was highlighted by Chris,

> ... here people have problems with calling people. So let's say if community is doing something let's say there's a meeting tomorrow and they call you at the last minute but they call everyone a week before you will feel like you don't belong there

This example highlights how feeling disregarded can occur unintentionally. Feeling disregarded can also be caused by missed opportunities. Some of the participants reported barriers to opportunities that were available to their peers, including school and employment opportunities. The following quote describes how the age cap policy prevented Fatu from completing her high school diploma:

> Yeah they say you have to go. You have to go somewhere. We can't let you here because you are old, something like that. I was so frustrated, my aim was to graduate but why, why you guys didn't let me? Because you are, that's what they told me, "because you are old. You don't stay here you have to go."“Okay, I'm going."And I came here [post-secondary institute].

Muskan also explained how the ESL program was hindering her academic progress. According to Muskan,

> ... when I come here I don't know that much English, it's really hard for me to address to people and when I come here they directly put me into ESL class. Before when I was in Nepal I studied very big, big books you know. When I came here, they just teach us like small kids. I was like "really" here it was so easy. I get so confused like 'why they are teaching me like that?'

Muskan felt her first high school was acting as a barrier to completing the ESL program which would further hinder her goal to apply to a nursing program.

In summary, this pathway shows that participants experienced acceptance when others showed interest in developing a bond with them, provided social support and a group to identify with, treated them as equals, and shared commonalities (i.e. interests, values, goals). Feeling

accepted contributed to the outcomes of having frequently pleasant interactions and achieving stable relationships.

Sense of purpose. This theme refers to opportunities that allow former refugee young adults to become involved in something higher than themselves, and it refers to the dimension of valued involvement (Hagerty et al., 1992). As Gina put it:

> I think having a sense of belonging somewhere is the most important thing because when you can't identify with anything I think it's the worst. I mean yeah I have my family, this is where I'm from but there has to be a bigger picture than that.

The findings suggest when former refugee young adults develop a sense of purpose it provides them with hope, pride, acceptance, and feeling they are valued. For example, Gina gained a sense of belonging through her involvement with the South Sudanese youth office in Edmonton. As noted in the introduction section, she developed and facilitated workshops, events, and fundraisers for the youth in her community. Gina described her sense of purpose process as:

> ...you say 'okay maybe this is where I need to be, yeah maybe I do belong here because I am able to do this and they really need me or whatever the case is. So I think a lot of it is you doing something and it is how people receive it. If they receive it well then I think it even confirms that sense of belonging.

Similar to Gina's involvement in the youth office, this interaction requires the young adult to be an active member of a group or community. For example, Chris was involved in a men's soccer team and Fatu joined various student groups in her post-secondary institute.

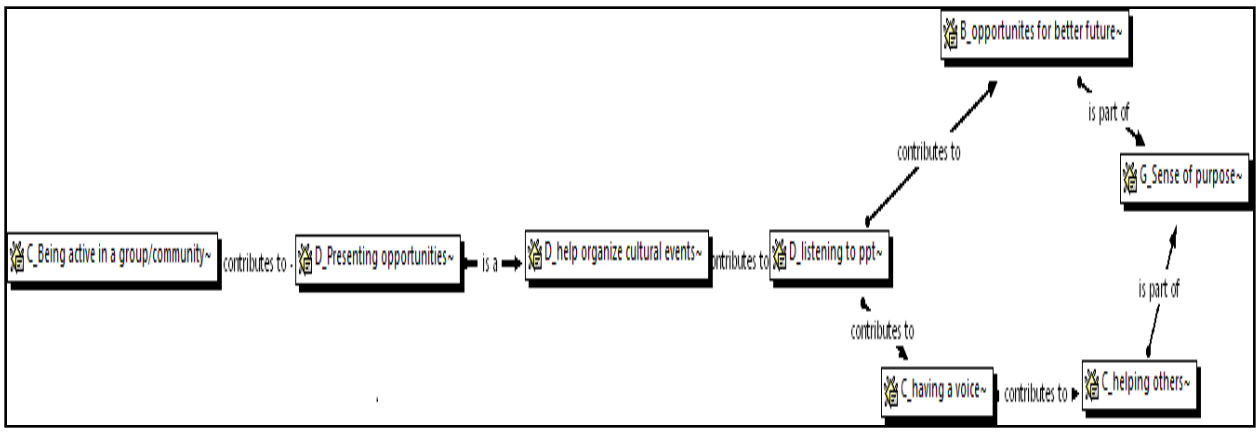

Figure 7. Sense of Purpose Interaction

As an active member of the group, the former refugee young adults were provided with additional opportunities to become involved. For instance, Brown described that his involvement with an after-school club started as a participant and later turned into a youth leader position:

> These organizations it's not even for youth it's even bigger than that. You can volunteer, you can be a part of this organization. So I wanted to be a part of this organization so I volunteer. It's not just going to stop because of school, I'm working too because some things are good, I find it fun meeting new people, trying new things, I like doing new things.

Similarly, Chris' high school coach presented him with the opportunity to help coach the high school soccer team. Chris described the interaction as: "he [said] 'you can come out anytime and help' and I was like yeah I like doing those stuff. Sometimes I go and play with the students too." The participants in this study were especially drawn to opportunities involving cultural events. Muskan reported the following activities during Losar which is a Nepali holiday "… we start from the morning making the food and at night time all the people will get together and keep eating and dancing." Similarly, Fatu reported her involvement in a school run fundraiser where:

> ... you cook different kind of food, culture food, so other people will come like guests. They will come and buy the food. They will pay the money to buy the food. And at the end of the year the money will go to charity. To bring like some children from any part

> of country to come [to] Canada. So we went there, we did this program and I was very excited. I was thinking I am helping someone too just like they helped me. I was on [front page of] Edmonton Journal because I [wore] my culture dress and it was very nice.

In the process of presenting new opportunities and organizing events, participants were frequently asked by other group members to share their feedback and ideas. When the participants felt heard it contributed to a stronger sense of purpose in two ways. First, the young adult were given opportunities to voice their opinions, something Fatu specifically shared did not take place during her pre-migration experiences. For example, in Canada she learned to talk to people who she perceived as important, including lawyers and political candidates. Through the student-run after school programs Fatu learned:

> ... talking to them, you will feel they will really take their time to answer your question. If they don't understand, they will ask you again what are you saying, they say, "take your time. Don't rush." Just come and you will take your time. Tell them what you wanted to say and they will take their own time to talk to you according to what you asked them. They will make sure that you understand. They will ask you "do you understand?"and if you say "no", they will explain again until you understand what they said…in my country, you don't have this kind of opportunity. You can't even try it because there would be a lot of people standing, like soldiers. You can try if sometime if you don't take your time you might be killed. They shoot, something like that. So here it was just easy.

Gina also explained the learning process that was involved in learning how to voice her opinions:

> I speak my mind, once I have an idea, and it's something that I had to learn to do that I never did before. I realized my opinion is valued and it doesn't matter how the person is going to take it but just voice your opinion.

This newfound autonomy resulted in young adults finding meaningful ways of helping others. Volunteering was a core value the participants shared. Examples included fundraising, acting as mentors, helping newcomers navigate the new environment, and translating. Another form of helping others was to welcome newcomers. Both Paru and Muskan talked about welcoming new families and participating in cultural festivities. Muskan also helped herself by voicing her

frustration with the ESL program. The teachers at the second high school were receptive in understanding Muskan's academic goals and were helping her achieving them.

The second benefit of listening to the participants was to empower them to envision a better future. The participants reported a sense of belonging in Canada because they could begin to plan for a future that consisted of limitless opportunities. Brown reported:

> When I moved here the minute I started a new page in the school, then I learned the language, I met new people, then I thought about what my future would be, I will travel, I want to be an engineer, I thought about a lot of things I wanted to do in my life.

Chris also reported thinking of the future as a motivator, according to him:

> ... you always think there's something big coming towards you so it makes you even try harder and try to reach for it. If there's a big opportunity let's say right now I'm playing soccer and I think there is a big opportunity ahead I will keep going with it. One day I will end up playing the big leagues and making millions of dollars.

Thus, participants in this study were goal oriented and many of them were looking for opportunities for good careers, income, and providing a better life for their family in Canada. In all cases, the participants identified Canada as their home country which suggests a sense of belonging to the country. Most of the participants also shared an interest in learning about other cultures and travelling the world. Learning English was perceived as an asset that would help them communicate with people around the world. Fatu noted:

> Speaking English can take me I think any part of the world because English is kind of popular language. If you know how to speak, even though you go somewhere like you don't know but there must be one person that know how to speak English. This makes me feel I belong to Canada and I will be able to go to other country too through this English that I am speaking.

Overall, this pathway indicates that once newcomers with a refugee background are actively involved in a group or community and are presented with opportunities to voice their ideas and opinions it contributes to a greater sense of purpose in life. As a result, the hope and pride they experience enhances the outcome of belonging that is associated with valued involvement.

Integration. In all cases, the participants reported the acculturation process, that is the process of adopting the beliefs, norms, and expected behaviors of a given culture, having an important influence on their perception of belonging. The participants on the whole, demonstrated an interest in maintaining their ethnic heritage and connecting with the larger Canadian society. Having the preference to integrate both cultures refers to the integration strategy as defined by Berry (2005). The findings suggest the pathway to integration begins with the maintenance of the ethnic heritage and the adoption of Canadian culture occurs later on (figure 8).

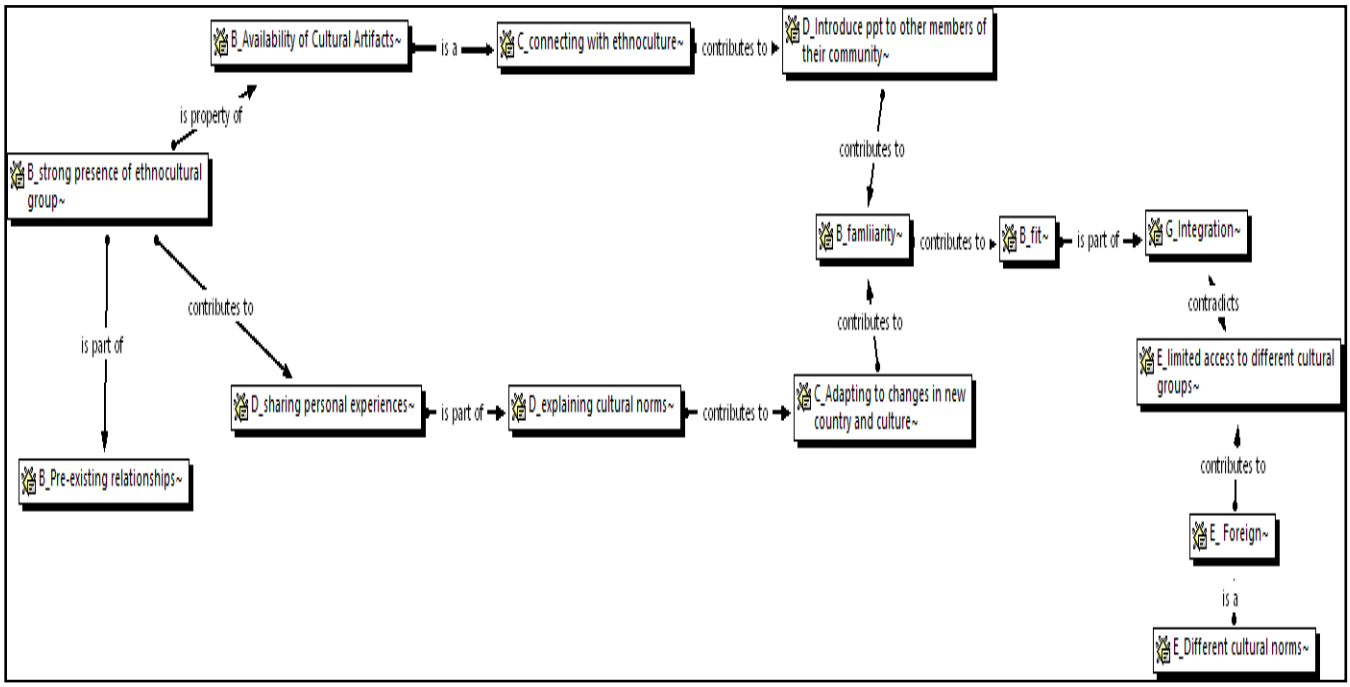

Figure 8. Integration Interaction

In all the interviews, the integration pathway begins with the strong presence of one's ethnocultural group. The circumstances that promoted a strong presence was the existence of formal organizations. All the participants with the exception of Fatu reported a strong formal network of their ethnocultural group. For example, when describing the South Sudanese group Gina explained:

> ... you always know somebody because there are a lot of South Sudanese in Canada especially Alberta. I would say 70% reside in Alberta so it's a very big community and all the different tribes - I don't think there's ever been a case where nobody - like whether it's a friend or a family member whether it's an extended you know there's always a connection.

Similarly, the Nepali community has a formal welcoming system. Muskan and Paru explained the immigrant-serving agency informs them when a new Nepali family arrives in Calgary. While the family is in the reception house, members of the Nepali community will come visit the newcomers and bring them their ethnic food. Although Brown did not talk about a formal Iraqi community he explained how his group of friends welcome new Iraqi students by saying "...this guy is Iraqi let's go chill because he's alone let's go take him out and then that's what we did." In Fatu's case, she had to take a more active approach by asking to meet someone from Sierra Leone. Her teacher knew someone she could connect her to. From that informal connection, Fatu connected to other members of her ethnocultural group. As figure 8 indicates, one component of a strong presence of the ethnoculture is to have access to items from the native country. It appears the presence of cultural artifacts provided participants with opportunities to continue developing a sense of belonging to their cultural group despite residing in a different country. Fatu noted it was after she discovered the African stores in Edmonton that she started to feel at home. Paru also commented "...we can find everything. Whatever we use in our country." Another component is to ensure the former refugee young adult has opportunities to connect with their ethnoculture. In the present study, this was achieved by attending cultural events and retaining their native language. When the young adults engaged in their ethnocultural practices and traditions it provided them with opportunities to expand their social network by meeting other individuals that also engage in similar cultural activities. It was also noted that immersing oneself in their ethnoculture provided a sense of familiarity during a transition when

most things appeared foreign to them. When asked about connecting with her ethnoculture, Gina explained:

> ...it was always the natural thing and it was comfortable for me because anything else was just strange or it would take just too much of emotional effort, or even mental effort too. It was great because in my situation it was comfortable, it was the only natural thing that I could identify and gravitate to [was] my own community.

The second part of the acculturation process consisted of other individuals sharing their personal settlement experiences and normalizing the challenges. Through this activity, other individuals would provide new information regarding Canadian cultural norms. Chris provided the following cultural difference he had to learn:

> ...one thing that made me feel not good, like back home when you say hi to random people, like when you are walking, they say hi back. But here if you say hi they look at you and walk, and I was like 'okay that person doesn't like me' that's how I feel.

Explaining cultural norms consists of explaining and answering questions the newcomer has about their new environment. For instance, Paru reported learning English songs including "Oh Canada" and learning about new holidays including Halloween. Although individuals outside of the ethnic group also provided this role, the majority of the individuals were from within their ethnic group. Interestingly, a barrier to belonging was having limited access to Canadian born individuals. Brown described his earlier experience of having only Arabic friends as "I still kind of feel like I don't belong here because I wasn't communicating with let's say Canadian people. I was surrounded by my people, my own people." In the following quote, Gina reflected the impact of this barrier as a young adult:

> I wish that setting was there like back in high school where there were so many other people. Yeah like here it's in school but you are in college for what 3-4 years or 4 years and you are done and then you are into adulthood and then you go back into your own family, or your own community and you don't really expand your social network right and I don't like that in a way. Which I think is a personal choice on my end because there's nothing that is stopping me from doing it but I just think it is a challenge for me, I think it is somewhat a challenge because it's not something I'm very comfortable with.

Learning more about Canadian norms resulted in the young adults adapting and integrating Canadian culture, including food and social norms, into their lifestyle, thus allowing them to expand their sense of belonging to the Canadian culture and people. The comment below illustrates Brown's process of integrating into the Canadian culture:

> I didn't lose my culture but I just started trying new things like when I bleached my hair. The first thing I thought was my parents, I didn't care what's going to happen I was like okay that's one thing I feel I want to do. When I did it I felt happy, then I was like I'm happy this makes me happy so why not. So every time I go home I wear a toque and I go to bed, work, bed, work, bed and then my mom she was like "do you think we don't know, you think when you sleep we don't come and see" I was like okay I know but I promised them I would bleach it back. I just want to do it for fun, so they didn't say anything.

Chris shared the following example of adapting to Canadian food:

> ...the first time we went to cafeteria we bought these sandwich and we tried it and threw it in the garbage right away because we didn't like it. We stay with no food all day that day because back home we ate late so we didn't eat and we didn't like subs and all the pizza. We see when people buy it's like [disgusting face] it's like what are they eating that's so nasty even chocolate milk, I tasted it and it was like garbage but now it's like oh yeah that's good stuff you know I got used to it.

Over time the participants gained familiarity with both cultures, as Chris put it "...well it doesn't matter how long it takes, you know the next day is like yesterday that you didn't like it and then today it's like oh okay I want this." Taken together, Canada's ability to provide newcomers with an environment that maintains a strong presence of their ethnocultural heritage, while at the same introducing a new set of values, norms, and behaviors results in participants selecting aspects of each culture that fit with their personal values and lifestyles. In this study, the core Canadian values of freedom and equality resonated with the participants.

Summary

The results of this study emerged from in-depth interviews with six young adults who arrived in Canada as refugee youth. The common elements between the data were developed into themes that represented the pathways in which the participants achieved belonging and the

actions that were associated with achieving a sense of belonging. Overall the findings suggest five themes that identify the pathways to belonging: (1) Feeling Comfortable, (2) Feeling Confident, (3) Feeling Accepted, (4) Sense of Purpose, and (5) Integration. Feeling comfortable refers to feeling secure and at ease in their new home, which resulted in opportunities to maintain long-term relationships.

Feeling confident refers to gaining a sense of accomplishment, success, or making positive progress. The participants facilitated this process by having a positive outlook about being in a foreign environment. They were willing to try new activities as well as meet new people, which resulted in embracing their differences in a positive light, as well as recognition of their personal strengths. As young adults, many of the participants perceived learning English as a strength and an important component towards developing a sense of belonging. Feeling accepted refers to developing a caring mutual relationship with another individual in their environment. Having someone show interest in them resulted in identifying with a group or organization and receiving social support.

Sense of purpose refers to being involved in a greater cause or to contribute back to society. As a member of a group or organization, the participants were provided with additional opportunities to become involved, this was especially the case when they were taking part in a cultural event. Participants reported feeling valued for their input and truly felt they were helping others. Providing opportunities to become involved and voicing one's opinions also resulted in envisioning a better future with limitless opportunities to achieve their goals.

Finally, integration refers to integrating both the Canadian culture and the youth's own ethnic culture into one's lifestyle. Maintenance with their own ethnic culture occurred through pre-existing relationships, interactions with people from the same geographic region, having

access to cultural artifacts, and opportunities to practice their cultural rituals, ceremonies, and language. Familiarity with the Canadian culture occurred when others would share their settlement experiences and explain what the Canadian norms were. As a result, participants would start to integrate Canadian norms into their lifestyle.

Chapter Five - Discussion

General Discussion

The purpose of this study was to describe and interpret the phenomenon and process of developing and maintaining a sense of belonging to Canada from the perspective of former refugee young adults. To date, no qualitative studies have been conducted specifically exploring sense of belonging from what Korac (2003) describes as the "refugees voice." The intent for collecting the viewpoint of young adults, rather than service providers was that new knowledge would be generated that would inform changes or improvements to program delivery. While each participant's specific experiences and insights were unique, the individual-derived themes across all interviews were compared to produce overarching themes.

The participants in this study had difficulties articulating a concrete definition of belonging, however they were able to discuss their experiences by reflecting on the outcomes of achieving a sense of belonging and often comparing it to their pre-migration experiences. The outcomes of achieving a sense of belonging were consistent with the four dimensions of sense of belonging as identified by Hagerty et al. (1992) and Baumeister and Leary (1995): (1) valued involvement, (2) fit, (3) frequency of affectively pleasant interactions, and (4) stability of relationship. In this study valued involvement was reflected in experiences where the participant felt valued, needed, and acknowledged for their contribution. The dimension fit was expressed as the participant's perception that their beliefs, values, and lifestyle were congruent with their physical environment. Frequency of affectively pleasant interactions represented experiences that promoted positive social interactions, and stability of relationships refers to the important relationships the young adults developed. The findings suggested that developing and maintaining a sense of belonging in Canada could be achieved through a number of pathways

which include feeling comfortable, confident, accepted, having a sense of purpose, and adopting an integration acculturation strategy. The outcome of each pathway resulted in achieving one of the dimensions noted above. Specifically, feeling confident and sense of purpose allowed participants to experience valued involvement, whereas integration resulted in achieving a fit between two cultural norms and their personal lifestyle. The pathway to feeling comfortable and accepted contributed to the dimensions of frequently pleasant interactions and achieving stable relationships. There were 38 sub-themes, which highlighted the conditions that facilitate belonging as well as the actions and behaviors that promote the development and maintenance of this phenomenon.

This chapter begins by taking each pathway to belonging and discussing it in relation to existing theories, framework, and previous research on belonging amongst refugee populations. Furthermore, in order to understand the developmental context of belonging the findings will be discussed in relation to the human ecology framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). That is the influence of different types of environmental systems on the development and maintenance of belonging will be discussed. This will be followed by a series of practical recommendations for psychologists and other professionals working with refugee youth and young adults. The chapter concludes with a review of the limitations and future directions for research.

Feeling comfortable. Studies on refugee pre-migration experiences have explored the hardship endured by children and youth (Beiser, 2009; Merali, 2008; Mollica, 2006). These experiences often consist of fleeing from one place to another and witnessing "rape, robberies, [and] killings" (Wong, 2013, pg. 138). Extrapolating from research on the adversity of pre-migration experiences, it seems reasonable to expect that many refugees feel estranged from their environment and are in a constant state of unrest. The results of this study indicate that

enhancing experiences of comfort in Canada and encouraging refugee young adults to feel at ease is an important condition that facilitates their belonging process. In regards to post-migration hardships, such as learning a new language and feeling lonely, the remaining pathways operated as protective factors and will be discussed in later sections.

At the Macrosystem level, political ideologies of the Canadian government including policies regarding multiculturalism, providing legal recognition through resident status, and having access to government protection were associated with enhancing comfort in the young adult's new environment. Participants noted that awareness of Canada's multiculturalism policy and obtaining citizenship were critical facilitators that contributed to their sense of belonging. These findings are inconsistent with Hogarth's (2011) study of immigrant women, between the ages eighteen to eighty two, in Canada where many of the participants did not report improvement in sense of belonging after citizenship was granted. One possible explanation for this difference might be the participants in Hogarth's study had different expectations of what life in Canada would look like and they had different indicators of successful settlement. One of the primary challenges reported in Hogarth's study was "...the [lack of] recognition of immigrants' pre-Canadian qualifications and their resulting underemployment" (p. 67). In comparison, the participants in the present study had received early settlement support within the school and community context and subsequently noted an improvement in their quality of life. Thus, the macrosystem support (i.e. policies around migration, multiculturalism, citizenship process) contribute to belonging when it is re-enacted at the mesosystem level. Furthermore, the mesosystem supports were stronger during their adolescent years which resulted in greater access to a number of individuals that would assist them in adapting to their new home. Examples in this study included bridges between immigrant-serving agencies and ethnocultural community

groups, and after-school programs offered through community organizations and the education system. Despite the differences in outcome, both studies support the notion that early settlement experiences could have a positive influence on sense of belonging in later years.

The most obvious finding to emerge from the analysis is that basic needs including physiological, settlement, and safety needs had to be met prior to establishing long-term relationships and satisfying the belonging need. These results are consistent with Maslow's (1987) motivational hierarchy of human needs. The description of feeling comfortable also matched those observed in earlier studies where feeling safe from threats was a characteristic of belonging (Ager & Strang, 2004). A strong relationship between policies that promote tolerance to practice one's ethnic identity and having a sense of security, and ultimately belonging, has also been reported in the literature (Valentine, Sporton, & Nielsen, 2009). Another form of safety was knowing that their possessions, both material and non-material, would not be taken away from them. The processes of establishing sense of safety, ownership, and stability in relationships were also consistent with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) idea of significant interpersonal relationships taking place in a stable context.

In addition to describing one of the conditions that facilitate belonging, this particular theme helps us to understand the importance of utilizing macrosystem and mesosystem-level supports earlier in the settlement journey. Furthermore, it appears that arriving in Canada as an adolescent, rather than adult, fosters more opportunities to acquire skills that could assist in gaining sense of belonging in later years.

Feeling confident. The present study explored whether strategies used to gain a sense of belonging during high school transferred to their young adult experiences. Rather than identifying specific strategies, the participants attributed their sense of belonging to gaining more

confidence in themselves. It appears when they felt good about themselves they were more likely to approach and connect with others. It is interesting to note that all the participants in this study perceived their move to Canada as an opportunity to grow and learn more about who they were as individuals. This identity formation aligns with their developmental stage. As mentioned in the literature review, the development of a personal identity is an ongoing complex process that relates to asking questions regarding how the individual fits in with the rest of society and who they currently are and who they aspire to become (Erikson, 1959; Kiang & Fuligni, 2009; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Schwartz et al., 2005; Seider, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 2010). While constructing their personal identities, the participants were trying new activities and participating in various groups including sports teams and after school club. Through these interactions, the participants reported increased awareness of their own capabilities. As a result, they started to perceive themselves in a positive light especially when they were mastering new skills. These results are consistent with Khanlou and Crawford's (2006) findings which showed that personal achievements promoted self-esteem among newcomer youth.

One advantage of migrating to Canada as an adolescent was having opportunities to connect with influential individuals through the school system including politicians and lawyers. These results are in agreement with Bisson's (2013) findings which showed teachers and peers were an important source of encouragement for refugee youth in Calgary, Alberta. Helping participants improve their English was also identified as critical to their increased self-confidence. The participants reported their willingness to push past their shyness as an important factor in improving their language skills. Furthermore, some of the teachers provided additional opportunities to practice. These findings match those observed in earlier studies on the impact of language acquisition of newcomers and their level of confidence (Bisson, 2013; Khanlou &

Crawford, 2006).

Returning to the research question of whether the participants transferred their strategies used in high school to their young adult experiences, the participants continued to participate in similar activities and groups. As young adults, the participants did not report new experiences that contributed to increasing confidence. It can therefore be assumed that the strategies utilized in adolescence established a foundation that guides their behaviors as young adults, such as joining a club. However, the rational for engaging in the activity had less to do with developing confidence and more to do with how they saw themselves and the identities they had constructed. This does not come as a surprise, given that the ongoing development of identity is most prominent during adolescents and young adulthood (Nelson & Barry, 2005; Seider, 2007). At this stage in their lives, they continue to question how they fit into the larger society (Yuval-Davis, 2010) and it may be the case that maintaining their adolescent identities reaffirms that they do in actuality belong to the identified group. For example, as a young adult Chris can still maintain the identity of an athlete given his ongoing involvement with sports.

Feeling accepted. According to Baumeister and Leary's (1995) belongingness hypothesis, human beings have a need for frequent, affectively pleasant interactions with at least a few other people. Thus, an initial objective of the study was to explore the nature of the relationships that contributed to a sense of belonging. Consistent with the youth refugee literature, the participant's Microsystem consisted of family, friends, teachers, and other members of their ethnocultural community (Kirkwood, 2011; Tingvold et al., 2012; Weine, 2008). The school environment was identified as a primary exosystem (Baffoe, 2007; Oikonomidoy, 2007) where participants frequently experienced acceptance. In support of Wallace et al. (2012) sub dimensions of belonging amongst ethnically diverse high school

students, the participants in this study also identified the following dimensions contributing to their feelings of acceptance and ultimately sense of belonging: connection to a specific teacher, participation in official school-sanctioned activities, and perceptions of fitting in with their peers. During the early years of settlement, the participants relied heavily on other individuals approaching and communicating an interest in getting to know them. These results match Goodson and Phillimore's (2008) observation that individuals will wait until they have established a sense of safety and confidence before approaching individuals or groups that differ from them. Through these initial connections, the participants expanded their Macrosystem supports by becoming members of various social groups. Consistent with Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory, group membership allowed participants to develop a social identity, such as a member of an athletic team or community organization. Socialization to a group not only provided the participant with an identity but also allowed them to experience opportunities of feeling equal to others.

In addition to group membership, acceptance was facilitated when other individuals provided social support, which consisted of people helping participants manage their day-to-day tasks and navigate the new country. In regards to friends, in most cases the participants became friends with individuals from various ethnic backgrounds. Thus, the participants were successful in establishing social bonds within their own ethnic community and developing social bridges with other communities (Ager & Strang, 2008). The ability to establish social bonds and social bridges enhances social capital which further contributes to a number of social support including access to new contacts and emotional supports (Perkins et al., 2002). Of course, there were a number of factors that threatened experiences of acceptance. Feeling disregarded was characterized by feeling lonely, isolated, ignored by others, and rejected. Feeling disregarded

also occurred when participants perceived barriers to participating in opportunities that were available to their peers. Although some of these barriers were a result of policy, i.e. Alberta Education's age cap policy where public funding of secondary education discontinues at the age of 19, the participants attributed these missed opportunities to being treated unfairly and consequently experiencing exclusion. This example highlights a contradiction of an earlier finding where Canadian policies increased sense of comfort which then influenced sense of belonging. In future investigations, identification of policies that play a part in experiences of belonging and exclusion is needed.

As the participants transitioned to young adulthood, family members and members from the ethnocultural community continued to be key components of the Microsystem. In comparison to their adolescent years, the young adults' peers tended to have a greater influence than authority figures had on their lives. On a positive note, young adults continued to maintain contact with individuals and organizations that played a critical role in their settlement years. In contrast to earlier findings on religious institutions being an important exosystem for refugee young adults (Schweitzer, Greenslade, & Kagee, 2007; Wong, 2013), the participants did not identify this resource as important to their sense of belonging. Instead, the participants identified post-secondary institutions and their place of employment as important exosystem.

Interestingly, in comparison to their adolescent years, the participants reported limited opportunities to interact with members outside of their ethnocultural community as they grew older. That is maintaining bonds within one's ethnic community did not change, however social bridges tended to dwindle during young adulthood. This finding is in accord with recent studies indicating that refugees in the UK report more social bonds that are primarily based on culture, religion, and language, than bridges and links (Daley, 2007; Kirkwood, 2011). It appears, that

despite sharing mainstream values and interests, shared activities with individuals outside of the employment setting become limited during young adulthood. A possible explanation for this change might be that in adolescents, the exosystem offers multiple formal opportunities to connect with people of different backgrounds through their after-school and culture clubs (Beirens, Hughes, Hek, & Spicer, 2007; Brar 2010; Yohani, 2013). Although the participants were enrolling in post-secondary programs or gaining employment, they were finding themselves in settings that predominately consisted of immigrants and newcomers. Unless the individual actively searched for a shared intercultural activity, such as a sports team, the common ground they had with other individuals in their environment boiled down to cultural background or occupations. Similar to the consequences of separating adolescents in ESL programs from regular programs these young adults experienced limited opportunities to bridge relationships with people from a different background. Hence, it could conceivably be hypothesized that obtaining employment in a highly newcomer populated setting can hinder sense of belonging and social capital among young adults with a refugee background. Specifically, as service providers we cannot assume the social capital obtained during adolescent remains stable during their transition to young adulthood. In order to continue maintaining social bridges and links, the young adult's exosystem needs to foster opportunities to engage in shared activities among diverse groups of individuals.

Sense of purpose. Although feeling comfortable, confident, and accepted occurred during adolescents and continued during young adulthood, it appears that a sense of purpose, as a pathway to developing a sense of belonging, emerged post-high school. Sense of purpose closely aligns with Hagerty et al.'s (1992) definition where belonging refers to "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that the person feels themselves to be an

integral part of that system or environment" (pg. 143). Furthermore, this theme was similar to the dimension of valued involvement where the individual reports feeling valued, needed, and accepted (Hagerty et al., 1992). In this study, valued involvement also resulted in feeling pride and having hope for the future. Sense of purpose was also linked to developing a sense of community. The participants reported all four elements of McMillan and Chavis' (1986) theory of sense of community that is the individual's perceptions, feelings, and attitudes regarding their relationship to a community. However, this theme taps into the element of influence, which refers to "a sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group" (pg. 4), and shared values that are connected to the individual's emotional and intellectual needs. The results of this study are in agreement with Maslow's later thoughts on his theory of motivation, sense of purpose is consistent with the motive of self-transcendence that is "they come to identify with something greater than the purely individual self, often engaging in services to others" (Maslow, 1966 as cited in Koltko-Rivera, 2006). In the present study, self-transcendence took the form of volunteering and giving back to the community. For example, Fatu was involved in a number of fundraisers to help support children in different parts of the world and Gina was involved in a South Sudan political group that currently has offices around the world. Self-transcendence not only guides the person's sense of purpose but also expands their opportunity to belong in a group that extends beyond their local social circle.

As noted in the previous section, participants in this study continued to become involved in groups and organizations but as young adults they started to take on a leadership role rather than a participant role. Furthermore, unlike their pre-migration experiences where decisions were made on their behalf, these activities allowed them to learn how to voice their opinions and to have their voice heard. The participant's desire to establish a sense of community promotes what

Perkins et al. (2002) refer to as the behavioral dimension of social capital including increased civic engagement. In many cases, contributing back to their ethnic community or enhancing awareness of their culture was the participant's method of meeting their self-transcendence need and enhancing their social capital, which consequently allowed them to maintain their sense of belonging to their community.

Sense of purpose also referred to working towards a positive future. As noted earlier, migrating to Canada as a refugee was perceived as a long-term solution to obtaining permanent residence. The participants perceived Canada as a free country where they could begin to plan the future they always hoped for. When asked to describe their future, the participants discussed good careers, creating a better life for their family, and having the freedom to travel. Many of the participants reported a desire to visit their home country, but none of them reported a desire to permanently return there.

This exploratory study suggests that as young adults these participants continue to enhance their sense of belonging by moving higher up on Maslow's motivational hierarchy of human needs. For all of the participants, sense of purpose entailed becoming involved in their ethnocultural community and in one case it fostered ethnic exploration (Phinney, 1989). As noted by Mollica (2006) for various reasons caused by displacement, some refugees have limited opportunities to learn about their ethnocultural heritage during pre-migration. Findings from this study suggest that engagement in ethnocultural community organizations can provide new opportunities to explore one's ethnic identity.

Integration. This particular theme represents the acculturation strategy utilized by young adults that contributed to a sense of belonging (Berry, 2005). Upon further analysis, it was evident the participants unanimously opted for an integration strategy. Berry's (2005)

acculturation framework outlines three components that influence whether an individual opts for the integration route: (1) preference in maintaining ethnic heritage, (2) interest in connecting with the larger society, and (3) attitudes and preferences of the dominant group. Initially, the participants in this study gravitated towards their ethnic culture. The most cited reason for this was the ethnic culture was a source of familiarity in a new world and did not require competency in English. There were formal ethnic organizations or partnerships between settlement programs and ethnic communities to facilitate this connection. In one case, the participant had to take an active role in finding her ethnocultural community. Access to a one's ethnocultural community contributed to belonging by enhancing opportunities to expand their social network and to have opportunities to practice their cultural traditions and activities. The challenges of settlement were mainly normalized by other individuals who had overcome their own settlement experiences. For example, the participants were told life in Canada would get easier. The participants also benefitted by other individuals explaining Canadian norms to them. Learning more about Canadian norms was the first step to familiarizing the participants to their new macrosystem, including government systems and policies that influenced their lives. Also, consistent with the immigrant and refugee youth literature, the school system served as a place for refugee youth to learn about Canadian culture (Baffoe, 2007; Bisson, 2013; Oikonomidoy, 2007). Therefore, it appears that familiarity with Canadian norms and access to ethnocultural communities increased the likelihood for these participants to select aspects from both cultures that fit with their personal lifestyle or belief systems. These results confirm the association between belonging and Hagerty et al.'s (1992) second dimension of fit. That is, the participants perceived their personal values and preferences were well received by their environment.

The integration acculturation strategy also facilitated hybrid identities similar to the Somali youth from Bhatia's (2010) study and Rodriguez et al (2010) study on multiethnic young adults in North America. Interestingly, obtaining the behaviors and values of the Canadian culture was not sufficient enough to report belonging. Many of the participants reported integrating with Canadian culture early on, however it was not until they made social bridges with Canadian-born individuals that they truly felt a sense of belonging to the country. It can therefore be assumed that acculturation style and social bridges combined enhance sense of belonging for young adults who arrived as refugee youth. This finding raises interesting questions regarding whether a gradual decrease in social bridges could eventually lead to a loss of sense of belonging, and integration as well, based on the data the participants still reported a sense of belonging but this group might be an exception. It could be the case that a number of former refugees did not participate in this study because of a loss of belonging in young adulthood. If this was the case, not only would it threaten sense of belonging for the individual but it would also impede Canada's vision of being a multicultural society.

Implication for Counselling Refugee Youth and Young Adults

The findings of this study provided insights obtained from the participants concerning counselling practices. Based on the participant's account of developing and maintaining a sense of belonging a number of recommendations were elicited.

1. Increase comfort in their new environment. It was unanimous across the interviews that increasing comfort in Canada earlier on facilitated long-term belonging. The participants in this study agreed that informing newcomers about government policies would allow them to feel safe and secure. As service providers, it is important to increase our awareness of laws, policies, and programs that are relevant to this population. Furthermore, newcomer youth often learn this

information in the pre-secondary school setting either through specific classes or programs designed to support the settlement of newcomer youth. Thus, when working with young adults who arrive later in life, it is important to assess if they have this information available to them. Another suggestion for increasing comfort is to strengthen the client's mesosystem by collaborating with other service providers involved with the client. For example, in my master's thesis in-school settlement workers collaborated with teachers and administrators to develop after school programs as well as act as a liaison between the school and the parents. They also connected parents and students to various settlement, such as housing and employment services. Finally, the settlement workers also collaborated with mental health therapist in facilitating referrals and enhance communication between youth and therapists (see Brar, 2010, Brar-Josan & Yohani 2014).

The present study also raises the importance of citizenship status as a critical step to developing a sense of belonging for the participants in this study. A number of participants were preparing for their Canadian citizenship either on their own or with the help of close family members and friends. Although there are a number of citizenship classes offered in Edmonton and Calgary, the participants in this study were not aware of the services. Given that the participants started their citizenship process after completing high school, this would be a good time for school personnel in high schools and post-secondary settings to inform students of these programs. Furthermore, the participants shared the perception that the settlement programs were for newcomers only. Perhaps advertising programs into two categories, early settlement programs and adaptation in later years, will communicate the availability of these supports. Furthermore, given that the nature of funding for settlement agencies is constantly changing, awareness about citizenship classes and other supports need to be made by the government when

the person applies for citizenship and school settings with a large immigrant population could take on the role of disseminating information about the classes.

2. Increase confidence. In this study, confidence refers to making positive progress and experiencing a sense of accomplishments. The process begins with having a positive outlook in life. Psychologists can draw on a number of positive psychology interventions. Positive psychotherapy is an empirically validated approach that attends to increasing meaning in the lives of client and building on client strengths and positive emotions (Rashid, 2008). In reference to Seligman's (2002) work on happiness, this theme most closely aligns with the "good life" (p. 161), where the client is engaging in an abundance of gratification and experiencing hope and optimism in regards to the future. Interventions that aim to increase gratification focus on helping clients explore activities they enjoy doing, for example playing an instrument or joining a sports team. Participants also tapped into "the good life" by trying new activities that were beyond their skill level, especially when their competency in English acted as a potential barrier. In reviewing Wong's (2006) Strength-Centered Therapy model, the four phases of: Explicitizing, Envisioning, Empowering, and Evolving overlap with the participants process of developing confidence. *Explicitizing* is the process of naming and highlighting existing strengths. For example, the participant's teachers explicitly named the participant's academic strengths. *Envisioning* requires the client to identify strengths they hope to develop and to state how that particular strength would help them achieve their goals. For instance, all of the participants identified learning English as a means to finding a good career and to travel around the world. The next phase E*mpowerment* takes place when the client has the motivation to work towards developing the skills, for example taking risks and engaging in conversations with others or trying activities despite language barriers. Through participating in this study, participants

also engaged in the *evolving* phase where they reviewed their progress and discussed further growth. This particular therapy model could be integrated into work with refugee youth and young adults as it provides psychologists with a framework to foster and encourage strengths that were identified as beneficial in this study.

Another recommendation from this study is to provide opportunities for clients to engage in activities that are deemed important to the participant but were previously prohibited during their pre-migration experiences. For example, establishing meet and greets with established members of society including policy makers, post-secondary lecturers, and political candidates. Fatu and Chris explained that talking to individuals who are considered important by society caused them to feel significant.

The present study raises the possibility that confidence is linked to achievements that are marked by the developmental stage. For example, during adolescents academic success is a primary marker of achievement, whereas in young adulthood career success becomes the new marker. Strategies that could be applied to increase confidence in pursuing their ideal career include encouragement, trying new activities, and having a positive outlook.

3. Enhance acceptance through social bonds and bridges. This exploratory study suggests that although participants successfully develop social bridges during their high school years, social capital does not remain stable during young adulthood. Many of the participants reported limited opportunities to connect with different people outside their ethno-cultural groups once they entered post-secondary school and employment. One of the findings emerging from the data is that presence of Canadian-born friends leads to a greater sense of belonging. An implication of this is that a reduced sense of belonging can occur in young adulthood. One recommendation to facilitate maintenance of social bridges is to explore the client's interests and

encourage them to consider organizations and groups that consist of people from various backgrounds. Chris shared his process of utilizing the internet to find a men's soccer team. Similarly, psychologists could facilitate sessions on exploring and connecting with various groups that exist with their clients. Websites including Facebook, meetup.com, and Kijiji community postings are popular sites that contain information about available local groups. Post-secondary based psychologists can also have a role in linking former refugees to groups on campus by first exploring pre-existing opportunities including athletics and student groups and clubs, and second creating new opportunities (Dunn, 2014). For example, many of the participants were invested in improving the integration of other newcomers. Creating a mentorship group is one possibility. Furthermore, many post-secondary institutions offer an international student office where international students are provided numerous resources to help them achieve their academic and personal goals, while also offering events that strengthen a sense of community. Post-secondary based psychologists could advocate for former refugees to become involved with programs such as the international student office. A few of the participants attended field trips offered by immigrant serving agencies, these events provided opportunities to interact with various ethnic backgrounds. The participants in this study reported that they no longer had the need for settlement assistance. Therefore, programs that focus on developing friendships and pursing career goals are more likely to attract young adults. A final recommendation is to engage young adults to take on a leadership role with organizations that serve a diverse population. All the participants valued volunteering and helping others especially newcomers. Many of them expressed this need by turning to their ethnocultural organization, which was perceived to be beneficial. However, for those who would like to connect with diverse groups, helping them recognize other opportunities including immigrant serving agencies

or organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters might be a viable intervention. In regards to therapy, psychologists can continue to use the Strength-Centered Therapy model (Wong, 2006) to identify and highlight leadership strengths. In addition to suggesting various opportunities, it is important to assess whether the individual understands the process of being involved.

One barrier to keep in mind is that some young adults may not have additional time to take part as a volunteer or mentor, thus one recommendation for increasing social bridges for this particular group is to consider enhancing their work environment. Some of the participants in this study worked at places that primarily consisted of immigrant employees. It was beyond the scope of this study to determine whether this was because the participants actively sought these positions, or if they encountered challenges to obtaining employment. Two of the participants reported incidents of feeling disregarded at work and encountering missed job opportunities. This raises the possibility that refugee young adults may experience systematic barriers to accessing employment. A recommendation for service providers and researchers is to investigate what the challenges are and develop programs that aim to remove barriers.

4. Fostering a meaningful life. One of the main findings that emerged from the study is the experience of belonging transitions from developing personal relationships to serving a broader community or cause. In reference to Seligman's (2002) work on happiness, this theme most closely aligns with the Meaningful life (pg. 249). One recommendation for psychologists is to utilize the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) from Peterson and Seligman (2004). The VIA-IS is an assessment tool used to identify character strengths into six core virtues: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. Upon identifying their core virtues, the young adult can explore ways to use their top five strengths in different areas of their life, or with different people they come into contact with.

Psychologists and young adults can also refer to Rashid and Anjum's (2011) list of 340 ways to use their character strengths. Volunteering was a popular choice for most of the clients, and for many of the clients working with newcomer youth or their ethnocultural community in any capacity promoted a sense of belonging. In addition to exploring existing opportunities to contribute to a greater cause, service providers could also offer support in helping young adults organize and implement new initiatives that tap into areas they are passionate about.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

There are several limitations to this research that should be taken into consideration and addressed in future research. First, it is important to note that five of the six participants were between the ages of 18 and 21. Consequently, the earlier years of young adulthood were overly represented in the findings although it was not my intention. To complement the current findings, additional studies that look at the later years are needed to observe if developmental differences exist. There is also abundant room for further development in determining whether ethnocultural differences exist in experiences of belonging.

Furthermore, although a number of sampling procedures were initiated, the study primarily recruited participants through existing immigrant serving agencies. Fortunately one of the participants self-referred to the study and had no prior relationship with a formal organization. In comparison to the other participants, she experienced additional challenges making connections in Canada. Despite the presence of in-school settlement programs, she experienced greater anxiety regarding the loss of her ethnic culture. More research is needed regarding the experiences of refugees with limited interactions with formal organizations. Research questions that could be asked include: what are the barriers to connecting to an immigrant serving agency and are there qualitative difference in belonging between those who

instantly connect with a formal ethnocultural group or immigrant serving agency and those who do not?

Given the challenges recruiting refugee populations, future studies on this topic may want to use a longitudinal approach, where recruitment occurs during the last year of high school and follow participants into young adulthood. There are a number of benefits to recruiting high school students. First, the data gathered provides a baseline for future comparisons. Second, drawing upon previous refugee studies (Baffoe, 2006, Yohani, 2008), it appears earlier engagement with participants allows the researcher to build trust which enhances access to participants. As Baffoe noted:

> It was these youth with whom I had interacted earlier who convinced their peers to trust me and meet me at their hang-outs. It was through this process that I gained access to the world of the participants in this study and that the informal focus groups for the research were developed (p. 91).

The present study provided a number of recommendations for future clinical interventions that aim to enhance sense of belonging. More research is needed to explore how effective the recommendations from this study apply to the practice of psychology. For example research could explore the opportunities and challenges that exist in facilitating social bridges during young adulthood. The findings also support the notion of moving away from a deficit model and towards a strength-based model. As such research should focus on the effectiveness of strength based models including Wong's (2006) Strength-Centered Therapy model or utilizing the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (Seligman, 2004) as an assessment tool. It is recommended that future studies continue to reconceptualize how psychologists can maximize the well-being of refugee populations through various roles and modes of service delivery. Research questions include: what is the psychologist's role (i.e. psychoeducation, program development, consultation, treatment planning, advocacy etc.) and which service delivery methods (i.e.

community team approach, traditional psychologist-client approach, etc.) are better received than others?

Final Conclusions

This study sought to provide a preliminary exploration of the process of developing and maintaining a sense of belonging among former refugee young adults in Canada. A group of young adults who arrived to Alberta during adolescence identified five pathways of belonging. Feeling comfort in their new homes was synonymous with the concept of belonging for all of the participants. It was after they experienced a sense of safety, gained legal recognition to reside in Canada, and established a normal day-to-day routine that they were able to focus on other aspects of belonging. Feeling comfortable in Canada resulted in the maintenance of long-term relationships as well as a strong sense of safety. Developing relationships with others was also considered an integral part of achieving a sense of belonging. These relationships conveyed an attitude of acceptance and provided opportunities to thrive and gain confidence in who they were as individuals. The outcomes of these relationships consist of feeling valued, having numerous positive interactions, and creating stable caring relationships. As the participants transitioned from adolescence to young adulthood, belonging was connected to a greater cause or larger community. By serving others, the participants were able to finding meaning and purpose in their lives. They reported feeling valued and envisioned a better future with limitless opportunities to achieve their dreams. Finally, the importance of Canada's multiculturalism policy was also emphasized. Specifically, participants engaged in a process where they negotiated their sense of belonging by integrating aspects of their ethnic and Canadian culture to their personal lifestyle. Furthermore, connecting with members from both cultural groups had an influential impact on their notion of belonging. As a result, the participants reported a fit

between their personal values and the values of their environment. From the results of this study a number of recommendations for psychologists and service providers were identified. It is hoped that the implementation of these recommendations will continue to inform clinical practice for the larger refugee population.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter for Immigrant & Refugee Serving Agencies & Programs

Study Title: Sense of Belonging and Former Refugee Young Adults

Date

Dear_____,

My name is Novjyot (Joti) Brar, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta. For my doctoral research, I am conducting a study on the development of sense of belonging amongst refugee young adults. Specifically, I would like to explore the strategies and actions that refugee young adults use to develop a sense of belonging during settlement. Belonging and social connections are primary factors that influence successful integration. To date, the relationship between sense of belonging and integration of refugee populations has received little attention. I would like to request your help in recruiting individuals who fit the following criteria:

(a) Between the ages 18 to 30 years
(b) Migrated to Canada under Refugee status
(c) Migrated to Canada between the ages of 13 to 17 years of age
(d) Migrated to Alberta at least three years prior to participating,
(e) Attended a high school with settlement supports
(f) Reports having a sense of belonging in Canada
(g) Willing and able to talk about experiences in English

With your assistance, I hope to use the findings of this study to identify policy and practice recommendations that enhance the integration of refugee young adults in Canada. I would be grateful if you could please distribute the *following Letter of Information* to individuals that fit the above criteria. If an individual is interested in participating but would prefer that I contact them, please e-mail their contact information after obtaining verbal consent.

For more information about this study, please call me at (780) 244-8831 or email novjyotj@ualberta.ca

Sincerely,

Novjyot (Joti) Brar, M.A.
Doctoral Student, Counselling Psychology
Department of Educational Psychology
University of Alberta.

Appendix B: Recruitment Poster

Study Title: Sense of Belonging and Former Refugee Young Adults

Sense of Belonging in Young Adults

I am a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. I am conducting a study on the process of developing a sense of belonging in Alberta. The information you provide will help other young adults, counselors, and community members support newcomers, especially refugees, living in Canada.

Participation is always voluntary!

This Study may be a good fit for you if you:

- Are 18 to 30 years of age
- Came to Canada as a refugee between the ages of 13 to 17
- Have lived in Calgary for at least three years
- Feel a sense of belonging

If your immigration status has changed you can still participate

If you decide to take part in the study, you would:

- Take part in a 60-90 minute interview about your experiences of belonging in Calgary
- Receive $20 for your time and to cover travel expenses

Please contact me if you would like to take part in this study, or to learn more about this study

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615."

novjyot@ualberta.ca	novjyot@ualberta.ca	novjyot@ualberta.ca	novjyot@ualberta.ca	novjyot@ualberta.ca	novjyot@ualberta.ca	novjyot@ualberta.ca	novjyot@ualberta.ca	novjyot@ualberta.ca	novjyot@ualberta.ca	novjyot@ualberta.ca	novjyot@ualberta.ca	novjyot@ualberta.ca	novjyot@ualberta.ca	novjyot@ualberta.ca	novjyot@ualberta.ca

Appendix C: Letter of Information - Client

Study Title: Sense of Belonging and Former Refugee Young Adults

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Date

Dear Mr./Ms. _____,

My name is Novjyot (Joti) Brar and I am a PhD student at the University of Alberta. For my research, I want to learn how young adults, such as yourself, develop a sense of belonging in Canada. This information can help other refugee young adults, community members, and counsellors support refugees living in Canada.

Participation in this study will involve:

(a) Taking part in a 60 to 90 minute auto-recorded interview
   i. You will select where the interview will take place
   ii. I will provide the questions before the interview
   iii. You will create a fake name for the study to protect your personal information
   iv. All interviews will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office

(b) Reviewing the results and providing feedback.

Travel and Parking expenses will be provided ($20) for being in this study.

If you would like to take part in this study, or to learn more about this study, please contact me at (780) 244-8831 or email novjyotj@ualberta.ca

Sincerely,

Novjyot (Joti) Brar
Doctoral Student, Counselling Psychology
Department of Educational Psychology
University of Alberta

Appendix D: Pre-screening Interview

Study Title: Sense of Belonging and Former Refugee Young Adults

Participant must:

Be between the ages 18 to 30 years
Migrated to Canada under Refugee status
Migrated to Alberta three years prior to participating,
Willing and able to talk about experiences in English

Participant must meet at least two out of four dimensions **of sense of belonging** for eligibility

Dimension	Screening Question
Valued Involvement	I am valued by or important to a person, group(s) (i.e. family, community), or place(s) (work, school)?
Fit	In general, I feel that there is a place(s) (school, neighborhood, country) where I really fit in Canada?
Frequency of affectively pleasant interactions	I am regularly connected to people or activities that I enjoy?
Stability of relationships	I would describe myself as having some long term relationships?

.

Appendix E: Research Information Sheet and Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Sense of Belonging and Former Refugee Young Adults

Principle Researcher:
Novjyot (Joti) Brar
Department of Educational Psychology
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novjyotj@ualberta.ca
(780) 244-8831

Research Supervisor:
Dr. Sophie Yohani
Department of Educational Psychology
6-107D Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
sophie.yohani@ualberta.ca
(780) 492-1164

Background

My name is Novjyot (Joti) Brar and I am a PhD student at the University of Alberta. For my doctoral research, I want to learn more about how refugee young adults develop a sense of belonging in Canada. I would like to invite you to participate in this study. The information you provide can help other young adults, counsellors, and community members support newcomers, and especially refugees, living in Canada. The results of this study will be used in support of my dissertation.

Purpose

Sense of belonging amongst refugees has not been widely researched. The purpose of this study is to describe the process of developing and maintaining a sense of belonging in Canada. Specifically, I am interested in learning about the factors (i.e. behaviors, environments) that promote a sense of belonging.

Study Procedures

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Participation in this study will involve the following:

a) Taking part in a 60 to 90 minute auto-recorded interview
   v. The interview will be in a convenient location chosen by you
   vi. You will be asked to bring in one or two small objects that are symbolic of belonging in Canada to you
   vii. You will be asked to share three important experiences in which you felt a sense of belonging in Canada
   viii. All interviews will be audio-recorded and typed up by me.
   ix. Your identity will be protected by using fake names and removing any identifying information that could be traced back to you.

b) Reviewing preliminary findings and providing feedback.
    a. The findings will be e-mailed or mailed to you
    b. You will be asked to review information from you interview to make sure I have captured what you wanted to say

Benefits

You will not directly benefit from being in this study. However, the findings of this research will increase understanding of the process of developing and maintaining a sense of belonging and this information will inform culturally sensitive interventions for refugee populations.

Risks

Participating in this study may be an emotionally demanding task and there is a threat for minimal emotional fatigue. In the case of any discomfort or concerns regarding this study, you will be provided with a contact list of mental health practitioners that will be available to discuss any personal questions or concerns. There may also be risks to being in this study that are not known. If I learn anything during the research that may affect your willingness to continue being in the study I will tell you right away.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and will not affect your performance at work or school. Even if you agree to be in the study you can change your mind and withdraw at any time. If you withdraw, we will continue to use the data we have collected until the dissertation has been submitted for defense. You are able remove portions of your data at any time prior to October 1, 2014.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

All of the information that you share in this project will be handled in compliance with University of Alberta standards of ethical practice. All identifying information, such as your name, will be removed once the transcriptions are complete. All electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer. All hard-data (e.g., researcher notes) will be stored in a locked cabinet. The data will be stored for a minimum of 5 years after the study. Only I will have access to this cabinet. In addition to myself, your information will also be available to my supervisor and the Research Ethics Committee.

The findings will be submitted for my dissertation defense. I will ask you at the end of the interview if you would like to receive a copy of the research report. Project results may also be published in articles and presented to individuals who could benefit from this research, such as resettlement workers, immigrant serving agencies, educators, and mental health professionals. I will use direct quotes from your interview, however all identifying information will be removed.

Further Information

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participants rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair at 780.492.2615. If you have further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at 780.244.8831 or Dr. Sophie Yohani at 780.492.1164. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Novjyot (Joti) Brar, MEd
Dept. of Educational Psychology
novjyotj@ualberta.ca 1-135 Education North
(780) 244-4833 University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5

Sophie Yohani, PhD, RPsych –
Dept. of Educational Psychology
sophie.yohani@ualberta.ca 6-107D Education North
(780) 492-1164 University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5

Research Study Title: Sense of Belonging and Former Refugee Young Adults

Agreement to Participate

This study explores the process of developing a sense of belonging in Canada amongst refugee young adults. This study is being done by Novjyot (Joti) Brar, a PhD student at the University of Alberta working under the supervision of Dr. Sophie Yohani. Ms. Brar's study will help professionals and community members find new strategies to help refugee clients overcome challenges when integrating in Canada. If I check off all of the boxes and sign this form, it means I understand these things about the study:

- □ I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me
- □ I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered
- □ For the interview, I will meet with Novjyot (Joti) by myself for 60 to 90 minutes
- □ I know she will record my verbal consent to participate in her field notes
- □ I know she will record what I say and then type it out.
- □ I know that she will use a fake name for me during the interview and that I can choose this fake name.
- □ I know that she will remove any information that may reveal who I am from the interview data, reports and any other writings.
- □ If I have a lot to talk about, Novjyot (Joti) and I will meet again for one to two hours.
- □ I know she will keep everything from the interview (the tape, notes she made, what she typed from the interview) in a locked filing cabinet in her office.
- □ I know she may make presentations and write about the study, that if she uses my words, nobody will know I said them because she will use the fake name.
- □ I know that if I feel stressed or worried when I talk about my experiences, I can get affordable help
- □ I know that I will receive $20.00 for being in this study. This is to cover my transportation expense.
- □ I know I can stop taking part in this study at any time without questions/problems.
- □ If I have questions or concerns about this study, I can send an email to novjyotj@ualberta.ca. I can also call her supervisor, Dr. Sophie Yohani, at the University of Alberta at (780) 492-1164.
- □ I know that the plan for this study has been reviewed by the Ethics Board at the University of Alberta (REB 1) that makes sure people taking part in research are treated properly.
- □ If I have any questions about my rights as a person taking part in this study, I can call the head of the REB 1 at (780) 492-3751.
- □ I agree to participate in the research study described above

Participant's Name (please print) _____ Signature _____ Date: _____

Signature of researcher _____ Date: _____

Appendix F: Open Ended Interview Guide

Study Title: Sense of Belonging and Former Refugee Young Adults

Participants will be asked to clearly and descriptively recall three important experiences in which they felt a sense of belonging in Canada. They will share the story one by one.

Sample Probe Questions:

Tell me a little bit more about (person/place/event)

How did that look like?
How did you feel/think?

How did that happen?

What did you do to make that happen?
What did XX (if another person) do to make that happen?
Who else was involved? If so, what did they do?

What strategies/activities/ were most helpful?

What strategies/activities/ were least helpful?

How did that help you feel a sense of belonging?

How did that change?

What made you do _____(action)?

How do you maintain this sense of belonging to _____?

Can you think of times where you did not feel like you belong?

At the end of the interview, participants will be asked:

What does it mean to you to have a sense of belonging

How do you know that you belong?

What is belonging to you?

Is there anything you would like to add?