

Unheard Stories: Narrative Inquiry of the Cross-cultural Adaptation Experiences of Refugee
Women in Metro Vancouver

By

Lindsay Marsh

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

MASTER OF ARTS
in
INTERCULTURAL and INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

We accept the thesis as conforming to the required standard

Dr. Zhenyi Li, Thesis Faculty Supervisor School of Communication & Culture Royal Roads University	Date
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Dr. Phillip Vannini, Thesis Coordinator School of Communication & Culture Royal Roads University	Date
--	------

Dr. Phillip Vannini, Internal Committee Member School of Communication & Culture Royal Roads University	Date
---	------

Sam Schechter, External Committee Member	Date
--	------

Jennifer Walinga, Director School of Communication & Culture Royal Roads University	Date
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*Once we had a country and we thought it fair,
Look in the atlas and you'll find it there:
We cannot go there now, my dear, we cannot go there now.*

WH Auden, Refugee Blues

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the barriers and opportunities that government-assisted refugee (GAR) women experience in settlement. Using a narrative inquiry approach, I elicited the stories of fourteen GAR women of diverse origins who have lived in Metro Vancouver for one to six years. Discourse analysis of the narratives shared within focus groups and individual sessions reveals a hierarchy of exclusory dimensions (barriers) and transformative dimensions (opportunities) of their adaptation process. The analysis also identifies settlement services and programs perceived as helpful by the women in overcoming identified barriers. The findings demonstrate how GAR women are active in their own cross-cultural adaptation and how this process is facilitated by intercultural communication competence and engagement in receiving communication activities. These findings provide insights for government and immigrant serving agencies concerned with tracking settlement outcomes for this population.

Keywords: narrative inquiry, refugee women, cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural communication, focus group

Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mom and dad. Without them, I would not be discovering new things about myself and the complex social world around me. I am also grateful to Felice Lam and Meesa Chungfat, my friends who kept my spirits high throughout this journey.

I also owe my deepest gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Zhenyi Li, for his guidance, patience, and intercultural insights and to my thesis committee members, Dr. Phillip Vannini and Sam Schechter, for ensuring that I was on the right path. I am also grateful for the lessons I gained from my instructors at Royal Roads University, including Dr. Phillip Vannini, Dr. Zhenyi Li, and Wendy Quarry. They inspired me to delve deep into participatory research.

I would like to thank Burnaby Family Life's Executive Director, Jeanne Fike, who agreed to BFL becoming my thesis sponsor agency in order for us to collaborate on refugee narratives. I would like to acknowledge Gabriele Pistor, Supervisor of Childcare and Family Resource Programs at BFL, for connecting me with participants and arranging daycare and the interview room. Zarghoona Wakil with the Step Ahead Settlement Enhancement Project was instrumental in connecting me with the Afghan women. Thanks also to Katalin Camara and Jenny Francis for providing me with contacts. Thank you to my interpreter, Wazhma Ibrahimkhel, without whom I would not be able to understand the Farsi, Dari, and Pashto spoken.

I would also like to acknowledge the Royal Roads University Office of Research, the Royal Roads University Ethics Review Board, the Royal Roads Writing Centre and the Royal Roads University Library.

I am ever grateful to the 14 women who came to Canada as government-assisted refugees and who chose to share their stories with me. I am forever moved by the courage, humility, and spirit expressed by these women and look forward to continue sharing stories together.

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Unheard Stories: Narrative Inquiry of the Cross-cultural Adaptation Experiences of Refugee
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One of the fundamental issues of relevance to people who are refugees in Canada is the marginalization of their voice within the dominant discourse (Semlak, Pearson, Amundson, & Kudak, 2008). Authentic refugee voices are largely neglected in mainstream media and public discourse (Semlak et al., 2008). When refugees are the topic of discourse, they are generally referred to in a negative light. These portrayals are not an accurate reflection of refugees' lives in Canada. Prevailing images in Canadian media and official discourse relegate refugees to a state of helplessness, victims of circumstance, and as dependents of the welfare state and thus a burden on the host societies (Ghorashi, 2005). Since 9/11, Canada has undergone a greatly heightened focus on security while unfairly linking refugees with the threat of terrorism (CCR, 2008). Of particular concern for Muslim women is the recurring colonial depiction of their inherent passivity and how it functions as common sense in the mass-mediated public sphere in Canada (Thobani, 2006). Increasing public dissatisfaction about the growing number of asylum seekers, with the assumption that most of them are not "real" refugees, has created the setting for the federal Conservative government's introduction of Bill C-31 in 2012, the biggest and most controversial overhaul of immigration and refugee policy in recent years, which could make it much harder for refugees to enter and to stay in Canada (Tromp, 2012).

This study focuses on the process of cross-cultural adaptation as told through stories by refugee women who came to Metro Vancouver between 2006 and 2011 as government-assisted refugees (GAR). Cross-cultural adaptation has been characterized by aspects of contact with and exposure to the mainstream or dominant culture (Torres & Rollock, 2007). By adopting an integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation, I explored three guiding

questions: How do refugee women perceive their cross-cultural adaptation experience in Metro Vancouver? What challenges and opportunities have refugee women experienced since arrival? In particular, when refugee women receive settlement services and programs from the host community, what do they perceive as helpful in overcoming adaptation problems?

The difficulties facing many refugees adjusting to a new country are well documented: culture shock, language and communication issues, discrimination or misunderstandings about cultural norms, a lack of social networks, limited access to education and employment, poverty and inadequate income support challenge individuals in different ways (SRDC, 2002; Hardi, 2005; D'Addario, Hiebert, & Sherrell, 2008; Semlak et al., 2008; Francis, 2009; Dow, 2011; AMSSA, 2011/12; CCR, 2008). These and other barriers are exclusory dimensions that keep refugees from fully participating in society (Gomez, Puigvert, & Flecha, 2011).

Newcomers are concerned with their own settlement and adaptation issues while the host community, and settlement service providers in particular, are concerned with helping newcomers address these issues. Each group must also concern itself with the views, customs, values, and practices of the other (Berry, 2001). This links to the concept of cultural identity: a complex set of beliefs and attitudes that people have about themselves in relation to their culture (Berry, 2001). I believe that cross-cultural adaptation is a mutually beneficial and collaborative effort “in which a stranger and the receiving environment are engaged in a joint effort” (Kim, 1995, p. 192). Most often, this leads to newcomers adopting the basic values of the host society while retaining elements of their own culture, and the host society adjusting their governmental policies and institutional practices to meet the needs of newly arrived groups (Berry, 2001).

Since refugees are so often the victims of violence and forced migration, mainstream society may assume that refugees have no agency (Ghorashi, 2005). Yet, refugees have

demonstrated significant transformations in their lives through their own reflections, interactions with the host community, and actions towards improving their lives. Many learn how to navigate the language and culture, pursue higher education, build social, human and economic capital, and advocate for change.

I am in agreement with the research that outlines the various adaptation issues facing refugees. However, I argue that scholars cannot solely examine barriers to refugee's adaptation. Scholars must also explore the transformative dimensions of adaptation in order to support the refugees' efforts, identify alternatives, and provide effective settlement support. These transformative dimensions are known to help marginalized people overcome barriers and improve social outcomes (Gomez et al., 2011). Refugees bring various assets to Canada that are often underappreciated. As Oliver, de Botton, and Merrill (2011) argue "when researchers fail to consider the contributions these groups can make, their conclusions and proposals may be based on prejudices about the cultural group, and thus actually hinder efforts to change the situation they have analyzed" (p. 269). Thus, rather than adopting an ethnocentric perspective of the refugee women in this study and seeing their differences as a disadvantage, I value their diversity and their contributions as social actors. The women's insights are critical to my research, as well as to their own understanding and knowledge. This helps to create the conditions to better understand the phenomena of cross-cultural adaptation and advance processes of social change.

Literature Review

The development of refugee studies as a field has always been closely aligned with policy developments (Black, 2001). Canada's federal department of immigration, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), has been one of the major contributors to the production of discourse on refugees in Canada (Lacroix, 2004). Refugeeeness is a universal social construct as it is a

shared uprootedness by those people forced out of their homelands to cross borders. As such, the irreversibility of refugeehood creates the refugee's new subjectivity (Lacroix, 2004). There is no one single theory or model of refugee settlement. Instead, scholars have adopted different theories and situated refugee research within various disciplines. Defining the parameters of the use of the refugee in this study is important. Refugee is not a label for a particular kind of person and is a term many people who became refugees due to circumstances wish to shun over time. It is, rather, useful as a "broad legal or descriptive rubric that includes within it a world of socio-economic statuses, personal histories, and psychological or spiritual situations" (Malkii, 1995, p. 496). Thus, my goal is not to highlight the distinctiveness of the term refugee, but rather to situate my study in the multidimensional theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation within the discipline of communication. Stories from the refugees themselves are largely absent within communication studies and they are valuable in order to understand the perceptions and experiences of cross-cultural adaptation of refugees.

Within this literature review, I have highlighted seven areas of research relevant to my study's design: (1) refugee resettlement, (2) cross-cultural adaptation, (3) the theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation, (4) integration, (5) the impacts of gender, (6) cultural intelligence, and (7) social capital. These areas are essential to building a comprehensive framework to explore GAR women's perception of their cross-cultural adaptation, the communication challenges and opportunities they have experienced since arrival, and the services they view as helpful while imagining a future that is more supportive of their settlement.

The context: Refugee resettlement in Canada

Unlike most immigrants who plan to move, GARs have fled their homes with little preparation and knowledge of Canada or the cross-cultural adaptation process (SRDC, 2002).

Hyndman's (2000) concept of mobility is important to consider in this discussion: "those with money can take advantage of space-time compression" (p. 37). Thus, refugees experience migration in distinct ways from immigrants. GARs are often not prepared both psychologically and materially for what will likely be a permanent change in countries. However, similar to immigrants, GARs hope for a better life in a safe place and wish to engage meaningfully with Canadians.

People who are GARs arrive from protracted refugee situations, which refers to a population in existence for five or more years with no prospect of returning home. The resettlement of GARs from diverse countries to Canada consists of a state-planned and managed approach to migration and settlement (Hyndman & McLean, 2006). Canada has one of the highest per capita resettlement rates in the world and the government sees GAR as an important tool to meet the country's international humanitarian commitments with respect to the resettlement of those in need (CIC, 2011). Between 1994 and 2005, over 95,000 GARs were resettled across the country, forming a significant population (Challinor, 2011). The diversity of the population is evident: 4,026 GAR composed of 1,740 families from 46 different countries arrived in B.C. between 2005 and 2009 (ISSofBC, 2010). The majority of GARs receive a pre-departure orientation from the Canadian embassy or government, the International Organization for Migration, or from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Cubie, 2006). Over 18 percent of 152 GARs in Canada surveyed in a 2006 study replied that the topics on Canadian culture and lifestyle, including culture shock, were the most useful to their settlement and had helped prepare them for their arrival (Cubie, 2006).

Once in Canada, GARs receive federal government income support through the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) for up to one year or until they become self-sufficient,

whichever comes first according to CIC (2011). In 2009, an individual GAR received a total of up to \$685 per month and a family of four received up to \$1,251 per month (ISSofBC, 2010). This mirrors social assistance rates in BC (Siggner, Atkey, & Goldberg, 2007). GARs must also cover the cost of their own transportation to Canada and medical screenings through an interest-bearing loan. In 2009, this loan was \$7,010 for a family of five headed by a single mother (ISSofBC, 2010). Canada is one of the few countries that demand that refugees repay a resettlement loan. Due to this, and the substantial costs to manage the loan, an evaluation report provided to CIC recommends that Canada re-examine the need for this repayment (CIC, 2011).

Refugees' basic settlement needs, such as locating housing, learning the language, accessing employment and education, and forming new connections to the host community are primarily met by various non-profit immigrant serving and multiservice agencies, supported by CIC and other funders (Siggner et al., 2007; Francis, 2009). In Metro Vancouver, the major agencies must pay attention to the rapidly changing ethno-cultural makeup of their communities while providing effective service to newcomers. Between 1996 and 2006, Vancouver, Burnaby, Richmond, Coquitlam and Surrey attracted 74 percent of all newcomers to the region (Metro Vancouver, 2008). The City of Burnaby, which lies east of Vancouver, has one of the highest rates of refugee intake in British Columbia (BIPT, 2012). Many newcomers to Burnaby have found support through Burnaby Family Life (BFL), a non-profit, non-denominational, community-based agency that has a 40-year history of providing services and programs to families, including refugees, in Burnaby. BFL has played an important role in responding to and shaping the intercultural context within Burnaby (J. Fike, personal communication, February 15, 2012).

Despite ongoing and innovative frontline settlement service provision in Metro Vancouver, many GARs are unaware of the array of services and programs offered to them upon arrival. GARs face additional challenges in accessing services due to limited time, language difficulties, health problems, lack of information about services, different cultural patterns of seeking help, and financial barriers (Focus groups, personal communication, March 10, 2012; Thomson, 2009). Social exclusion informs the argument that it is not the marginalized refugees who have the barriers; rather, the barriers are built by the host community's government, institutions and social structure (Francis, 2009). Social exclusion refers to the inability of certain groups or individuals to participate fully in society due to inequities in access to resources (Galabuzi, 2006). This is based on overlapping dimensions of economic and social disadvantage related to race, culture, socio-economic status, disability, gender, sexual orientation, and immigrant or refugee status. People who experience social exclusion tend to live in poverty and in ethnically segregated neighbourhoods, have uneven access to employment and employment income, and experience low health status (Galabuzi, 2006). In the spring of 2012, announcements by CIC regarding cuts to refugee healthcare will remove benefits from GAR, many of whom are referred to Canada for protection because of their medical needs. Social exclusion continues to impact refugees' quality of life in Canada and limits their potential to navigate the barriers to their cross-cultural adaptation process.

GARs have settlement needs that go beyond those of other immigrant groups: they have the lowest levels of education and the lowest level of English or French among immigrants arriving to Canada (Francis, 2009). Many also begin their lives in Canada with limited or no social networks, in impoverished conditions, and report facing discrimination and racism (SRDC, 2002; BFL, 2011; Hardi, 2005; Semlak et al., 2008). Gender also affects settlement

outcomes; women face different barriers than men in their cross-cultural adaptation (CCR, 2009). The numbers of GARs with these acute needs grew following the implementation of Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) in 2002, which focused less on the person's potential to integrate and more on their immediate need for protection (CIC, 2011). Despite this show of humanitarianism, no major changes in government-led services for GAR integration within Canada took place (Francis, 2009).

Immigrant serving agencies (ISA) who aim to support refugees' cross-cultural adaptation have faced mounting challenges to service delivery, particularly when helping single parent families from protracted situations (ISSofBC, 2010). Additionally, ISAs offering BC Settlement and Assistance Program services to clients are only funded to do so for the refugee's first three years. However, many individuals require on-going support (Francis, 2009). Related to housing, many refugees continue to experience critical housing stress, including crowding four or more years after arrival (Hiebert, Mendez, & Wyle, 2008). The personal histories of GARs are diverse and each person has a unique set of experiences and needs following arrival. However, these studies represent significant barriers to the adaptation process of GARs in their host societies.

The path: Cross-cultural adaptation

The starting point of my research was the idea of cross-cultural adaptation as a “dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments, establish (or reestablish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments” (Kim, 2001, p. 31). I believe that finding stability and functional relationships are key goals for all refugees in their direct and indirect contacts with the host community, thus I incorporated this definition into my study (Kim, 2008). Acculturation theories are generally concerned with adjustments and adaption processes in new cultural

environments (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936; Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989; Kim, 2001; Ward & Kagitcibasi, 2010). Cultural behaviour is highlighted as the dimension of change in adaptation since individuals acquire some, but not all, of the aspects of the host cultural elements. Kim (2011) argues that no immigrant will achieve total assimilation, but some degree of new learning, adjustment and internalization happen while the person remains in the host society. Cross-cultural adaptation typically results in increased security, mobility and a sense of belonging (Kim, 2005).

For newcomers in Metro Vancouver, learning English, knowing how to effectively and appropriately communicate with locals, gaining meaningful employment, and adapting to the evolving cultural context are indicators of their cross-cultural adaptation (Berry, 2001). This process is facilitated by intercultural communication competence, which refers to an individual's internal capacity to effectively decode and encode information within the communication practices of the host community and communicate their experience to others (Kim, 2001). Although this study does not focus on changes made to the host community's attitudes towards newcomers, it does concern itself with changes within settlement services in order to better accommodate and serve newcomer populations within Canada's multicultural society.

Kosic (2002) and Ward (2008) view socio-cultural adaptation as the individual's social competence in managing their daily life in the host community, which includes learning the language and establishing relationships with locals. Not every refugee participates in adaptation or changes in a similar manner (Berry, 2006). Despite their efforts, newcomers are criticized for not adapting quickly enough. This points to the elements of power in cross-cultural adaptation, as the process typically involves a dominant group holding greater influence and power than the acculturating group (Dow, 2011). Kim (2001) suggests that minorities are subject to the coercive

force of adapting to the norms and social structures of the dominant society. Gender, ethnicity, language, religion, and economic means affect the levels of power and privilege that both the host community and the newcomer may feel as they interact with one another.

The framework: Integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation

The process of cross-cultural adaptation is a complex and multidimensional one. Theorists have debated whether adaptation is a choice (unconscious or not) or a matter of necessity. For Kim (2001), adaptation is a “life-enhancing activity” (p. 35) that is founded upon newcomers’ capacity to self-organize and adapt to changes in their immediate environment. This does not negate the challenges posed by the host environment to the individual’s adaptation, but it is important to consider both the individual’s orientation as well as the host community’s “receptivity and conformity pressure” (Kim, 2001, p. 93). Kim (2001) highlights the research that points to adaptation as inevitable, as long as the immigrant or refugee stays in and is “minimally dependent upon” and “minimally engaged in firsthand communication experiences with” (p. 34) the mainstream society.

This study uses this systems-theoretic view of cross-cultural adaptation as occurring naturally and inevitably through communication. Communication is defined as all activities involving an exchange of messages, verbal, intentional and explicit or nonverbal, non-intentional, and implicit between an individual and their environment (Kim, 2001). Kim (2005) positions communication as essential to cross-cultural adaptation and as a mediator: it is the process required to facilitate a culture-to-culture transition. The experiences of cross-cultural adaptation impact the ways all newcomers communicate, no matter if they are immigrants, refugees, rich, poor, or visible minorities. Through ongoing interaction with the new cultural environment, a refugee may integrate different cultural norms, attitudes, and behaviours.

Although I am in agreement with Oliver et al. (2011) who argue that “people have a universal competence that enables them to communicate and interact” (p. 270), basic conditions are still needed for this communication to readily occur. This focus on context—examining the structural issues involving newcomers—is one that Kim (2005) uses to bridge macro- and micro-level perspectives in her acculturation studies. Adaptation is not linear, but is a multifaceted process that occurs within and is mediated by various communication interfaces (Kim, 2001). According to Kim’s (2001, 2005) broad-based theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation, the three key features of cross-cultural adaptation are communication competence, functional fitness, and ethno-cultural identity, which are explored in the following section.

Communication competence. Communication competence allows newcomers to make sense of their surroundings and to engage in appropriate and effective communication with the host society (Kim, 2001). It includes the cognitive, affective, and behavioural capacities of an individual that assist them in fitting themselves into a particular environment. As individuals learn the cultural nuances and meanings of their new environment, they begin to rely less on people to help them function and achieve more autonomy (Kim, 2001). Three causal factors are identified by Kim (1977) as major determinants of an immigrant’s communication patterns: language competence, acculturation motivation, and accessibility to host communication channels. A common language is critical to communication between the newcomer and local residents, thus most newcomers seek familiarity with the dominant language (Dow, 2011).

Language skills impact both the quantity and quality of intercultural communication (Ward, 2008). Language proficiency is one of the most widely used indicators of acculturation: the acquisition and usage of English is considered evidence that a newcomer is becoming involved in society (Phinney & Flores, 2002). As every individual is different, each maintains

different degrees of motivation to learn an unfamiliar language and adopt new views and values during the adaptation process. Higher levels of motivation positively correlate to interpersonal communication frequency (Kim, 1977). This correlation is relevant to my study because the motivation expressed by refugee women impacts the way they improve their communication competence.

Functional fitness. Newcomers achieve a level of functional fitness when they are able to interact competently in the host society without the burden of transitional stress (Kim, 2001). Communication competence not only relies on the newcomer's capacity, but is also influenced by the biases, stereotypes, and degree of intercultural communication competence of the host society as well.

Cross-cultural adaptation demands a great deal of the individual's time, energy, and mental and emotional capacities to overcome the culture shock, loneliness, and feelings of diminishment (Skuza, 2007). Berry (2006) refers to culture shock as acculturative stress, which is a common stress reaction that newcomers experience when they become immersed in an unfamiliar culture. Stress is a direct function of the lack of fitness between the refugee's "subjective experiences and the prevailing modes of experience" (Kim, 2001, p. 55) in the host community. It involves the push of the host community to adapt and the pull of the native land to retain cultural heritage. Migration in itself does not increase the incidence of mental health issues; however, an inability to speak the language of the host country, family separation, negative host receptivity, a decrease in socio-economic status, and traumatic experiences prior to arrival are conditions that can lead to migration becoming a risk factor for mental illness (Canadian Mental Health Association, 1996). These factors can impact the level of functional fitness that refugees achieve in Canada.

Cultural (ethnic) identity. Related to cultural or ethnic identity, all refugees begin as outsiders and shift on a continuum towards becoming insiders as they go through what Kim (2001) terms “the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic” (p. 55). This force of adaptation works upon individuals, causing both stress and growth. Thus, as the individual learns new cultural elements, stress and confusion can ensue. However, this stress drives adaptation as the newcomer seeks new cultural norms and values to achieve stability (Kim, 2008). An individual’s capacity for self-reflection, a creative force, helps overcome stressful situations (Kim, 2001). As refugees move on a gradual path toward learning the language and cultural context, they will eventually experience some measure of intercultural personhood, which is manifested in increased functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity (Kim, 2001, 2008). This emerging inclusive identity encompasses multiple cultural perspectives (Kim, 2008).

Adaptive personality. Individuals with an adaptive personality—those who are positive-minded, open to change, resourceful, persistent, and tolerant of ambiguity—will find adjusting to their new lives easier, as they will find ways “to absorb shocks from the environment and to bounce back” (Kim, 2001, p. 85). Those individuals with a higher degree of desire to acculturate more toward the dominant culture experience less acculturative stress than those with no desire, including those who had no choice, such as refugees (Dow, 2011). Refugees “can actively create conversational roles that allow them to triumph over external acculturation pressures” (Ng, 2007). Without some of these personality traits driving these actions, individuals may find adaptation challenging, or even life threatening. However, Kim’s (2001) theory assumes that everyone has a capacity to adapt to environmental challenges and achieve some measure of psychosocial wellness, which is the “the ability, independence, and freedom to act and the possession of the requisite goods and services to be psychologically content” (Ahearn, 2000, p.

4). General coping accounts for significant amounts of variance in predicting depression, over and above traditional acculturation variables alone, suggesting that an active problem-solving mindset is associated with healthier lives (Torres & Rollock, 2007).

Kim's theory (2001, 2008) is important to this study, and to intercultural communication studies overall, since it suggests that increasing interpersonal communication and engagement in social communication activities in the host society will result in better cross-cultural adaptation outcomes for newcomers (Kim, 2005). The theory is developmental, as it demonstrates how individuals crossing into new cultures can seek to facilitate the process more easily, as well as interactive, since it serves as a foundation for interaction among members of different cultures. Therefore, the theorems can be applied within qualitative research related to cross-cultural adaptation that may lead to practical insights to improve the lives of newcomers. However, the theory does not address geographic location, such as the influences that an urban versus a rural setting can have on adaptation outcomes, nor does it focus directly on access to employment.

The goal: Integration

Integration is related to the goals of this study because of the term's high traction within Canadian government documents and discourse related to refugee resettlement. There is, however, a lack of agreement on what integration means by government, policymakers, ISAs, and academia. Berry (2006) defined integration as the adoption of the host culture and the embrace of the heritage culture, which disregards the changes made within the host community to welcome newcomers. In some of the literature, integration is referred to as "social participation in the host environment" (Kim, 2011, p. 31). From a policy standpoint, integration is assessed as language acquisition and employment in Canada. Implying a two-way street, CIC acknowledges the "mutual accommodation and adjustment by both newcomers and the larger

society” (CIC, 2010, p. 29), while also expecting newcomers to respect Canadian values. But CIC fails to clearly outline those values. Further to this, without knowing the newcomers’ values and cultural beliefs, Canadians will lack the understanding needed to complete this two-way exchange. This is problematic, as it unfairly places the weight of cross-cultural adaptation on newcomers. The majority of refugees in Canada will never reach the final stage of integration, when “refugees are in an equal position to the majority” (Phillimore & Goodson, 2008, p. 309).

Other researchers use the term integration as a measurement of how well newcomers are doing in relation to the native-born population. Common indicators include access to employment, housing, education, health, social bonds, language competence, cultural knowledge, safety, stability, rights, and citizenship (Ager & Strang, 2008; Phillimore & Goodson, 2008). It is this measurement of wellness that I think best suits my research. However, the concept of integration is not highly relevant to this study insofar as the problem of meeting the needs of GARs is an issue of cross-cultural adaptation, and not one of integration necessarily. To the exclusion of other uses then, I find the use of the concept of integration the most helpful as it relates to GARs’ success within the labour market.

The player: The impacts of gender

Gender impacts the cross-cultural adaptation outcomes of newcomers (Dow, 2011; Phinney & Flores, 2002). Newcomer women must continually negotiate between expectations of their gender from their family, their ethno-cultural community, and the host society. Their own expectations are also relevant to their adaptation because they may not match their new reality. The frustration that these women experience in virtue of their gender and their status as GAR may stifle their ability to start a new life in Canada and may lead to feelings of alienation, inadequacy and hopelessness (Hardi, 2005). Refugees from conservative backgrounds are

exposed to gender role attitudes in Canada that are more egalitarian than those in their home country (Phinney & Flores, 2002). Some women become more egalitarian, but many experience tension with their husbands and families (Moghadam, Ditto, & Taylor, 1990). Evidence suggests that women's entry into the labor force in Canada and their resulting contributions to family earnings can shift the power dynamics within spousal relationships, a change that can be perceived by men as threatening (Grzywacz, Rao, Gentry, Marin, & Arcury, 2009). The opposite could also be true, as some women manage their family's finances but find that Canada identifies the husband as the "head of the household," resulting in stress (CCR, 2009). No matter which role they might like to take, refugee women in Canada who stay at home have limited opportunity to express or explore alternative gender models to the ones with which they are familiar.

Women who are refugees make various contributions to their host community, based on past learning, both formal and experiential, and competencies, including domestic work (Clayton, 2005). Refugee women also build new skills while adapting, such as communicative and intercultural competencies, which are rarely recognized or valued by society, nor by the women themselves (Clayton, 2005). Despite these competencies, racialized women in Canada face "precarious employment: insecure and low-paying temporary, casual, contract, and home-based employment and are often at the mercy of unscrupulous employers and employment agencies" (Galabuzi, 2006, p. xii). Due to the barriers explored, gender differences should be considered in resettlement (UNHCR, 2002).

A resource: Cultural intelligence

Egalitarian and intersubjective dialogue allows both researchers and marginalized newcomer groups to reflect on social exclusion and build new knowledge collaboratively,

resulting in the transformation of oppressive social structures within the host community and less ethnocentric perspectives among both the newcomers and the host community (Gomez et al., 2011). Refugees themselves are resourceful and proactive in the process of resettlement, far from passive dependents. They are active agents in their own resettlement and “have the capacity to reflect on and analyze their environment and the meaning behind their actions, based on the common sense they use to analyze their daily lives” (Oliver et al., 2011, p. 270). This aligns with Freire’s (2005) education for critical consciousness, which brings attention to the need to transform oppressive structures that dehumanize both the oppressor and the oppressed. Freire (2005) argues that everyday people can develop critical consciousness and find meaning in their own situations to transform them. This capacity is enhanced through interpersonal and intercultural communication.

I adopt the view that as refugees increasingly interact with other newcomers and locals during their cross-cultural adaptation, they develop their critical consciousness as well as cultural intelligence. This leads to reflection and analysis of their experiences of being excluded, often prompting suggestions to ameliorate their situation. The notion of cultural intelligence, or CI, counters prevailing assumptions regarding how ethno-cultural minorities and those who have little formal education cannot make important contributions to research, even if it is related to them (Gomez et al., 2011). This argument demands that researchers believe that even the most vulnerable groups possess CI and that intelligence is linked to experience as well as socio-economic and cultural contexts (Oliver et al., 2011).

Another resource: Social capital

Another resource available to refugees as they move through their cross-cultural adaptation is social capital in the form of support networks built on trust and reciprocity. Social

exclusion is defined by Stillman et al. (2009) as a “perceived deficit in belongingness” (p. 687). A better understanding of social capital is key to understanding the communication challenges and opportunities that refugees experience during their adaptation. Refugees’ social networks are composed of both strong and weak ties to the host community, as well as bonds within their own ethno-cultural community and to other newcomers (Ager & Strang, 2008). Affective social capital, or bonding, concerns the relationships and norms that strengthen links between groups, whereas indirect social capital, or bridging, links people together across divides, such as culture, ethnicity, and class (Health Canada, 2003). These different social ties grow in strength over time and enable refugees to settle. However, limited bridging social capital places the refugee at a disadvantage when first resettling in Canada.

Given their limited host community language ability and unfamiliarity with Canada’s customs, values, and way of life, GARs often rely on their own ethno-cultural community and other newcomers for immediate support. Relationships help ease the demands of settlement “by offering relief and protection, which are important because without the support of others, the difficulty of acculturation could become overwhelming” (Skuza, 2007, p. 460). As demonstrated in the research, an absence of social capital impacts access to housing for GARs (D’Addario et al., 2008). In addition, Lamba and Krahn (2003) revealed evidence to suggest that refugees’ familial connections are linked with significantly higher quality of employment. However, there is some debate as to the degree to which social capital impacts labour market integration; Potocky-Tripod (2004) found that indicators other than English ability, gender, human capital, and length of residence did not impact refugees’ economic outcomes. Thus, having an extensive social network might be a determinant of the economic adaptation of refugees, but most evidence demonstrates its essential role in overall successful refugee resettlement (Lamba & Krahn, 2003).

Evidence points to the lack of successful adaptation among refugees who do not develop strong relationships with the host community (Sherrell, Hyndman, & Preniqi, 2005). This supports Kim's (2001) theorem that suggests the greater the ethnic interpersonal communication, the less powerful the intercultural transformation. Newcomers who rely solely upon their own ethno-cultural community for support will adapt more slowly than those who engage with members of the host culture.

Settlement services facilitate the growth of social capital among GARs, as do policies with indirect impact, such as providing access to affordable housing, education, public transport, and recreation (D'Addario et al., 2008). The Step Ahead program, volunteer host programs, women's groups, and English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) are programs and services that build social capital by bringing newcomers together to access relevant information and connect with locals and employers. These activities facilitate refugees' host communication competence. According to Kim's (2001) theorems, the more the refugees' capacity for effective interactions with the host community increases, and the more adaptive they are, the closer they will be to intercultural transformation, which will decrease the stress of the adaptation process as the severity of fluctuation in their stress-adaptation-growth dynamic subsides.

Methodology

My study adopted narrative inquiry, which views stories, interviews, and conversations as data and experience as a storied phenomenon (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Murphy & Clandinin, 2009). Narratives contain people's perceptions and interpretations of meaning derived from experience (Lawler, 2002). I chose narrative inquiry as a way to understand the barriers to cross-cultural adaptation of refugees because it is a good approach to elicit and listen to the stories of those traditionally marginalized (Lewis, 2011).

Additionally, storytelling often comes naturally to people of diverse cultures and is usually seen as unthreatening; participants can experience a range of feelings that are contained within a safe place, allowing for such emotions to be expressed (Horsley, 2007).

Narrative is a framework for the act of storytelling, which helps people make sense of daily life (Lewis, 2006). The idea behind narrative inquiry is that stories are shared as a means of understanding experience as lived and expressed, while also helping people negotiate experience (Eastmond, 2007). In the case of refugee women in Metro Vancouver, this negotiation was focused on the process of cross-cultural adaptation. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) point to an ontological feature within narrative research that is transactional: “the regulative ideal for inquiry is not to generate an exclusively faithful representation of a reality independent of the storyteller but to generate a new relation between a human being and her environment—her life, community, world” (p. 39). For Dewey, this means that the individual gains a new capacity to relate to and interpret her world (Boydston, 1981).

I believe that experience forms the basis of the narratives expressed by both myself as a narrative inquirer and by the narrators. For Clandinin and Connelly (2000), “a narrative view of experience” (p. 128) is paramount for narrative inquirers to chart both the participants’ narratives and their own narratives of experience. Experience “can manifest in narrative form, not just in retrospective representations of human experience but also in the lived immediacy of that experience” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 44). This is important to my study, as I wanted to study the past, the present, and the unfolding future of the participants. Most narrative researchers abide by a Deweyan theory that suggests experience is a continuous interaction of thought with the knower’s social environment (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Murphy & Clandinin, 2009). Dewey believed that the “what” of experience is tied closely to the “how,” which focuses

our attention on experience as emergent as well as the result of interaction (Boydston, 1981). The Deweyan ontology of experience underscores the common ground of narrative inquiry: its social dimension, the temporality of knowledge generation, and continuity that is ontological (Murphy & Clandinin, 2009). Alongside the refugee women, I entered a multi-dimensional narrative inquiry space, a space not restricted to, but rather open to possibilities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

This space is layered in context: temporality refers to how an event has a past, a present, and an implied future, relational factors tell us the personal and social factors involved in interactions, and place is our specific site for inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note the four directions common in narrative inquiry: “inward and outward, backward and forward” (p. 50). Inward refers to feelings and moral dispositions, whereas outwards looks to the environment. Since inquiry happens along temporal lines; it can also move backward and forward. Polkinghorne (1995) also argues that narrative is “a discourse form in which events and happenings are configured into a temporal unity by means of a plot” (p. 5). Being aware of temporality asks that I understand temporal shifts: I have positioned myself in the midst of the ongoing lives of these women who are reflecting on their past while experiencing the present and expressing hope for positive change in the future. Since narratives order characters in space and time, they function as a format and offer coherence and structure to our lives and the lives of others (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004).

For all narrative researchers, “a central question revolves around which voice or voices researchers should use as they interpret and represent the voices of those they study” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 58). Thus, the Western assumptions about self and identity embedded in Western narrative research, of which I am a part, are critical to consider (Denzin & Lincoln,

2008). I am obliged to pay attention to my role as researcher in the production of narrative data and the representation of experience as research text (Eastmond, 2007). I am aware that the women's voices are mediated by the socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts that surround them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Within this wider context then, their stories provided a window for me to explore the meanings that refugee women ascribe to their lived experience: their initial culture shock, settlement, and re-establishment of identity in Canada (Eastmond, 2007).

Storytelling is always co-constructive: the intentions of the storyteller merge with the intentions of the researcher to produce a shared interpretation. As the listener "Other," I constructed epistemological narratives to better understand the social world in which the women live, to illuminate their cross-cultural adaptation experiences, and to relate these to the shifting social, political and theoretical contexts of refugee resettlement in Canada. These contexts have shaped the women's cross-cultural adaptation process and will continue shaping the circumstances of their lives (Eastmond, 2007). My interpretations of their stories play a role in understanding since my research illustrates both what the refugee women know to be true and what a non-refugee woman thinks is true of them. Cross-cultural adaptation is a process the newcomers move through, but also one that impacts the host community. Thus, both ontological and epistemological positions of narrative play key roles in order in this study to highlight the vital role that narrative plays in the creation of meaning and to provide the reader with a comprehensive, contextualized understanding of cross-cultural adaptation (Stalker, 2009).

Narratives are often thought of in terms of dominant, master narratives and counter narratives. Master narratives offer people a way of making sense of their lives as they identify with the norms of culture and society, rather than confront or critique assumptions about what

those norms are (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004). Oftentimes, we unconsciously become these familiar stories, thereby reproducing them. But sometimes, our experiences diverge from the master narrative and “the challenge then becomes one of finding meaning” outside the familiar discourse (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004, p. 1). These counter narratives are those stories which people tell that offer resistance, either in overt or subtle ways, to dominant cultural narratives (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004).

This study adopts the view that narrative research has the potential to produce socially responsible knowledge that can also be locally useful (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). However, the use of traditional research methods in studying acculturation has not yielded many actionable solutions to issues of adaptation and few refugees have been engaged in suggesting practical solutions to the barriers they face (Okigbo, Reiersen, & Stowman, 2009). The question of audience is central to narrative research. Narrative inquiry can link to social change if researchers consider the audiences that may benefit from their studies. In my study, I intended to provide an opportunity to empower women through the act of storytelling; the women reported benefitting from the exchange. The stories will be shared with BFL for potential publication as both hard copy and on their website and help inform their settlement planning for refugee women. Other frontline settlement service providers, and possibly, gatekeepers such as major employers in Metro Vancouver, current and potential funders for settlement services, and the provincial and federal governments may also benefit from this research.

Data collection

I used purposeful sampling to draw upon the stories of 14 female adult GARs. The type and number of research participants defined in relation to context and the sampling strategy depends on the study's goal, the data collection effort, the richness of the data obtained, and the

ways in which the findings are linked to theoretical and empirical frameworks (Wells, 2010). Josselson, Lieblich, and McAdams (2003) suggest a number of between five and 30 participants in narrative research. Wells (2010) confirms that five is a sufficient number since “projects involving highly detailed analyses require fewer participants than those involving less-detailed approaches. This study is specific to the cross-cultural adaptation process of refugee women and not stories of the women’s homeland, their journey to Canada, or other areas of their lives unrelated to adaptation. I found that after hearing the stories of 14 women, my guiding questions were more or less answered and the themes began to repeat themselves. I had one woman volunteer to meet with me later during the data collection, but I felt that I had sufficient data to work with after 14. The small sample size allowed me to interpret the individual responses while also revealing common themes across participants’ responses.

My sampling involved women with varying degrees of adaptation prior to arriving in Canada, including living elsewhere in Canada and in transition countries before coming to Metro Vancouver. However, this study did not focus on these experiences. The 14 research participants live in Metro Vancouver, are over 19 years of age, have varied ethno-cultural origins and languages, and have accessed one or more settlement services or programs upon arrival. Two women arrived one to two years ago, six arrived two to three years ago, one arrived four years ago, four arrived five years ago, and one arrived six years ago.

Figure 1. Distributive sample.

One Year Ago	Two - Three Years Ago	Four Years Ago	Five Years Ago	Six Years Ago
Two women	Six women	One woman	Four women	One woman

This distributive sample revealed important changes in their cross-cultural adaptation process related to their length of residence in Metro Vancouver. This time period allowed for a clearer focus on the communication barriers the women experienced in various areas of their cross-cultural adaptation process and the ways in which they addressed these barriers. The sample demonstrated how settlement services had helped these women address barriers and locate transformative opportunities in order to move forward.

Ethics of the research. Generally, the ethics of research with refugees include “the intersecting issues of power and consent, confidentiality and trust, risks to researchers and potential harm to participants, as well as the broader cross-cutting issues of gender, culture, human rights and social justice” (Pittaway, Bartolomei, & Hugman, 2011, p. 232). I strove to address each of these issues in a reflexive manner. I received ethical approval from the Royal Roads University Ethics Review Board. An invitation to participate was endorsed by BFL. My modified snowball sampling strategy relied heavily upon BFL’s Executive Director, a family counsellor at BFL, a settlement counsellor with the Step Ahead program, and a doctoral student in the UBC Department of Geography; these are people who had suitable social networks to recruit participants in a culturally competent way. I contacted the GAR women by e-mail or phone once I received their confirmation of interest from my contacts. Each woman reviewed and signed a research consent form. An interpreter who spoke Farsi, Dari, and Pashto assisted 10 of the Afghan participants. As a GAR woman from Afghanistan herself, the interpreter also acted as a cultural agent and insider into these women’s experiences. I reminded the women that their participation was voluntary and that they could choose from a list of options: a questionnaire and a two-hour focus group or a questionnaire and/or a two-hour interview. I thanked each woman with a Superstore gift card worth 50 dollars each. I used pseudonyms in the paper and erased

other identifying information in data analysis and presentation to protect the participants' identity.

I chose to only invite women as participants in this research due to the likelihood of establishing an easy rapport with them as a woman myself and acutely aware of the gender role that society constructs for women. This was also an opportunity to connect on sensitive topics that perhaps the women would not have shared otherwise with a male researcher.

The GAR women shared their narratives with me during three focus groups and two individual sessions. The two separate sessions were held with Jennifer, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who could not attend the focus group sessions due to caring for her two young sons, and Mohira from Uzbekistan, who was out of the country. The first focus group was held with a mixed group of women and the latter two involved only Afghan women. All the Afghan women attended both focus groups except for Rukshika, who could not join the second group due to health concerns, and Simin, who joined us for the second focus group only.

I held two of the focus groups at BFL, which was located near public transit and offered free parking. I held the third focus group in the Burnaby apartment of an Afghan woman who had invited us to her home. Hamasa quipped: "This is not my home [points to her apartment], it's a 'community home.'" One individual interview was held in the Burnaby home of the woman who invited me there and the other was held in Metrotown mall in Burnaby. I provided refreshments and transit tickets to each woman who took public transit. I audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews in their entirety to ensure accuracy.

Focus group method. The focus group method is an important way to capture the ontological narratives of refugees. Focus groups carry the potential for synergy among participants; as moderator, I established rapport and trust while reflecting on the insights shared

(Houston, Hyndman, McLean, & Jamal, 2010). I encouraged participation from all women, though naturally some were more outspoken than others. Focus groups are “oriented toward change, allow for researchers and subjects jointly interpreting situations in an egalitarian way, and in them researchers play active roles throughout the data-collection process” (Gomez et al., 2011, p. 240). The communicative orientation of the focus groups helped me overcome the separation between myself and the participants. It also allowed the women to share and gain knowledge collaboratively as they interpreted each of their stories. The focus group dynamics were different from the individual interviews due to the exchange of conversation, advice, and empathy.

The focus groups and interviews began with a questionnaire consisting of 10 questions to capture demographic information (Appendix II). I then employed semi-structured interviewing so that the women’s responses were comparable for common themes and concepts. Using minimal structure in my narrative interview instrument, I elicited stories by asking four open-ended probing questions so that the women could provide detailed descriptions of their cross-cultural and intercultural communication experiences and perceptions (Appendix III):

1. Would you tell me a story of yours when you found yourself changing your way of thinking or doing while living in your community because of the different ways of thinking and doing that are done by the local people?
2. Would you tell me about an experience you had when you had trouble communicating with a local resident? What happened?
3. Would you tell me a story about your impressions of and feelings about local

settlement services/programs? Did you like them/not like them? Did they help you in getting through any difficult situations? Did they help you talk to other people outside of your family and close friends?

4. Are there any stories you like to tell me but I did not ask?

I asked additional probing questions for further clarification and insight (Appendix III). These questions helped elicit thick descriptions of how the women perceive their own cross-cultural adaptation and what settlement services they deemed helpful or envision would be helpful. The wording of the questions was modified slightly to express my purpose clearly to the women, all of whom spoke English as an additional language. I pulled direct quotes to ensure each person's voice was heard. The way that the women responded during the interviews and focus groups was influenced by the way I welcomed them, made efforts to make them feel at ease, explained the research goal, and framed my questions. Creating a casual atmosphere in a safe, quiet place with refreshments available helped to create a comfortable setting. Like other narrative inquirers, I found that the interviews and focus groups turned into a type of conversation at times (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The data collected during the focus groups and interviews reflect the limited time I had with the women but also the level of comfort they felt with me.

We are part of the world that we study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000): in this present study, I was complicit in being a member of the host society in which the refugee women now live. After coming to know the women, as a narrative inquirer, I developed a vested interest in the quality of their lives. I shared their concern for their children's welfare, for their future employment, and for their socio-economic and physical well-being. At some point, I stepped back to see my own story in the inquiry, alongside those of the women and the broader social

backdrop in which these stories are taking place. Negotiating transitions is also part of narrative research. A sense of connectedness developed with the participants and I reluctantly said goodbye, and that I would be in touch to share my final paper with them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Analysis

Discourse analysis is “a perspective on social life that contains both methodological and conceptual elements” (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 3). One of these elements takes into account the values of the participants in communication, whether these are shared or not (Widdowson, 2007). A discursive perspective views language as social practice within shifting socioeconomic and culture contexts and explores social interaction. Research with refugees from this perspective aims “to identify the way that we produce a particular reality for refugees at a particular time within a particular context” (Guilfoyle & Hancock, 2009, p. 127). Discourse analysts typically work with naturally occurring materials, but they also rely upon data via semi-structured and unstructured or conversational interviews with participants (Widdowson, 2007). The advantages of semi-structured interviews relate to the control participants have in the direction of the interview and how long their account should be (Guilfoyle & Hancock, 2009). Other than the two-hour limit per session, I did not restrict the time each woman had to speak, but rather, waited until she was finished speaking then either probed for more detail or turned to another woman to invite her story.

I used discourse analysis to identify the major content categories and to separate these into dimensions based on my three guiding questions. By looking broadly at the overall structure of the narratives, I observed how the women linked concepts and events together (Almeida, 2004). As well, I reflected continuously on the sense of rupture and “uncertainty and liminality,

rather than progression and conclusion” (Eastmond, 2007, p. 251) that characterized refugees’ lives.

There is always the potential for various interpretations inherent in this type of research. Researcher-participant relationships can develop along empathic lines. I am in agreement with Jackson (2002) who states that “from the perspective of a shared humanity, without listening to one another’s stories, there can be no recovery of the social, no overcoming of our separateness, no discovery of common ground or common cause” (p. 104). I recognize the biases and multiple subjectivities that I bring to this study. To assist the reader in achieving a better understanding of my interpretations of the research text, I have shared my preconceptions and thoughts during the interview and analysis here. Since I am employed in the immigrant and refugee settlement sector, I carried some preconceived notions about the inadequate amount of government funding to support newcomers into my interviews and analysis. As a researcher within refugee studies, I embrace the ideal that the knowledge I generate will ultimately support the refugees I interview (Dona, 2007). Therefore, I acknowledge this research is not neutral, as I hope it influences the development of better programs, services, and policies on the part of ISAs and governments.

I also personally drew connections with the participants through the common ground that we shared as women concerned about the negative discourse on refugees in Canada and practical considerations for a healthy future, such as access to education and meaningful employment. My concern for the women comes across in my interpretations of the text. As someone who has worked extensively in cross-cultural situations, I found myself affirming the participants’ communication challenges by making statements like “I’m sure that’s common.” I reaffirmed their ideas and sometimes stated my own opinion on their story. This may have influenced the narrative and the analysis to some extent.

The analysis is presented in two parts: the analysis of exclusory dimensions of narratives collected during participant interviews and focus groups and the analysis of transformative dimensions. I employed a common narrative strategy by writing a biographical summary of each participant (Appendix IV). Within some direct quotes, the participants' laughter and gestures helped convey their meaning. I have included these as regular type within brackets. I have also used brackets to add words which I think will help with the readers' understanding.

Findings

Several overarching themes were found throughout the participants' responses and did not appear anywhere in a singular manner. I grouped these themes into a hierarchy of exclusory dimensions (barriers) and transformative dimensions (opportunities) based on Kim's (2001) multidimensional theory. These are listed in order of priority, as shared by the women and based on my interpretation. This framework may aid comparability between initiatives while allowing researchers and ISAs to add their own indicators. As well, the framework can help guide thinking on the kinds of data that need to be collected when speaking with refugees and encourage changes in the research design.

Exclusory dimensions (barriers)

The following exclusory dimensions are those that limit the facilitation of cross-cultural adaptation of refugee women.

Language. All of the women prioritized language as a barrier and repeatedly mentioned experiencing imposed isolation, problems in health care communication, an inability to meet their neighbours, and the inability to secure employment leading to anxiety and depression. All of the participants commented on the problems that arose due to their limited English language skills. Golbahar from Afghanistan shared a story about getting lost:

I had to go to my doctor at the Bridge clinic in Vancouver. It was Halloween. I got lost. I couldn't find my home to go back. I left home at nine a.m. and I came back at 12 a.m. [laughs. The other women laugh empathetically]. At nighttime, I saw graves for the first time. It was scary. I couldn't speak. I couldn't tell the police that I got lost. I was standing in one place and I was crying. An Iranian man came and I told him I got lost [laughs]. Yeah, my children, they told the police that I got lost! [all laugh]. Learning English is also a problem for refugee youth.

Wajma from Afghanistan expressed: "I had difficulties when I was flying to Canada. I knew only a few words. I just entered the plane and I thought...I couldn't communicate. It was very challenging. When I came here I started full-time study! [laughs] I told myself I should talk! And I did." Jennifer expressed her frustration at not being able to speak English well upon arrival. However, the limited English she knew helped her face the initial culture shock: "Here, life is not easy to start in the new place. When I came here, me and my husband came here without kids. But I found out life was very hard for me. With my little English I know, yeah, that helped me a lot how to face some problem, some barrier." Newcomers often feel a sense of shame and embarrassment when first speaking in English. Jennifer described her fear of answering the telephone: "before if someone calling me, [I say] you call this time, when my husband be back at home. You see? I need[ed] my husband to answer the phone. But not now. Now I answer by my own!"

Language barriers can also be a mental burden and prevent refugees from communicating with the host community. Hamasa described her experiences with learning English. "The main problem is language, communication. I have depression, headaches every day. After two to three months we could communicate. We had a settlement counsellor working with us. But we still

had problems with communication.” Hosai also expressed how learning English was a huge struggle: “I had the feeling I would never speak in English. When I was going with my friends, they were talking, and I had the feeling that I would never talk that way.” Fruzan shared her ambitions: “I want to go to VCC [Vancouver Community College]. I want to go back to school. I have some problems to stay at home with children but at same time, I want to learn English.” Simin expressed a similar ambition: “I went to my daughter's school and talked to the teacher. I asked to be involved in the community, doing volunteer work. It is boring to be at home and I cannot communicate. They referred me to a program – Mothers Speaking English. It's very good.”

ELSA courses. All GARs have access to free ELSA courses in their first year in Canada. However, they pointed to various barriers to their participation, including the level, lack of time, and health issues. Hosai described the urgency she feels in wanting to learn English:

We are participating in ELSA courses, but it's slow. [We] want to do something faster because I want to finish upper levels to get to the programs which are helpful. Because we are getting older - we should participate in programs which are helpful for us to get education and get less physical jobs.

Fareiba also explored a barrier to ELSA class: “I am currently in level 2 English. These courses are saying they have limited hours – 1,000 hours. After that, you cannot attend anymore. We want to have something because we might not improve our English during that time. After everything is not for free and we should pay.” Both Hamasa and Rukshika described the problem of hours in the ELSA schedule. Rukshika related her story:

I have health problems and I missed a class five times. I started attending ELSA courses and got from level zero to level one. After, I got sent to MOSAIC - they have free

English classes. But the problem is that level is higher and I cannot study there. I stopped the English courses for [the past] eight months because of my health problems.

Mohira described wanting to learn more English: “My ESLA program is finished but I need more. I’d like to continue school. Five levels of ESLA is free. But now we have to pay.”

Gender. The women’s narratives support the literature, which argues that differences exist in the barriers that women face compared with men, such as family responsibilities taking time away from language learning (CCR, 2009). Ravan from Iran illustrated this point: “My husband knows English very well because he was free and always he study and practice. But me? No. I was busy. I was washing.” Jennifer illustrated how as a mother of two sons under five, she needs to mainly stay at home to take care of them, which prevents her from actively pursuing settlement services or programs. She was not aware of any local programs offering free daycare: “I’m not going to any community programs now because of the kids. They (boys) wake up late, I have to cook for them. I would go but it’s not easy with kids.” Ravan expressed a similar story regarding family responsibilities and their impact on learning English: “Just close to my home, they have free English class on Thursday. I want to go to there for afternoon class. Otherwise, I’m at home because I’m busy. I take care of my husband and my kids. They need me.”

Health. Many refugees experience issues with health communication and refugee women are an especially vulnerable group who require culturally sensitive care and education related to pregnancy, childbirth, family planning, and preventive health (Johnson-Agbakwu, 2012). Wajma is a trained medical doctor from Afghanistan. She shared a story about her frustration in not being able to speak English with a doctor: “When I went there [to the Bridge clinic], it was very difficult for me to communicate with the doctor. I couldn’t talk. It was very hard for me because I felt like, this is my colleague! And I’m a doctor. But that was very embarrassing for me.”

Rukshika shared that “there is a huge problem with integration and communication and going to the doctor. I’m thankful for the Step Ahead program, they are helping for that.” Hamasa agreed: “The main problem is health communication with doctors because not everyone can have an interpreter with them. This is very difficult for us.” Jennifer illustrated the frustration that many newcomers to Metro Vancouver experience due to limited English ability: “When the doctor was saying something, I say ‘Doctor, you are talking so quickly. Can you please slow down?’ She say ‘I’m getting you well! Don’t worry!’” Refugee women whose first language is not English also struggle with access to emergency services such as 9-1-1 (Lorenzetti & Este, 2010). Jennifer expressed how difficult it was for her to communicate with emergency service operators with limited English: “You are feeling pain. They [9-1-1 operator] have to ask you so many questions! You know when you’re emotional, you cannot talk at all.”

Housing. Locating appropriate and affordable housing is a major concern for refugee families. Twelve of the 14 women interviewed spoke of challenges, such as affordability and adequate space for their children to study. These challenges are compounded by BC’s rental market, which is characterized by high rent prices, few vacancies, and a lack of purpose-built rental units (Hiebert & Sherrell, 2009). Hosai shared that she struggles with the lack of affordable housing in Metro Vancouver:

The government for the first year they are giving us \$700 and it’s also for rent and support. But a two-bedroom is more than \$900, and just going for the apartment. There’s no money for support [for groceries, clothes, etc.]. This is every day stress and I get depressed.

Hamasa believes that securing appropriate shelter is one of her top priorities: “For me,

it's very hard because I have two teenage boys and we are living in a one-bedroom apartment. They want to have their own space.” Hamasa sleeps on the couch. Many of the women linked the problem with adequate housing to added pressures on their children. Hamasa argues that refugee children are the future of Canada and “if they have problem with education and daily living, this is not good for the future of the country. The children can build a good future here.” Fareiba lamented the fact that BC Housing did not offer her family a viable option to move out of their one-bedroom apartment. She also brought up a problem that many refugee youth face:

We came to Canada for the brighter future for our children, but our children don't have their own room to study. The welfare [agency] said ‘your children should go to work.’ But my son says if he is working, he cannot study.

Najia highlighted cultural differences related to an understanding of housing:

BC Housing told me my son should not live with me because he's over 20. The culture is different. In Canada, when children get to be 18 years old, they can go out from the house, but in our culture it's not like that. Until they get married they will be in their parents' home.

Fruzan also described her frustration: “You are on a waiting list for five years for BC Housing. But by the five years, the child will be grown up. We need it now.” Finding appropriate and affordable housing is an ongoing concern for these women and other refugee individuals.

Discrimination. Berry (2001) argues that overt acts of discrimination have the greatest negative impact on newcomers. I believe this is true for some individuals, but these acts often arise from systemic racist and oppressive institutional structures which unintentionally exclude people of diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds. Canada's multiculturalism policy has failed many newcomers in that it does not adequately address host society attitudes and receptivity. Jennifer

shared a story about her and her husband's first attempt at finding an apartment in Metro Vancouver:

When we reach here in Vancouver, it was in the Welcome House. We had to find first the house, but to get the house was not easy. We have to look by our own. You don't have a network. You don't know how to do. We call one man. He told us there is a house here if you want to rent. You have to come tomorrow at 8pm. We called him to say that we are coming and came to in front of his house. That man was not there. Then, a few minutes he came with all [his] family. Then he said "somebody already dropped money for the house." First, it was very hard for us because for this man, he not like black, he not like us. We are the black, we cannot get money.

Jennifer's story highlighted how racism poses a barrier to finding housing for black newcomers. The Canadian Race Relations Foundation defines racism not only as an attitude, but as the specific actions by individuals or institutions that result from this attitude which impact upon, marginalize and oppress diverse groups (Roy, 2008). Canada has failed to recognize that racial discrimination exists across all dimensions of society. This may be due to how racism is typically understood: in terms of individuals, rather than systemic acts and attitudes within society's political, economic, and social institutions (Roy, 2008). People of diverse ethnic origins and cultural backgrounds continue to experience racism in Canada and refugees are particularly vulnerable to its negative impacts; they are already dealing with a high level of stress due to transition and resettlement.

Employment. Refugee women face a range of barriers to labour market integration in Metro Vancouver. Many come to Canada with job skills, but they find securing employment difficult due to their limited language skills, their lack of Canadian work experience, widespread

non-recognition of foreign credentials, and limited social networks (SRDC, 2002; Sherrell et al., 2005). As Horaira stated: “I have [had] some problems with volunteer work. Sometimes they ask for Canadian experience. But if we cannot work as volunteers, how do we get experience?”

Some GARs face barriers owing to characteristics of the group itself. Research has shown that labour market integration is the lowest among Afghan GARs due to inadequate language skills or health issues precluding them finding or retaining employment (Sherrell, 2010). Fruzan stated:

When we are giving the resumes to the places, they tell us the first thing is that our English is limited. Even if the work is physical, you don’t need to speak that level of English [on the job], but they will not give you the job [without it].

The narratives related to employment reveal the levels of social exclusion in Canada that prevent refugee women from accessing adequate employment. In line with earlier studies, the majority of refugee women in this study indicated that finding ways to break free of welfare and find sustained employment were desirable. Employment can generate both income and an increasing sense of self-worth (Casimiro, Hancock, & Northcote, 2007).

Family responsibilities. In addition to these hurdles, many female refugees have family responsibilities that prohibit them from entering the workforce. Ravan expressed her desire to work, but also highlighted the limits on her time due to having a young daughter at home: “Maybe next September, my daughter will go to kindergarten I’ll have free time to do something. I need money. My husband is not working. He’s [on] disability. I need to work.” Likewise, Jennifer expressed her willingness to work, despite being a busy mom of two young sons: “I feel connected now in Burnaby, but it’s not for the work. I will work, I was planning to but the kids, they’re small. To get them to the daycare is not easy, it’s very expensive. I want to

learn!” Jennifer suggests that ISAs and the government provide hands-on “employment guides” to support women like herself.

Social capital. Many refugee women experience particular vulnerabilities, such as social isolation that is reinforced by a lack of traditional sources of support (Lorenzetti & Este, 2010). Establishing and developing relationships with friends, neighbours, or others in the community takes time. For newcomers from more community-oriented cultures, an absence of neighbours to rely upon can signal the loss of a sense of community. Jennifer related her struggles:

Here is not Africa; we know our neighbourhood there. Not here. I can see my neighbours, but not know them. This one [points to the apartment next door] is a good lady because she is the first one who came to knock on the door and greet me. But other neighbours, I don't know them!

Mohira expressed similar emotions: “Here, neighbours doesn't talk to neighbours, right? I saw my neighbor one year after! She is a very nice lady. She is 76 years old. She taught me a lot.” Jennifer was acutely aware of the importance of forming networks with the host community and building social capital in order to locate employment as well as to improve her mental well-being. For her, knowing people in Metro Vancouver is crucial:

You have to make a network: a connection. It's a big challenge. It's not very easy to get a connection. Here, to hire by somebody, you have to be connected. How? But if you don't know some people, who can I ask? Let me tell you, even if you go with your CV in your hand, nobody can take you because they don't know you! They cannot believe you!

These narratives speak to the importance of social capital in lending refugees credibility and in facilitating their labour market integration.

Stress. Refugee women face barriers to optimum mental health and social well-being as they navigate cross-cultural adaptation. Golbahar related her story:

Yeah, I had that experience when I came; I couldn't communicate. I got panic attacks.

My family called the ambulance. Now it's better. I can communicate at the bank; they can understand me. I can explain what I want. But some conversations are hard for me.

Golbahar also expressed how learning English is the most helpful in terms of decreasing her stress: "When I can communicate, I feel better." Both Mohira and Hamasa expressed concerns with their own mental health. Hamasa became agitated as she described her feelings:

My husband stayed back in Russia. It was emotional. I want to get my [Canadian] citizenship to go to visit him in Russia. I don't have money!! I have two teenagers. It is making us stressed out and we are depressed. I want to shout!

Mohira shared a story about her embarrassment being caught with the wrong fare on the bus. She made a suggestion for ISAs to help refugees in their initial settlement. "I want someone to teach them culture. How to stand in line, how to take the bus. They need help. Newcomers need to learn more about the 'outside'." Mohira described how adaptation is a difficult process and that she suffered, but is now doing well in her life in Richmond with many new friends:

Adaptation is really hard. Now I'm getting better. Now I'm really, really changed. 90 degrees! Before, I was really depressed and stressed for two years. I can't talk like I talk to you about that with my country's people. I have many friends from my country because I enjoy other country's people.

Friendships with host community members are indicators of the women's social well-being. The narratives suggest the overall distress levels to be high for this participant group and that social networks with the host community can help mitigate this stress.

Culture. There is no exact length of time for adaptation to take place. The timeline differs for each newcomer, depending on a multitude of factors such as age, gender, language ability, education, ethnicity, and socio-economic and citizenship status. Jennifer estimated that “when we are newcomers, it can take five years, sometimes seven years. It is not easy, but the time will come when it [will] be stable.” Fruzan also shared her opinion on the length of time:

We don’t want you to think we are just asking the government to support us all the time.

But when the refugees come, they need at least two years to adjust to get integrated in the community to learn the language, find a job. When we are coming to Canada, we have different expectations from this country. But when here, it becomes vice versa: the government has *more* expectations for us than we have. That’s the problem. We are not saying just help us and we just rest. The point is, we are saying we just need time.

Jennifer noted the differences between life back home in the Congo and life in Canada: “Back home, I can talk with you. But here, you see, in the train, all is busy! Here, the life is individual.” Wajma expressed how Canada is “another world. Not just language. It’s culture. Daily life, it’s so different.” Fruzan, Fareiba, Simin, and Najia shared their stories of being robbed in Metro Vancouver. Despite these incidents, they still maintained a positive attitude towards Canada and towards their own cross-cultural adaptation. One example is from Fruzan’s experience:

After four months, I went to do some shopping. I was alone. I got the shopping cart and put my bag there. I had money \$500 and all of my documents—PR, care card, social insurance number, VISA credit card—I was sure that in Canada, nobody would take it. There were a few seconds I was not there, then I see that the bag is not there. All was gone! [It was] all the money we had.

Fruzan followed her story by moving away from blame and by highlighting the opportunity to learn something from these experiences: “I’m not blaming the police or the system. It’s a multicultural country. Every community has their good people and bad people. From these experiences, we get these good points.”

Transformative dimensions (opportunities)

The transformative dimensions that refugees can access help them overcome their cross-cultural adaptation barriers and improve their social, cultural and economic outcomes.

Settlement services. Settlement services, and ESLA courses in particular, were perceived very positively by all the women, due in part to the high quality of culturally responsive services available in Metro Vancouver. The majority of the Afghan women had accessed the Step Ahead program, which is delivered as a collaborative effort by five ISAs. The Step Ahead program aims to “assist referred immigrant and refugee client families to work towards the goals of integration and self sufficiency by providing in-home services using the innovative “integrated mobile team” outreach model” (BIPT, 2012). Some of the program’s clients lack literacy in their own language, as well as English language skills, suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues, and experience chronic medical conditions. As the Executive Director of BFL relates: “Step Ahead is not intended for long term support; it’s outreach and connection. Counselors provide basic life skills, such as showing them how to use public transport and accompanying clients to housing appointments, medical appointments, shopping” (J. Fike, personal communication, April 20, 2012). Life skills building upon arrival supports GARs to facilitate successful daily interactions and builds confidence.

Language. English as an additional language classes are essential for refugees to successfully adapt to life in Metro Vancouver. Golbahar expressed that her time in an ELSA class was worthwhile:

First, when I came to Canada, I was attending ELSA courses for six months. We couldn't read. We didn't know the English alphabet. That was very hard for us. We studied full-time from nine o'clock to four o'clock. I had a good time there because we had some people from our community and also Chinese people. I keep in touch with some of them.

Similarly, Ravan described her experience attending an ESL class: "About seven months I take the ESL class. I'd like to speak English very well. I practice at home with my kids. We sit and we do homework together." Mohira deemed school to be the ideal environment for language learning and meeting other newcomers. Hosai and Horaira expressed their gratitude towards the ELSA instructors in helping their cross-cultural adaptation process through language training. Hamasa described valuable support she received in her immediate settlement needs:

The most help newcomers are getting are from the teachers and from programs like Step Ahead. Because I came to Canada, I don't speak English. I forget, because of the war. I want the government to support more programs like Step Ahead. The most important thing with these agencies is they are accompanying us to the places: to the bank, to the doctor, to services. In our Afghan community, we usually help each other. But in Canada, it's hard because everybody has their own business. So these settlement programs are helpful. When I am getting very stressed, I know I can call them and tell them [laughs].

Social capital. Social networks for refugees are often established and facilitated by ISAs. Jennifer shared the benefits of participating in a family program:

Always, I was spending my time there [at MOSAIC]. And getting some knowledge, some English words. It was helping me a lot. Getting some advice—how to do, how to work, how to make the connection because the connection here is very important. Because when I learned something from them....I was stressed at home alone. When I get something from them, yeah, I was very happy. Now I know how to live in Canada.

The majority of the Afghan participants had participated in BFL's immigrant women's support group, which aims to help newcomer women integrate actively in Canadian society, appreciate the value of a multicultural society, understand their settlement process and have a positive attitude towards it, and feel comfortable with other cultures different than theirs (K. Camera, personal communication, April 20, 2012).

Housing. Hamasa commented positively on the initial housing support provided by ISSofBC: "The counsellors in Welcome House were very supportive. We were there for 20 days." Others agreed that the Welcome House played a crucial role in welcoming them to Canada. Although the women were satisfied with the services received, the need for expansion became clear as each participant made suggestions for services and programs to meet their needs. This highlights the disconnection between people in need and service delivery. The women's suggestions include the expansion of Step Ahead program, help with basic life skills, better access to affordable daycare, and opportunities to connect meaningfully with Canadians.

Agency. Throughout the narratives, I interpreted the experiences of the women as indicators of the active role they play in their own cross-cultural adaptation process. Jennifer's stories emphasized how the responsibility is on her as a newcomer to adapt. She highlighted how her own self-initiative has helped her overcome language barriers: "Since I'm here in Canada, I never go with an interpreter or translator in the hospital. I have to go by myself then, because I

have to know also English. You have to make it by your own.” Numerous times, Jennifer also expressed her proactive attitude towards her own personal growth and cross-cultural adaptation:

Yeah, I have to adapt to this kind of life. When I go to MOSAIC, there’s no people from Congo. I have to meet them, share with them some story. I need to learn, to buy some food, how can I do? To adapt is good, because if we stay at home, nobody will come and help you. It’s like when you’re sick, but the doctor don’t know you’re sick [so] they can’t come help you.

Jennifer offered a practical suggestion that she believes will help her become independent: “The government needs to come down to the field and ask what’s going on, how people can get jobs so they can live. If they don’t do like that, we are still on government assistance.” She lamented that many refugees do not have any social networks to rely upon and framed this as a barrier to their cross-cultural adaptation. However, Jennifer also shared several strategies to address this limitation:

How to get the connection to people who understand your situation and where you come from and are welcoming you? People who will not discriminate against you because you are a newcomer? One day I met a woman who was crying. She doesn’t have people to help her. I said: ‘You can go to MOSAIC for advice.’ I called many people to go there. You cannot stay home alone. Go to the church. There, you can meet some people. Sometimes your stress is gone!

Wajma emphasized the importance of government subsidies in enhancing the quality of life for GARs living in Canada:

We have people [in our community] who complain about Canada: it’s hard, this or this. But I know the people who say you have opportunities which you don’t have in your

country, so use those opportunities so at least you have something. I think for women it's more about children. It's good the government is giving subsidies. Because if you're working or studying, or even if you're looking for a job, you can get subsidies so you have time to work on yourself.

Wajma also suggested that GARs broaden their mindset and consider changing their profession should they be unable to secure employment in their field:

Here in Canada, you can change your field. If it's not right for you, you can just study or you can work and get the experience from other jobs. You can find a job there. Think about other opportunities!

These narratives suggest that Wajma is motivated to take advantage of every opportunity that Canada has to offer her. Every individual maintains different degrees of motivation during the adaptation process. These different levels of motivation directly influence interpersonal communication frequency, facilitating her cross-cultural adaptation process (Kim, 1977).

Intercultural communication competence. Communication with strangers involves a great deal of uncertainty, since one cannot predict how a stranger will respond. In light of this, communicating with one's own ethnic group provides safety and a sense of familiarity. However, Kim (2001) views reliance solely upon ethnic communication with those from the home culture as a barrier to improved adaptation outcomes. Kim (2001) suggests that increasing the communication with the host community will lead to positive adaptation outcomes (Appendix V and VI). My findings support Kim's theorems. Many of the women described actively engaging with people from different countries to share their experiences and learn from one another. They were conscious of the benefits of this to their own well-being. Mohira

expressed pride in her English language ability and intercultural communication competence, once she moved past the initial learning phase:

The first time I talked to people, it was embarrassing. I can't show my feeling. Now I can talk. I enjoy anywhere. I check body language. Now my English is not perfect, but I'm not embarrassed. I enjoy conversation with others.

Jennifer described how she knows many Congolese people in Burnaby, but does not interact solely with them. She enjoys the cultural diversity of the community and strives to make more connections outside her ethno-cultural group: "We are multicultural here. We have to help each other! We have to share. We have to work together, build this country together. Because it belongs to us!" This statement highlights Jennifer's willingness to interact meaningfully with local residents and to adapt to her new cultural context.

Intercultural mindset. As refugees become increasingly fluent in two or more languages and effectively navigate cultural norms, values, and customs in the host community, they move towards an "inclusive group identity that embraces many groups, they are better able to make rational comparisons among different philosophical and ideological systems, as well as identify with the experiences of all parties involved" (Kim, 2001, p. 195). This is not a process of replacing the new culture with the old: adaptive change is marked by individuals who retain some of their original cultural identity while absorbing new elements of the culture (Kim, 2001). The women's emerging "interethnic identity" is a special kind of mindset that promises a greater capacity to succeed in our diverse society and "represents a continuous struggle of searching for the authenticity in self and others within and across ethnic groups" (Kim, 2006, p. 292). Identity development is influenced by the stress of intercultural challenges and the persons' adaptive capacity.

The goal of refugee women must be to strike a balance between stress and adaptation, novelty and confirmation, change and stability, which is up to each individual (Kim, 2006). The women's ethno-cultural identity is constantly evolving rather than fixed. Mohira stated "I am a citizen of the world" and shared about the value of connections and friendships: "I enjoy other country's people. I have a friend from Iran. She calls me all the time. I have some friends from Mexico—everywhere! Everyone [here] is equal." Many of the Afghan women also view themselves as global citizens, rather than Afghans or Canadians, as marked on their questionnaire forms (Appendix IV).

The Afghan women spoke at length about changing themselves to match the culture as well as keep up with their children, who are adapting more rapidly than their parents. Simin believed that refugees "have to prepare ourselves to match this culture because we are living here," while Fruzan stated "we have to match the culture because our children are attending school. They're going to school; they have different opinions on life. We should match their opinions. That's why we should change a little bit to understand each other." Hosai described how her children help her navigate the cultural landscape. "I came to Canada two years ago. They [children] help us with communicating. They help us learn the Canadian culture and integrate into Canadian society." Hamasa illustrated how "it would be good to become friends with Canadians to know their culture and living style." Likewise, Wajma suggested that there be "programs to show newcomers their culture, like the Host program. Older people need this to connect with Canadian families to get to know their lifestyle."

Many of the women expressed a deep appreciation for Canada's multicultural fabric and are proud to be a part of it. Jennifer stated "we are multicultural here. We have to help each other! We have to share. We have to work together and build this country together. Because it

belongs to us!” Connerley and Pedersen (2005) argue that people who live in an unfamiliar culture possess increasing levels of intercultural awareness and learn to respond in innovative ways, illustrated in the women’s actions and suggestions. Newcomers learn to adjust in unique and profound ways and are often unaware of these changes within themselves (Connerley & Pedersen, 2005). Kim (2009) defines intercultural competence as “an individual’s overall capacity to engage in behaviours and activities that foster cooperative relationships in all types of social and cultural contexts in which culturally or ethnically dissimilar others interface” (p. 62). All of the refugee women displayed varying levels of intercultural competence, with great potential to expand on these skills.

Ravan expressed how happy she is to be in Canada, based on a newfound sense of freedom and safety, especially regarding protection from domestic abuse. Rukshika, Fareiba, and Hamasa agreed that they feel safe in Canada. Golbahar shared a story about the profound difference in women’s rights:

Yeah, it’s a big difference in our lives when we came to Canada. Life changed totally. Women in our country don’t have any rights. For example, I was 16 years old when my family decided for me to get married. That man was twice my age. Of course I didn’t have any rights to say no. In Canada, we are free. But still, we have language problems. I want to communicate. I want to be part of this country.

Ironically, Golbahar enjoys a new sense of freedom while still feeling locked in silence due to language barriers. Hamasa emphasized the responsibility of the government in understanding the needs of GARs: “Of course we are thankful for the Canadian government. So if the Canadian government needs us, they should understand our needs too. Like our children: they cannot get education because of the work and the problems they have.” This is a call for

more narrative research into the lives of GAR women to better understand and support them in their cross-cultural adaptation in Canada. Sahba expressed her gratitude:

I am very thankful for Canada. It is a multicultural country, bringing people from different places and it is very generous. And I would like [Canada] to be a safe and good country forever. As a Muslim, I always pray for that.

Discussion of Findings

The findings answer the study's three guiding questions and reaffirmed that the well-documented issues of refugee resettlement continue to be low language competency, securing appropriate and affordable housing and employment, experiencing mental health issues and perceiving or experiencing discrimination. The challenges involved in learning the language relate to access to ELSA courses and family responsibilities. Barriers to employment, in which limited social capital and gender play a role, underscore the levels of social exclusion that refugee women experience in Canada. Most of the participants reported experiencing anxiety and isolation compounded by transitional stress. ISA support includes attention on language learning, access to employment, and growth in social networks that mitigate isolation and facilitate adaptation. Despite not knowing the language, none of the participants expressed relying solely upon their own ethno-cultural community for support.

The women's self-advocacy was exemplified in efforts to understand and interact with Canadian society. This level of agency supports the development of an open mindset and intercultural communication competence, a skill that is important not only for the women to navigate the new cultural landscape but for Canadian society as well, as it supports inclusive communities. The women possess increasing degrees of CI as they learn to live within the intricate and intersecting socio-economic and cultural contexts of their new home. These

transformative dimensions are positioned as key to assisting refugees in engaging with their host communities. The exclusory and transformative dimensions and sub-dimensions are listed in the following figures.

Figure 2. Exclusory dimensions.

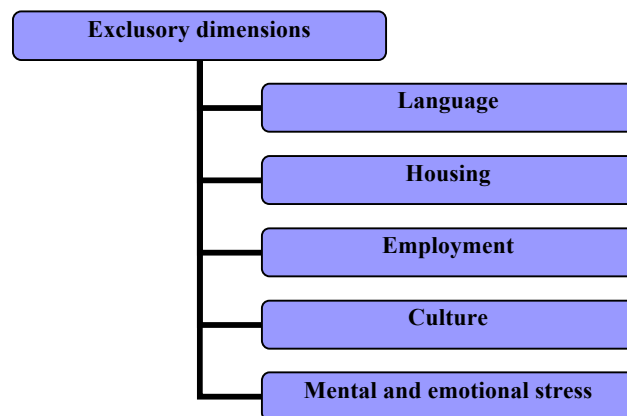
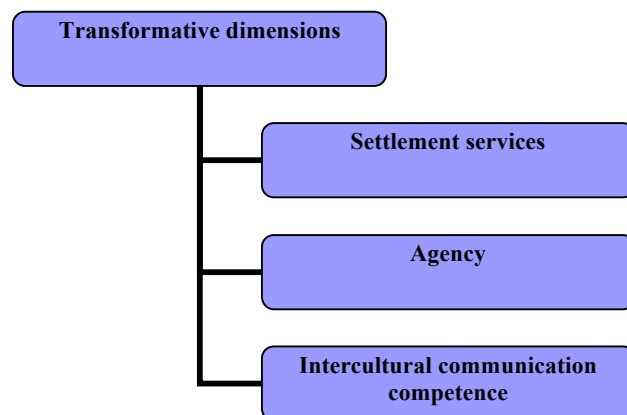


Figure 3. Transformative dimensions.



As I interpreted the women's experiences, I found that the themes echo Kim's (2001, 2005) understanding of cross-cultural adaptation as a multifaceted process that is controlled, to a certain extent, by the individual, based on their predispositions and needs (Kim, 2008). This

speaks to the women's narratives on agency; their examples of self-initiative were evident. As they reflected on, interpreted and narrated their stories, the women displayed critical consciousness and cultural intelligence. They found common bonds with other women experiencing social exclusion and made various suggestions to improve their quality of life. Their narratives also support Kim's (2001) assertion that as long as the newcomer remains in contact and communication with their new host environment, some measure of change within their values, attitudes, views, and behaviour will inevitably occur.

Kim (2008) views adaptation as the totality of the newcomer experience. There is no "end point" for cross-cultural adaptation. Refugees can move forward in their own process of cross-cultural adaptation by retaining some elements of their ethnic identity and culture and adopting some of the cultural norms and values found within Canada. The findings support this conceptualization of cross-cultural adaptation since a number of women reported change in their views or actions in Canada while simultaneously expressing their own culturally-embedded beliefs and values. These findings demonstrate that cross-cultural adaptation is facilitated by intercultural communication competence and engagement in host communication activities, such as settlement services and programs. By engaging in multiple intercultural encounters over time, refugees in Metro Vancouver build cultural knowledge and experience that results in positive intercultural growth and identity transformation (Kim, 2008).

Figure 4. Positive adaptation experience.



As a researcher, I strove to uphold the notion of transparency by exploring my biases, multiple subjectivities, and insider's perspective (Eastmond, 2007). The participants'

interpretations of their experiences added authenticity to my research as their stories represented their lived experiences. Authenticity is an important element of refugee narrative within a national public discourse that is increasingly hostile towards both GARs and asylum seekers. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest the following criteria as good narrative: “as having an explanatory, invitational quality, as having authenticity, as having adequacy and plausibility” (p. 185). These stories met these criteria while also empowering the women in the act of sharing.

The GAR women’s stories are counter narratives of resistance to Canada’s dominant narratives of refugees as passive victims of circumstance. Representation of a diversity of refugee experiences through narrative is urgently needed because there has been a shift in discourse in much of the Western world to speaking of refugees as “bogus” or as a threat to our social and moral fabric (Payton, 2009). This framing consequently decreases the credibility of refugees’ stories (Eastmond, 2007). These narratives also offer outsiders new ways of perceiving the lived experiences of refugees. The women’s stories express a unique kind of knowledge that allowed me to explore dimensions of refugee experiences previously inaccessible. I could not have learned what I did from engaging in other forms of inquiry. Narrative exposed character transformations in the women’s unfolding personal histories as their confidence levels increased and their embarrassing moments decreased through language learning, connections with locals, and cross-cultural cultural adaptation.

Limitations

Limitations of the research were largely centered on its attention to GAR only, rather than including refugee claimants, privately-sponsored refugees, or students who arrive through the World University Service of Canada. As well, my study focused on women; a longitudinal study of the cross-cultural adaptation of GARs through a gender lens might allow for

comparisons between GAR men and women in order to draw generalizations for the wider group. However, this was not feasible within my research design. As well, my study does not contain data to cover all areas of cross-cultural adaptation and the number of participants was limited due to time and financial constraints on both my part and the part of the women. Its regional focus to Metro Vancouver restricted the extent to which the research findings and conclusions from this study can be applied to the refugee population at large is narrow.

Future Considerations

I positioned my inquiry within refugee studies so as to contribute qualitative findings which may hold some measure of significance for refugee resettlement services in Metro Vancouver and in Canada since they demonstrate the role of intercultural communication in resettlement. This collection of narratives, along with the analysis, will be provided to BFL and may be used on their website and promotional materials. These will help inform and educate their Board of Directors, funding bodies, government agencies, and community stakeholders of the acute and ongoing needs of GARs in Metro Vancouver and of the services that are offered and desired. This is important since evidence points to the need for services and information provided to GARs not only before and upon arrival, but over the long-term as well. It was a need for engagement with refugee women that inspired my inquiry and will enable my findings, I hope, to contribute to the growing body of research on refugee resettlement around the topics of cross-cultural adaptation and intercultural communication.

The UNHCR (2002) advocates for the use of strategies to foster the participation of refugee women within qualitative research with this population. Involving women in the process of creating or improving settlement provision results in new insights and innovation. The experiences of (post-IRPA) GARs require further consideration; continual reflections and

participatory research will help in the development of future support systems and innovative programming for this underserved population. I am in agreement with Sherrell (2010) who believes that if Canada is going to continue accepting high needs GARs to uphold our global humanitarian commitments, it is unethical to continue providing insufficient support to enable their long-term cross-cultural adaptation and integration into Canadian society.

Conclusion

This narrative inquiry explored the perspectives of 14 GAR women living in Metro Vancouver of their own cross-cultural adaptation experiences. What emerged from discourse analysis was a hierarchy of both exclusory and transformative dimensions that impact their cross-cultural adaptation. This also included thick description of the settlement services and programs the women deemed as most helpful in overcoming barriers. Women who are refugees should be seen as a resource to Canadian society. Their narratives demonstrated their agency and how this dimension, alongside an intercultural mindset and communication competence within their interactions with the host community, facilitates cross-cultural adaptation. Narrative is a transformative tool that can empower even the most marginalized people while providing deep insight into experience. GAR stories should be listened to, understood, and used to inform resettlement policy and settlement provision in Canada in order to meet the ongoing cross-cultural adaptation needs of these diverse newcomers.

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Appendix I Abbreviations

AMSSA – The Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC

BFL – Burnaby Family Life

BIPT - Burnaby Intercultural Planning Table

CCR – Canadian Council for Refugees

CRRF – Canadian Race Relations Foundation

CIC - Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada

ELSA - English Language Services for Adults

GAR – Government-assisted refugee

ISA - Immigrant Serving Agencies

IRPA - Immigration and Refugee Protection Act

ISSofBC - Immigrant Services Society of BC

MOSAIC - MOSAIC is a multilingual non-profit organization

RAP - Resettlement Assistance Program

S.U.C.C.E.S.S. – A group of three registered charities and two limited liability social enterprises

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Appendix II Questionnaire

This questionnaire was completed at the start of the focus group and interview. The interpreter translated the questions for the Afghan women during the first focus group. The responses revealed basic demographic data about the 15 GAR women.

1. Please let us know your name, fill in the blanks where possible:

Family name _____

Given name _____

Preferred name (if different from your given name) _____

2. What language or languages do you like to speak in at home?

3. What country-of-origin are you from? _____

4. Did you live in another country (transition country) or countries before arriving in Canada?

☐ Yes, list the countries here: _____

☐ No

5. What cultural or ethnic group, tribe, chiefdom, people, or nationality do you feel most closely connected to? _____

6. Your age is between:

☐ 19-29

☐ 30-45

☐ 46-60

☐ 61 or older

7. What best describes your married life? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Married
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Single
- ☐ Widow
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

8. You have:

- ☐ 0 child
- ☐ 1 child
- ☐ 2 children
- ☐ 3 children
- ☐ 4 – 6 children
- ☐ 7 or more children

9. If you have children, your children are: (please select all that apply):

- ☐ 0-5 years old
- ☐ 6-10 years old
- ☐ 11-14 years old
- ☐ 15–19 years old
- ☐ 20+ years old

10. How many children live with you at present?

- ☐ 0 child
- ☐ 1 child
- ☐ 2 children
- ☐ 3 children
- ☐ 4 – 6 children
- ☐ 7 or more children

11. You have lived in Burnaby for:

- ☐ 6-12 months
- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ 2-4 years
- ☐ 5+ years

12. Have you participated in any of Burnaby Family Life's services / programs since you arrived in Burnaby?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't Know / Not sure

If yes, which services / programs did you participate in? (name or description)

Appendix III Inquiry – Additional Probing Questions for Focus Groups and Interviews

These questions guided differed in each focus group and interview and probed deeper on certain topics of interest.

Focus Group 1:

- Right now, are you accessing any programs or services?
- Do you keep in touch with those women you met?
- Have you made friends with people from other countries?
- What is the most helpful to decrease stress or problems? What is really helpful?

Focus Group 2:

- Do you have examples of jobs you are thinking about?
- Do you know of any other programs that can help with affordable housing?
- Are there any skills connect programs directed for youth?
- Does BC Housing understand your needs?

Focus Group 3:

- Did you change your mind about trusting people here?
- Are the police responsive?
- How do your children help you integrate?

Individual Interview with Mohira:

- So you couldn't talk about your feelings with your own country's people?
- Did you participate in MOSAIC's Step Ahead program?
- Do you know how many Uzbek people live here?

Individual Interview with Jennifer:

- So you were talking about the Family Program, did you have to ask these questions or did they offer advice?
- So did you find both the coordinators of the program and the other women were both helpful?
- How long was the program / course?
- So you didn't find it helpful in the end?
- When did you start to feel more connected?
- Is there a particular type of person or connection that is really beneficial?
- Do you know many Congolese?

Appendix IV – Participants’ Biographies

The following refugee names and some identifying details have been changed.

Individual Interviews

Jennifer came to Canada from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2007 with her husband. They are both government-assisted refugees who were settled in the City of Burnaby. They now have two young sons under four years old. Jennifer shared that it was very hard to settle in Burnaby with little English, but the English she had learned in Kenya helped her face her immediate barriers to adaptation.

Mohira is a woman in her early thirties from Uzbekistan. She lived for a year in neighbouring Kazakhstan before arriving in Canada with her husband, who was an independent journalist who was jailed in their homeland. They have lived in Burnaby for just over a year before moving to BC Housing in Richmond, where they have lived for the past two years. Mohira learned about the BC Housing program through a settlement service. She speaks Uzbek, Turkish, and English. She reported on the questionnaire as feeling most closely connected to “all cultural and ethnic groups or nationalities” and notes that “we are all human, all equal.”

Focus Groups

Ravan is from Iran and speaks both Farsi and Turkish. She lived in Turkey and Azerbaijan before coming to Canada as a GAR. She says she most closely associates with Turkish, Azari, and Persian people. She is married and lives with her husband and two children, one of whom is under five and the other eight. The family was first resettled to Ontario four years ago but they couldn’t stand the cold and moved to Metro Vancouver. They now live in Coquitlam. Ravan has participated in beginner level ELSA programs through S.U.C.C.E.S.S.

Wajma is a 27 year old married woman from Afghanistan who speaks Pashto at home.

Wajma identifies with “any” when asked which cultural or ethnic group, tribe, chiefdom, people, or nationality she feels most closely connected to because, as she stated, she doesn’t have difficulties communicating with other communities or ethnic groups. She lived in Russia before coming to Canada five years ago. She has a child under five who lives with her and her spouse. The only program she attended in the first year after her arrival was an ESL class offered at Vancouver Community College. After awhile, Wajma didn’t want to continue studying ESL as she wanted to learn more quickly, so she switched to the Pearson Adult Learning Centre and finished her Grade 12 English there. She said she “found it more useful than ESL.” At the same time, she was volunteering for different non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to communicate in English and get to know the workplace culture in Canada, which she found very useful as well. After some time, she was hired at the same NGO. Currently, she is planning to evaluate her diploma from outside of Canada and also upgrade her skills as needed.

Golbahar is a 40-year old Dari-speaking woman from Afghanistan who says she strongly identifies “with Canadians.” She lived in Iran and Pakistan before coming to Canada through the UNHCR. She is a widow and lives with three of her children, who range from teenagers to young adults. The family has lived in Coquitlam for the past six years. She has participated in various settlement services, including ELSA classes.

Fruzan is an Afghan woman in her thirties who lived in Turkey before UNHCR brought her to Canada. Her native tongue is Dari. Like other women, she reported on the questionnaire as belonging to “any cultural or ethnic group, tribe, chiefdom, people, or nationality.” Fruzan is married with two children, one who is eight and the other who is a teenager. She has lived in Burnaby for about a year. She has participated in the Step Ahead program, coordinated by MOSAIC.

Najia is from Afghanistan and speaks Pashto, the native language of the Pashtun people and the national language of Afghanistan. Najia reported on the questionnaire as belonging to “any cultural or ethnic group, tribe, chiefdom, people, or nationality.” She lived in Russia before coming to Canada. She is 40 years old and is married with five teenage and adult children. Three children live with her in Burnaby, where they have settled for about a year. Najia has participated in the Step Ahead program run by MOSAIC.

Hamasa is from Afghanistan but says she relates to “anyone” when asked which cultural or ethnic group, tribe, chiefdom, people, or nationality she feels most closely connected to. Hamasa is middle-aged and her husband is still in Russia, where they were living after fleeing Afghanistan. Two teenage sons live with her in a single-bedroom apartment in Burnaby, where they have been adapting to life for the past two years. The family has plans to move to a two-bedroom apartment in Coquitlam provided through BC Housing, although the younger son expressed dismay at having to change high schools and leave his school friends behind. Hamasa has been involved in MOSAIC’s Step Ahead program.

Horaira is from Afghanistan and reports feeling most closely connected to “Afghan, Canadian” when asked about her ethno-cultural background. She lived in Pakistan before arriving in BC as a widow. She is in her mid-fifties and has five children who are now over twenty years of age and still live with her. She has lived in Surrey for the past year. She has participated in the Step Ahead program through MOSAIC.

Hosai is from Afghanistan and speaks Dari. She most closely relates to Afghans and Canadians when asked about her cultural and ethnic group affinity. She is in her late thirties and is married with three children, one who is under five, one who is seven, and one who is 13 years old. They have been living in Burnaby for nearly two years. She has also participated in the Step

Ahead program offered through MOSAIC.

Sahba is from Afghanistan and lived in Tajikistan before arriving in Burnaby. She speaks Dari and most closely relates to Afghans as her ethno-cultural group. She is over 61 years old and is a widow. She has six children over 20 years of age. Two of her grown children currently live with her. Her adult daughter, Hosai, also attended the focus group. Sahba been living in Burnaby for over five years. She has also participated in the Step Ahead program offered through MOSAIC.

Rukshika is from Afghanistan and lived in Russia before coming to Canada through UNHCR over a year ago. She speaks Dari and identifies with Afghans and Iranians as her ethno-cultural group. She is in her mid-sixties and is a widow. She has five children over twenty years of age, but only one lives with her currently in Burnaby. Like the other Afghan women, Rukshika has participated in the Step Ahead program. Rukshika experiences serious health problems.

Fareiba is a Dari-speaking Afghan woman who lived in Russia before coming to Canada one to two years ago. She identifies strongly with being “Canadian.” She is in her late thirties and is a widow. She has four children but only one of them, a teenager, lives with her in New Westminster. She has been a participant in MOSAIC’s Step Ahead program.

Simin is a Dari-speaking Afghan woman who lived in Russia before coming to Canada five years ago. She is in her early forties and is married with four children. Only two children live with her currently in Burnaby. She has also participated in MOSAIC’s Step Ahead program.

**Appendix V Young Yun Kim's Communication Acculturation Theory: List of Ten
Axioms**

1. Cross-cultural adaptation involves both acculturation and deculturation, an eventual possible outcome of which is assimilation.
2. Underlying the cross-cultural adaptation process is the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic.
3. The stress-adaptation-growth dynamic brings about an intercultural transformation in the stranger.
4. As the stranger undergoes intercultural transformation, the severity of fluctuation in his or her stress-adaptation-growth dynamic subsides.
5. Intercultural transformation is manifested in increased functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity.
6. Intercultural transformation facilitates, and is facilitated by, host communication competence.
7. Intercultural transformation facilitates, and is facilitated by, participation in host social (interpersonal and mass) communication activities.
8. Extensive and prolonged participation in ethnic social (interpersonal and mass) communication activities deters, and is deterred by, intercultural transformation.
9. Environmental conditions (host receptivity, host conformity pressure, and ethnic group strength) influence, and are influenced by, the stranger's intercultural transformation.
10. The stranger's predispositional conditions (preparedness for change, ethnic proximity, and adaptive personality) influence, and are influenced by, his or her intercultural transformation. (Kim, 2001, p. 91).

**Appendix VI Young Yun Kim's Communication Acculturation Theory: List of 21
Theorems**

1. The greater the host communication competence, the greater the host interpersonal and mass communication.
2. The greater the host communication competence, the lesser the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication.
3. The greater the host communication competence, the greater the intercultural transformation (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity).
4. The greater the host interpersonal and mass communication, the lesser the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication.
5. The greater the host interpersonal and mass communication, the greater the intercultural transformation (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity).
6. The greater the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication, the lesser the intercultural transformation (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity).
7. The greater the host receptivity and host conformity pressure, the greater the host communication competence.
8. The greater the host receptivity and host conformity pressure, the greater the host interpersonal and mass communication.
9. The greater the host receptivity and host conformity pressure, the lesser the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication.
10. The greater the ethnic group strength, the lesser the host communication competence.
11. The greater the ethnic group strength, the lesser the host interpersonal and mass communication.

12. The greater the ethnic group strength, the greater the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication.
13. The greater the preparedness for change, the greater the host interpersonal and mass communication.
14. The greater the preparedness for change, the greater the host interpersonal and mass communication.
15. The greater the preparedness for change, the lesser the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication.
16. The greater the ethnic proximity, the greater the host communication competence.
17. The greater the ethnic proximity, the greater the host interpersonal and mass communication.
18. The greater the ethnic proximity, the lesser the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication.
19. The greater the adaptive personality, the greater the host communication competence.
20. The greater the adaptive personality, the greater the host interpersonal and mass communication.
21. The greater the adaptive personality, the lesser the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication. (Kim, 2001, p. 91).