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Conceptualizing Integration: Resettlement Experiences of Bhutanese Refugees in Pittsburgh, PA

Andrew J. Smith

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CONCEPTUALIZING INTEGRATION: RESETTLEMENT EXPERIENCES OF
BHUTANESE REFUGEES IN PITTSBURGH, PA

A Thesis

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

By

Andrew J. Smith

December 2013

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Andrew J. Smith

2013

CONCEPTUALIZING INTEGRATION: RESETTLEMENT EXPERIENCES OF
BHUTANESE REFUGEES IN PITTSBURGH, PA

By

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Approved November 20, 2013

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ABSTRACT

CONCEPTUALIZING INTEGRATION: RESETTLEMENT EXPERIENCES OF
BHUTANESE REFUGEES IN PITTSBURGH, PA

By

Andrew J. Smith

December 2013

Thesis supervised by Daniel Lieberfeld, Ph.D.

This thesis seeks to understand the extent to which prevailing conceptual frameworks can explain the experience of integration for refugees. It also seeks to incorporate the perspectives of refugees and resettlement professionals, as well as provide recommendations for policy and further research. I pursue these objectives with guidance from the Indicators of Integration Framework (Ager & Strang, 2004), a model that incorporates key dimensions of integration, and through interviews with Bhutanese refugees and resettlement professionals. Results characterize integration as a largely social phenomenon, although self-sufficiency and basic functional considerations emerge as major priorities for refugees. I also offer implications regarding the general use of conceptual frameworks in integration research, the priority and proximity of factors to the occurrence of integration, the significance of social connections, and local conditions that may support integration. In addition, I propose that interview information reflecting participants' experiences and perspectives merits consideration in its own right.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the Bhutanese community of Pittsburgh.

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Firstly, I would like to acknowledge all the exceptional individuals who participated in the interviews for this study. Thank you for taking the time to share your valuable experiences and perspectives with me.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iv
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS.....	x
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. <i>Overview of Contents</i>	2
1.2. <i>Motivations</i>	4
1.3. <i>Notes on Terminology</i>	6
2. Background	7
2.1. <i>Refugees and Resettlement</i>	7
2.2. <i>The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)</i>	8
2.3. <i>Integration in the Resettlement Context</i>	9
2.4. <i>Bhutanese Refugees—The Lhotshampas</i>	11
2.5. <i>Bhutanese Refugees in Pittsburgh</i>	12
2.6. <i>Exploring the Experience of Bhutanese Refugees</i>	13
3. Literature Review and Conceptual Approach	14
3.1. <i>Introduction: Locating “Integration” and “Assimilation”</i>	14
3.2. <i>The Concept of Assimilation</i>	16
3.3. <i>The Concept of Integration</i>	18
3.4. <i>The USRAP and Economic Self-Sufficiency</i>	24
3.5. <i>Conceptual Approach to the Research</i>	25
4. Methodology	26
4.1. <i>Research Question, Objectives, and Design</i>	26
4.2. <i>Document Analysis</i>	27
4.3. <i>Interviews with Refugees and Resettlement Professionals</i>	28
4.4. <i>Data Analysis and Discussion</i>	31
5. Interview Results: A Proposed Framework of Integration.....	32
5.1. <i>Functional Dimensions of Integration</i>	34

5.1.1.	The Meaning of Functional Integration	34
5.1.2.	Self-Sufficiency.....	35
5.1.3.	The Importance of Language and Employment.....	36
5.1.4.	Safety, Residential Location, and Cultural Competence.....	38
5.1.5.	Educational Experience and Perspectives	40
5.2.	<i>Social Connections</i>	42
5.2.1.	Social Bonds: Strength of the Bhutanese Community	43
5.2.2.	Social Bridges: Relationships Outside the Bhutanese Community	45
5.2.3.	Social Links: Accessing and Navigating the System	47
5.3.	<i>Identificational Dimensions of Integration</i>	48
5.3.1.	Sense of Belonging.....	49
5.3.2.	Cultural Awareness and Understanding	50
5.3.3.	Cultural Identity	51
5.3.4.	Citizenship.....	52
5.4.	<i>Additional Issues of Importance to Integration</i>	54
5.4.1.	Generational Dynamics	54
5.4.2.	Gender Roles	57
5.4.3.	Expectations Upon Arrival.....	58
5.4.4.	The Role of Resettlement Agencies	59
5.5.	<i>Chapter Summary</i>	60
6.	Further Discussion: Developing Themes and Implications	62
6.1.	<i>Applying Frameworks to Understand Integration</i>	63
6.2.	<i>Exploring the Proposed Framework and Emerging Themes</i>	66
6.2.1.	Characterizing the Dimensions of Integration	66
6.2.2.	The Significance of Social Bonds and Bridges.....	68
6.2.3.	Conditions of Integration: Safety, Tolerance, and Understanding.....	71
6.2.4.	Resettlement Policy and Functional Integration	73
6.3.	<i>Chapter Summary</i>	74
7.	Conclusion	77
7.1.	<i>Thesis Conclusion</i>	77
7.2.	<i>Recommendations for Planning and Policy</i>	81

7.3. <i>Possibilities for Further Research</i>	84
7.4. <i>Limitations, Validity, and Generalizability</i>	87
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	91

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BCAP	Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh
IoI Framework	Indicators of Integration Framework (Ager & Strang, 2004a)
MG	Matching Grant Program
ORR	Office of Refugee Resettlement
PRM	Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
R&P	Reception and Placement Program
RSC	Refugee Support Centers
RSS	Refugee Social Services Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USCIS	United States Citizenship and Immigration Services
USRAP	United States Refugee Admissions Program
VOLAG	Voluntary Agency

1. Introduction

This thesis seeks to understand the extent to which prevailing conceptual frameworks can explain the experience of integration for refugees. It also seeks to identify and incorporate the perspectives of refugees and resettlement professionals; develop a critical understanding of integration as a social process that occurs within the experience of resettlement; and offer recommendations for policy, planning, and further research. To guide design, methodology, and discussion around these objectives, I apply the Indicators of Integration (IoI) Framework (Ager & Strang, 2004a), a conceptual model that incorporates key dimensions of refugee integration.

The main sources of data for this thesis are interviews conducted with members of the Bhutanese refugee community of Pittsburgh, who have recently and rapidly become the largest refugee group in area,¹ and resettlement professionals who work with them. Analysis of these interviews was conducted in two parts. The first was an inductive examination of content to identify prevailing themes associated with integration and the second involved development of these emerging themes guided by the factors and dimensions of the IoI Framework and similar typologies of integration. Based on the results, I introduce a conceptual framework consisting of three dimensions of integration—functional dimensions (Zetter, Griffiths, Sigona, & Hauser, 2002), social connections (Ager & Strang, 2004a), and identificational dimensions (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006)—intended to enhance the presentation of interview content and create a structure for further discussion.

¹ Bhutanese refugees began resettling in Pittsburgh in 2008. Their total population in Pittsburgh is now expected to exceed 3,000. Background information and further data regarding their resettlement is provided in chapter two.

From this analysis, I offer several implications regarding the use of typologies such as the IoI Framework in integration research and the occurrence of integration in general and for the Bhutanese refugee community of Pittsburgh. Among these implications are the need for flexible, yet descriptive classifications of integration; the concept of the framework proposed here as a hierarchy of factors related to integration; the urgent priority of self sufficiency and the functional factors of integration for refugees; the significance of social connections to the process of integration; and the notion of safety, tolerance, and understanding as conditions of integration. In addition to these implications, I suggest that the empirical data presented here reflecting the experience and perspectives of interviewees may provide its own value to local stakeholders and others with an interest in better understanding integration and resettlement in general and for Bhutanese refugees in particular.

The next section provides an overview of contents for each chapter of this thesis, after which I describe the basic motivations that have shaped and guided the research and offer some notes regarding the use and meaning of important terms.

1.1. Overview of Contents

Following this introduction, chapter two presents background information intended to provide context for the topics and subjects that are the focus of this thesis, including information related to refugees and the resettlement process in general; the significance of integration within that process; and circumstances leading to the Bhutanese refugee situation. Chapter three builds on this background by providing a review of literature that seeks to describe the meaning and development of the term “integration,” as it is typically used within the general immigration dialogue. It also

introduces the concept of integration typologies, such as the IoI Framework, and characterizes the focus of US resettlement policy on the goal of economic self-sufficiency for refugees. This literature review shapes a basic conceptual approach to the research that views integration as a long-term, dynamic process with no definite end point that occurs across multiple dimensions and is affected by many participants.

Chapter four begins to address the primary research question and objectives by establishing the methodological approach for the thesis—mainly interviews with local Bhutanese refugees and resettlement professionals. This chapter also describes the approach to participant selection, the resulting sample of interviewees, and the inductive method of analysis that underpins subsequent discussion of the interview content.

In chapter five, I present and discuss the content of the interviews, categorized into three dimensions of integration—functional dimensions, social connections, and identificational dimensions—representing a framework for analyzing interviewees’ experiences. I propose this classification based on data analysis conducted according to two main approaches. The first was to inductively examine the interviews for prevailing themes associated with the perception, feeling, or experience of integration and the second was to apply the IoI Framework and similar typologies to the results, looking for substantive connections between these sources and interview content.

Chapter six provides a more focused discussion of the empirical data described in chapter five, including general observations regarding the use of conceptual frameworks in integration research, further characterization of the framework presented in chapter five, and the identification and development of several themes from the interview data, selected based on their clarity and frequency within the interviews. These themes include

the significance of social connections; the notion of safety, tolerance, and understanding as conditions of integration; and the current focus of US resettlement policy on functional integration and self-sufficiency.

Chapter seven is the final chapter of this thesis, in which I attempt to synthesize these contents and provide concluding remarks. I also offer recommendations for policy and planning, ideas for further research, and a discussion of the limitations, validity, and generalizability of this thesis.

1.2. Motivations

The impetus for this study originates largely from my own personal and professional experience with refugees and those who work in the field of resettlement. Through such experience, including many discussions regarding refugee resettlement, I have often encountered the word “integration” or other related terms such as “incorporation,” “acculturation,” and “assimilation,” used in various settings with many different intended meanings. Indeed, the immigration literature suggests that “integration” is an imprecise term that has been the topic of much debate and disagreement among scholars, politicians, and policymakers.² Nonetheless, many international organizations and refugee-receiving countries often identify integration as an essential and desirable outcome for refugees, even articulating integration as a stated goal of resettlement policies (UNHCR, 2011; US Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2013c). Given the significance of integration within the discussion of refugee resettlement, I sought to develop a clearer understanding of its factors, relationships, and dependencies through this thesis.

² Chapter three provides more discussion regarding the definitions and meanings of integration.

At the same time, many typologies or frameworks of integration have emerged, especially in the European context, that partially shift the discussion away from defining integration in standard terms and toward identifying and arranging the essential factors of integration into logical categories. One model that reflects this trend is the Indicators of Integration (IoI) Framework (Ager & Strang, 2004a), briefly introduced above, which classifies the factors of integration into major domains and dimensions.³ In my view, models and typologies such as the IoI Framework are promising research tools that allow users to observe and describe the occurrence of integration, guide the selection of indicators, facilitate further research, and advance the general dialogue surrounding integration.

Another motivation for this thesis is to include “refugee voices” in research that attempts to describe the refugee experience or influence related policies. Indeed, some researchers have suggested that US resettlement policy treats refugees as objects rather than unique, active participants in their own resettlement process (Ives, 2007, p. 61). In contrast, I would like to see the incorporation of more refugee perspectives and experiences into the research and policy formation process, which I have tried to do here by selecting interviews as the main method of data collection, employing an inductive approach to analysis, and incorporating quotes into the thesis from the interviews to enhance presentation of the data.

In light of these motivations, I sought a research approach that explores the concept and experience of integration among a local group of refugees that I am particularly interested in. This group is the Bhutanese refugee community of Pittsburgh,

³ A description and illustration of the IoI Framework is provided in chapter four.

whose members are now expected to exceed 3,000.⁴ Their community provides a rich source of experience and information from which to gain a better understanding of the occurrence of integration and potentially useful applications for conceptual models such as IoI Framework. Furthermore, instead of focusing on one particular area of integration, such as employment or language skills, I chose to explore the concept broadly, aiming to gain a fuller picture of the experience for Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh.

With these motivations in mind, and the research objectives described above, I utilized the factors and dimensions of the IoI Framework, related studies from Ager and Strang, and other, relevant sources to guide and inform the research design, methodology, and discussion of results.⁵ This approach was selected not only to produce findings related to the utility of the IoI Framework and similar typologies in integration research, but also the occurrence of integration in general and for Bhutanese refugees in particular.

1.3. Notes on Terminology

The term “refugee” is used here to describe a temporary immigration status.⁶ I recognize the descriptive limitations of the term as an impersonal designation and would like to affirm the uniqueness and agency of individuals it intends to describe, including those interviewed for this thesis. Still, in order to facilitate discussion, I use the term “refugee” frequently and generically throughout this thesis.

Another imprecise expression that I employ here is the phrase “Bhutanese refugee.” This term is used to describe a group of ethnically Nepali people from Bhutan

⁴ Estimate of 3,000 provided by the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh, based on preliminary results of a community-conducted population survey.

⁵ A more detailed discussion of these sources is provided in chapter three; a more detailed discussion of the influence of these sources on the development of design, methodology, and data analysis for this thesis is provided in chapter four.

⁶ Acknowledging this usage, several interviewees for this thesis may no longer technically maintain refugee status; nonetheless, the term “refugee” is used throughout this thesis to describe them.

who were forced to flee from their homes to refugee camps in Nepal, where many lived for up to twenty years before relocating to refugee-receiving countries throughout the world, including the US.⁷ Again, although the term “Bhutanese refugee” has become common parlance, it fails to accurately describe a unique group of people with a complex background and identity. Thus, I use these terms here for their utility and expediency, hoping that overuse does not depersonalize or generalize the individuals who they aim to represent.

2. Background

This chapter provides information regarding the process and policies of refugee resettlement, the basic concept of “integration” within this setting, and a brief historical description of refugees from Bhutan. I discuss these factors in order to establish context for this thesis and to support the rationale for its focus on the experience of integration for Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh.

2.1. Refugees and Resettlement

The most commonly recognized definition of a refugee can be found in the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees: a refugee is “a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (UN Refugee Convention, 1951, Article 1A (2)).

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is tasked with the responsibility of protecting and supporting refugees during their time of displacement while working toward one of three durable solutions: 1. voluntary repatriation to their

⁷ A brief historical account of the Bhutanese refugee situation is provided in chapter two.

country of origin; 2. local integration in their country of asylum; or 3. resettlement in a third country that agrees to offer residency status (UNHCR, 2011). If attempts toward repatriation and local integration fail, third country resettlement may be pursued, in which case the UNHCR begins working to relocate refugees through a number of partnerships with countries that operate their own national resettlement programs. Under such an arrangement, the US has admitted over three million refugees since 1975, more than all other receiving countries combined, mostly through the US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) (US Department of State, 2013a).

2.2. The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)

The term “USRAP” is used here to describe a number of different agencies, organizations, and policies that collectively comprise US refugee resettlement operations (US Department of State, 2013b). In collaboration with UNHCR, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), within the Department of State, coordinates overseas processing of refugee applications with support from US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Refugee Support Centers (RSC), and other partners who conduct refugee interviews, provide pre-departure cultural orientation training, and prepare refugees for travel to the US. Before receiving approval, PRM must secure “sponsorship assurance” for all refugee cases from one of nine nongovernmental voluntary agencies called VOLAGs that work with affiliated refugee resettlement agencies throughout the US to assist refugees as they arrive and begin their new lives.

Through this public-private partnership, PRM funds the Reception and Placement Program (R&P), which provides initial support services to refugees in the areas of “housing, essential furnishings, food, clothing, community orientation, and assistance

with access to other social, medical and employment services,” delivered by local refugee resettlement agencies for the first 30 to 90 days of residency (US Department of State, 2011). Upon expiration of R&P, additional support may be available to eligible refugees through the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), within the US Department of Health and Human Services, who partners with states and local resettlement agencies to implement several refugee-specific programs. The most prominent of these programs are likely Matching Grant (MG) and Refugee Social Services (RSS).

The objective of MG is to enable refugees to “become economically self-sufficient within 120 to 180 days of program eligibility” by providing “case management, employment services, maintenance assistance and cash allowance” (US Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2013a). RSS maintains a much longer eligibility period of five years for refugees, coinciding with the length of official refugee status in the US; however, it does not provide any form of financial or material support, utilizing only traditional forms of employment assistance such as resume development, job searching services, and language interpretation (US Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2013b).

In summary, these programs provide an initially high level of support for refugees as they enter the US that then diminishes quickly to encourage self-sufficiency and discourage public dependence. It is reasonable to assume that such a system has a significant impact on the experience of resettlement and integration for refugees, which is why it is described here.

2.3. Integration in the Resettlement Context

Providing guidance for third-country resettlement programs, the UNHCR emphasizes the central importance of supporting “integration” for refugees in their new

destination: “To truly be a durable solution, resettlement must offer refugees the support and opportunities to facilitate their integration into their new community” (UNHCR, 2011, p. 7). In the US, officials and policymakers seek to facilitate integration during the resettlement process mainly through the programs described above. Indeed, one of ORR’s main objectives is to assist refugees “in becoming integrated members of American society” (US Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2013c).

Despite this emphasis on integration in refugee resettlement, little agreement exists among policymakers and scholars regarding its definition and related processes (Castles, Korac, Vasta, & Vertovec, 2002). Widely differing programmatic approaches toward resettlement across receiving countries regarding factors such as language, public assistance, and labor market participation indicate various understandings of the concept of “integration.” Nonetheless, public leaders and policymakers widely agree that integration is a desirable objective for multicultural societies seeking to maintain social cohesion and equality among groups and individuals (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006).

Considering the potential importance of integration to successful refugee resettlement, there is clearly a need to provide meaning and structure to this abstract notion. Not only to foster a deeper understanding of integration, but also to inform local policymakers, program managers, refugees themselves, and the communities where they live and work. Indeed, this thesis is motivated by the need to develop a clearer understanding of integration, although it does not seek or claim to make a general contribution to such an understanding beyond the context of this study.

2.4. Bhutanese Refugees—The Lhotshampas

Because this thesis incorporates the perspectives and experiences of Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh, this section provides a brief and incomplete historical overview of the situation leading to their displacement and resettlement in the US. This information is offered in order to provide context for understanding many of the pre-migration factors discussed during the interviews that likely influence the experience of resettlement and integration.

The majority of today's refugees from Bhutan are ethnically Nepali, who came from Nepal to Bhutan in the late nineteenth century to cultivate the largely uninhabited southern parts of the country, eventually becoming known in Bhutan as Lhotshampas, or “People of the South” in the national Bhutanese language (Cultural Orientation Research Center, 2007). The Lhotshampa grew significantly in size and economic importance within Bhutan throughout the twentieth century, until the late 1980s when the Bhutanese ruling class grew wary of their presence (International Organization for Migration, 2008). In 1989, the Bhutanese government implemented a series of nationalist regulations to suppress Lhotshampa culture, restrict the Nepali language, and tighten citizenship requirements under a policy called “One nation, One people” (Evans, 2010), which effectively caused the forced migration of tens of thousands of Lhotshampas from Bhutan after several generations of continuous residency.

After an initial period of disorientation and a short stay in India, many of the displaced refugees relocated to eastern Nepal, where temporary camps developed into meager, cramped settlements, eventually becoming home to over 100,000 Lhotshampas by the early 1990s (The Intergenerational Center, 2011). Their prolonged displacement

attracted a high level of international attention and the Lhotshampas became commonly known as “Bhutanese refugees” by various international relief agencies and the popular media.⁸

More than a decade passed before the UN and its partnering agencies and governments ruled out the options of repatriation for the Lhotshampas to Bhutan or local integration in Nepal, thereby opening the pathway to third-country resettlement. Not long thereafter, in 2008, the US agreed to resettle 60,000 Bhutanese refugees over the course of several years in towns and cities throughout America (Cultural Orientation Research Center, 2007). As of September 30, 2013, the US had admitted over 70,000 Bhutanese refugees (US Department of State, 2013c).

2.5. Bhutanese Refugees in Pittsburgh

The size of this migration to the US is reflected in Pittsburgh where refugees from Bhutan have recently and rapidly expanded to become the largest refugee group in the area. As such, the local Bhutanese population provides a rich source of information and experience from which to base this thesis. I provide a brief description of Bhutanese resettlement in Pittsburgh below to establish basic local context.

The direct resettlement of Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh began in 2008 and has continued at a steady pace, reaching a total of approximately 1,471 as of September 30, 2013 (Pennsylvania Refugee Resettlement Program, 2013). Other cities in the region have received a similar number of Bhutanese refugees directly through the USRAP, including Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Erie, Baltimore, and Columbus. However, the Bhutanese population of Pittsburgh is noteworthy due to its extraordinary attraction of secondary migrants—Bhutanese refugees who were initially resettled in other US

⁸ Accordingly, this thesis also uses the term “Bhutanese refugees” to refer to this group of people.

locations and then relocated to Pittsburgh.⁹ According to local estimates, secondary migration of Bhutanese refugees to Pittsburgh has greatly enlarged the group to a total of approximately 3,000,¹⁰ making the Bhutanese community of Pittsburgh the largest refugee population in the area by far.

A strong case can be made that local residents, institutions, and businesses have an interest in the successful resettlement and integration of these new community members. Like many “rustbelt” cities, Pittsburgh has struggled to recover from the industrial fallout of the late twentieth century, suffering from population loss and economic decline. New immigrant groups, such as refugees from Bhutan, may help revitalize Pittsburgh and other comparable cities in the region through added economic and social value (Robison, 2011). However, the potential of Bhutanese refugees to be productive residents will certainly depend on their ability to integrate into the social, economic, and political structures of society.

2.6. Exploring the Experience of Bhutanese Refugees

Many of the above factors have shaped the early development of this thesis, including the significance of integration to refugee resettlement, the conceptual ambiguity of integration in the immigration literature, and the focus of US resettlement policy on economic self-sufficiency. At the same time, the information and experience found in the Bhutanese refugee population of Pittsburgh provides an opportunity to explore these issues. Furthermore, I recognize an under-representation of refugee perspectives in the formation of research and policy regarding resettlement and

⁹ According to interviewees, secondary migration to Pittsburgh may be driven by the availability of jobs, low cost of living, family connections, and topography/climate that resembles places of origin in Bhutan.

¹⁰ Estimate of 3,000 provided by the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh, based on preliminary results of a community-conducted population survey.

integration and accordingly seek to collect the experiences of Bhutanese refugees themselves.

3. Literature Review and Conceptual Approach

This chapter provides an overview of material that describes how integration and associated concepts are defined and applied within this thesis. Berry's Model of Acculturation (Berry, 1997) is briefly discussed to introduce the terms "integration" and "assimilation" within the general discussion of immigration, followed by a brief summary of how these terms have developed and are now commonly viewed. A more detailed examination of recent influences on the definition and concept of integration is provided with particular attention to Ager and Strang's Indicators of Integration (IoI) Framework (Ager & Strang, 2004a) and similar scholarship from the European context. Finally, the US focus on "economic self-sufficiency" is introduced before a conclusion which describes the influence of all these factors on the conceptual approach to this thesis.

3.1. Introduction: Locating "Integration" and "Assimilation"

Numerous theories have been devised to describe the many dimensions and implications of immigration since the social sciences first took interest in the phenomenon. The many facets of immigration research include the push and pull factors that drive human movement, the legal and political aspects of nationhood and citizenship, and the process of immigrant incorporation or integration, to name a few. As for this thesis, I am primarily interested in examining the social processes that take place at the local level as a particular group of immigrants—Bhutanese refugees—come into contact with and adjust to their new place of residence—the "receiving community" of Pittsburgh, PA. This general interest guides the selection of material reviewed below.

As a starting point, cultural psychologist John Berry offers a basic typology of social strategies and processes that may guide immigrants' adjustment and acculturation in new societies (Berry, 1997). They are integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization; each is characterized below. According to Berry, integration is a course of "mutual accommodation" whereby immigrants are able to preserve their own cultural identity while creating meaningful connections within the host society as well. Assimilation occurs when immigrants shed their cultural identity, replacing old norms and behaviors with those of the host society. Notably, both assimilation and integration involve connection and interaction with the host society, while separation and marginalization do not. Separation implies preservation of the immigrant's cultural identity, but without connection to the host society. When marginalization occurs, both social connection to the host society and cultural preservation are absent.

Berry's conceptualization of immigrant adjustment does not capture the complexity of social processes, the range of strategies that immigrants may pursue, or the many distinctions that exist between immigrant groups. For example, refugees do not share the same impetus for immigration as those who are attracted by economic opportunity, which may affect their adjustment and acculturation. Also, research shows that second generation immigrants generally have many more options available to them than those suggested by Berry (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Nonetheless, Berry's model does provide a basic introduction to the concept of immigrant adjustment and acculturation, the social pathways available to immigrants in new societies, and key terms that are relevant to this thesis. Two of these terms—integration and assimilation—have dominated recent and past discussions within the immigration debate, creating much

political and scholarly contention along the way. They are thus discussed in the sections below.

3.2. The Concept of Assimilation

To gain an understanding of the discussion surrounding integration, it is helpful to examine the development of assimilation, which has roots in the Chicago School of sociology during the early twentieth century, a time when immigration to the US had reached a historic peak. Sociologists Robert Park and Ernest Burgess offered one of the earliest definitions of assimilation, which quickly became a classic point of reference in immigration studies. They suggested that assimilation is “a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (Park & Burgess, 1921, p. 735). Park further defined his conception of assimilation as the end stage of interaction between migrants and non-migrants, preceded by contact, conflict, and accommodation in the so-called “race relations cycle” (Park & Hughes, 1950).

Like Park, sociologist Milton Gordon later saw assimilation as the dominant explanation for the process of adjustment and incorporation of immigrants in twentieth century America. Gordon viewed assimilation as a sequential process that advances in predictable stages, from acculturation, to structural assimilation, intermarriage and the eventual formation of a common, shared identity among minority and majority groups (Gordon, 1964). Gordon’s contribution quickly became the decisive account of assimilation theory regarding the absorption of immigrants into mainstream American society. However, not long after Gordon’s seminal scholarship, assimilation theory

became the source of much criticism and began to fall out of popularity. In particular, during the heightened social consciousness of the Civil Rights Era, the concept was attacked for its perceived Anglo-centric orientation and one directional burden on minorities (Rumbaut, 1997).

Despite the stigma acquired by assimilation in the later part of the twentieth century, several scholars have attempted to revive the concept and adapt it for modern use. Sociologists Ruben Rumbaut, Alejandro Portes, and Min Zhou have advocated for a more flexible, multi-directional model of assimilation to accommodate the growing heterogeneity of the immigrant population in the US and provide space for deviation from the classic linear model developed by Park and expanded on by Gordon (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut, 1997). Portes and Zhou in particular contributed to a substantial reformulation of assimilation theory that emphasizes the effect of contextual and structural factors on individual and group paths of assimilation for immigrants (Portes & Zhou, 1993).

Although modern adaptations of assimilation theory have received significant attention, much of which has been positive, the term “assimilation” remains unpopular. Sociologists Richard Alba and Victor Nee, both notable proponents of new assimilation theory, admit that “in recent decades assimilation has come to be viewed by social scientists as a worn-out theory which imposes ethnocentric and patronizing demands on minority people struggling to retain their cultural and ethnic identity” (Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 827). In addition, other scholars suspect that the process of adaptation and incorporation itself may be fundamentally changing in response to technological advancements, increased mobility, and greater immigration from Asia, Africa, and Latin

America, all of which may diminish the meaning and relevance of assimilation theory (Brown & Bean, 2006).

Regardless of their legitimacy, these criticisms have stigmatized assimilation, which, along with the popularity of the concept of multiculturalism, has paved the way for different terms and theories to describe immigrant adjustment and incorporation. Although integration is not a new concept in immigration research, its development and popularity has certainly been influenced by the discussion above. The following section describes the concept of integration in more detail.

3.3. The Concept of Integration

For critics who view assimilation as paternalistic and suppressive of minority cultures, notwithstanding the validity of such a stigma, the concept of integration may be an attractive alternative. This is especially true in the European context, where recent use of the term has been far more prolific than in the US. European sociologists Wolfgang Bosswick and Friedrich Heckmann propose that integration may be preferable in light of the stigma attached to assimilation, stemming from its association with “nationalism, fascism and the suppression...of minorities,” concluding that the term integration may be more “pragmatic and communicative” than assimilation (2006, pp. 4, 6). Such views reflect the common European aversion to assimilation and may explain why integration has been researched and promoted more heavily in Europe than in America.

The term “integration” has been widely and broadly characterized. As a starting point, immigration scholar Rinus Penninx offers a basic definition: “integration is the process by which immigrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups” (2003, p. 1). Political scientist Jennie Schulze offers a similar definition,

highlighting the multidirectional nature of integration: “integration may be summarized as the ongoing process of mutual inclusion and understanding between the ethnic minority and ethnic majority in a given society” (2012, p. 287). Bosswick and Heckmann emphasize “social integration,” which they describe as the “the inclusion and acceptance of immigrants into the core institutions, relationships and positions of a host society” (2006, p. 11). They further describe social integration as “a learning and socialization process” that is “interactive” and “ongoing,” requiring effort from both immigrants and the host society (2006, pp. 9, 11).

Although much of the research behind the above definitions comes from the European context, several research efforts from America agree on these basic points. The Integration Working Group, established by the US Office of Refugee Resettlement to explore and identify successful integration practices, suggests that “integration is a dynamic, multidirectional process in which newcomers and receiving communities intentionally work together based on a shared commitment to tolerance and justice, to create a secure, welcoming, vibrant, and cohesive society” (Brown, Gilbert, & Losby, 2007, p. iii). Also, in a recently conducted study of refugee resettlement sponsored by the Church World Service, integration was identified as “a long-term process, through which refugees and host communities communicate effectively, function together and enrich each other” (Dwyer, 2010, p. 6). These descriptions indicate a growing consensus around the essential characteristics of integration and draw basic distinctions with the concept of assimilation.

Beyond these fundamental characteristics, debate has surrounded the development of integration theory. Indeed, one comprehensive review of contemporary literature

concluded that “there is no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration” (Castles et al., 2002, p. 14). Similarly, at a hearing of the European Council of Refugees and Exiles, integration was described as “a chaotic concept: a word used by many but understood differently by most” (Robinson, 1998, p. 118).

In any case, recent efforts have provided additional insight into a deeper theoretical understanding of integration. For example, Bosswick and Heckmann attempt to classify the components of integration based on Hartmut Esser’s basic forms of social integration (2000). In their view, social integration can be divided into the following four dimensions: 1. Structural Integration – acquisition of rights and access to position and status in the core institutions of the host society; 2. Cultural Integration – acquisition of the core competencies of host society culture; 3. Social Integration – acceptance and inclusion in the primary relationships and social networks of the host society; and 4. Identificational Integration – feeling of belonging to and identification with the host society (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006). The authors go on to propose specific factors for these dimensions with particular attention toward policies that may facilitate integration, conceived as individual and group progress within each dimension.

A similar notion of integration emerged from a study commissioned by the European Refugee Fund and conducted by a team of social researchers, including Roger Zetter, David Griffiths, Nando Sigona, and Margaret Hauser (2002). In their report, these authors propose a typology of integration that divides the concept into four distinct domains: citizenship, governance, functional, and social. The latter two are of particular

interest to this study as their components are appropriate for local interviews, including language skills, employment, social networks, and cultural identity, to name a few.

The work of Zetter et al. (2002) and Bosswick and Heckmann (2006) may reflect a recent trend in immigration research, which is an effort to establish working definitions that capture the common factors, barriers, and facilitators of integration, rather than an all-encompassing definition of the concept. In general, these efforts view integration as a subjective, two-way, non-linear process that takes place across legal, functional, and social dimensions, mutually experienced both by refugees and receiving communities (Atfield, Brahmhatt, & O'Toole, 2007).

Another well-known study within this paradigm was conducted by Alastair Ager and Alison Strang (2004a; 2004b). Based on extensive documentary analysis and interviews with refugees and members of receiving communities in the UK, the study resulted in a functional model of integration that is relevant to the conceptual development of this thesis. Ager and Strang suggest that the process of integration for refugees occurs as individuals or groups progress within ten general domains, evaluated by indicators provided for each domain (2004a). Their model, known as the Indicators of Integration Framework (IoI) Framework, is illustrated below:



Source: Ager & Strang, 2004a

The IoI Framework combines the structural and functional elements of integration that are often the focus of resettlement policy with social, relational, and cultural elements that may play an equally important role. The four components within the category of “markers and means” are labeled as such because achievement within these areas can be seen as both an indication that integration is occurring and as a catalyst for further integration across the dimensions of the framework. The three components comprising the category of “social connection” are derived from Robert Putnam’s work on social capital (2000), conceived as relationships within common groups (social bonds), with members from other groups (social bridges), and with institutions and organizations (social links). The third dimension of the IoI Framework includes language and cultural proficiency, as well as the sense of safety and stability in the lives of

refugees, all of which may impede or facilitate integration. Finally, the “foundation” of the IoI Framework includes “perceptions of rights and entitlements” and “ideas of citizenship and nationhood,” including the obligations that accompany these factors (Ager & Strang, 2004a). Ager and Strang suggest that social activity within these domains of integration is complexly interconnected; however, they do not define the nature of the connections or propose a process through which integration can be expected to progress.

Several field studies have been conducted using the IoI Framework and other models as a conceptual foundation. One such study, conducted by Gaby Atfield, Kavita Brahmhatt, and Therese O’Toole, employed a combination of the typologies described above, dividing the concept of integration into legal, statutory, functional, and social domains (2007). Within the social domain, Atfield et al. utilized Ager and Strang’s conception of social connections to explore and describe the functions of social networks among refugees in the UK with promising results.

Ager and Strang encourage this type of flexible application of the IoI Framework. They explain that its purpose is not to define integration or to suggest uniform measures, but to provide a flexible, “sound basis for dialogue around issues of integration policy and practice” (Ager & Strang, 2004a). Although they provide a range of possible indicators for each domain, they also encourage use of the framework to facilitate “middle-range” analysis of integration theory and particular experiences, which is its intended use in this thesis.

3.4. *The USRAP and Economic Self-Sufficiency*

Departing for a moment from scholarly discussions and refocusing on refugee resettlement policy in the US, it is important to recognize the strong focus on the concept of “economic self-sufficiency.” The concept has roots in the Refugee Act of 1980, which established modern US resettlement policy “to provide for the effective resettlement of refugees and to assist them to achieve *economic self-sufficiency* as quickly as possible” [emphasis added] (US Congress, 2012). The central agency charged with pursuing this objective is the US Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), which mainly works toward helping refugees become “integrated members of American society” (US Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2013c).

In much of ORR’s operations, the concept of “economic self-sufficiency” drives refugee programming, which the agency defines as “earning a total family income at a level that enables a family unit to support itself without receipt of a cash assistance grant” (Newton, 2007). In other words, ORR views economic self-sufficiency as early employment for refugees without utilization of public assistance. Whether or not ORR expects this approach to facilitate progress within additional dimensions of integration is unclear.

The timeframe by which refugees are expected to achieve economic self-sufficiency after arriving in the US is particularly relevant to the discussion of integration. Considering the reduction of income support for refugees over a short duration,¹¹ it may be reasonable to assume that ORR expects refugees to become economically self-sufficient within a timeframe of four to eight months after arrival in the US (Brandt, 2010). Furthermore, the fact that ORR aims to facilitate integration while

¹¹ See chapter two for a brief description of programs comprising the USRAP.

focusing predominantly on early economic self-sufficiency may inherently indicate a certain assumption regarding the concept of integration. In other words, it seems that ORR views economic self-sufficiency as a central factor in refugee integration. It is not a central goal of this thesis to explore the concept of economic self-sufficiency in detail, but it is nonetheless important to recognize its emphasis in the US context while discussing integration experiences with refugees.

3.5. Conceptual Approach to the Research

This thesis approaches the concept of integration for refugees with a conceptual lens that aligns with the work of scholars described above, including that of Ager and Strang (2004a; 2004b; 2008), Bosswick and Heckmann (2006), Zetter et al. (2002), and Atfield et al. (2007). In other words, I view integration as a dynamic, ongoing process that occurs within broad, interconnected dimensions, influenced by both refugees themselves and the communities that receive them. I recognize that numerous processes influence the overall experience of integration, which unfolds uniquely for those who participate in it, based on various personal and environmental factors.

Several studies in recent years have applied this notion of integration to qualitative research with refugees in local contexts to better understand the diversity of integration experiences and how emerging frameworks can describe the occurrence of integration (Ager & Strang, 2004b; Phillimore & Goodson, 2008; Phillimore, 2012; Atfield et al., 2007). Although this thesis is much smaller in scope, I approach the study of integration with a similar view, which is reflected here in the research design, methodology, and analysis of results.

4. Methodology

A primary goal of this thesis is to better understand the extent to which prevailing conceptual frameworks explain the experience of integration for refugees. Toward this goal, this thesis employs a qualitative research approach guided by the IoI Framework that utilizes semi-structured interviews with Bhutanese refugees and resettlement professionals focused around the topic of integration and related factors. The following chapter articulates the research question and describes the research design, including interviews with participants and the inductive approach used for data analysis and discussion.

4.1. Research Question, Objectives, and Design

The primary research question guiding the design, methodology, and analysis for this thesis is articulated below, shaped by the preceding motivations, literature review, and conceptual sources: To what extent do prevailing conceptual frameworks explain the experience of integration for refugees? Additional objectives guiding the thesis include: identify and incorporate the perspectives of refugees and resettlement professionals; develop a critical understanding of integration as a social process that occurs within the experience of resettlement; and offer recommendations for policy, planning, and further research.

The research design is largely shaped around the IoI Framework, which aligns well with the above question and objectives. As the primary method of data collection, I utilized semi-structured interviews with Bhutanese refugees and resettlement professionals in Pittsburgh, an approach designed to attain information-rich, nuanced data regarding the experience of integration at the local level. In addition, I conducted a

document analysis, described in the following section, in order to incorporate resettlement policies, the general background of Bhutanese refugees, and local resettlement details into the framework of the thesis.

As described in the previous chapter, the level of conceptual analysis and understanding sought by this thesis is located in the middle range of theory, described by sociologist Robert Merton as “theories that lie between...minor but necessary working hypotheses...and the all-inclusive systematic efforts to develop unified theory” (Merton, 1968, p. 9). In other words, this thesis does not seek to explore grand social theories about integration; nor does it seek to precisely measure integration according to specific indicators. Instead, the focus is placed on the theoretical middle ground, using the concepts and typologies of integration described here to discuss the experience of Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh.

In summary, this thesis seeks to explore the intersection of the concept of integration, experiences of Bhutanese refugees, perceptions of resettlement professionals, and refugee resettlement policy. Specific details regarding data collection and analysis methods are provided below.

4.2. Document Analysis

Document analysis focused mainly on understanding the social and policy context for the thesis through a review of the Bhutanese refugee situation, the framework of the US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), and the history of Bhutanese relocation and reception in Pittsburgh. Sources for this document analysis included historical reports and newspaper articles, resettlement policies and program descriptions, and similarly conducted studies with attention to factors that are reasonably expected to influence the

experience of resettlement for Bhutanese refugees. This information was used to inform and guide research design, interviews with refugees and resettlement professionals, and analysis of interview content; related references can be found throughout this thesis.

4.3. Interviews with Refugees and Resettlement Professionals

As the primary research method for this thesis, I chose semi-structured interviews with Bhutanese refugees and resettlement professionals regarding the experience of integration, toward the development of a particular understanding through interviewee perspectives. Qualitative research specialist Irving Seidman (2006) offers a convincing rationale for such an approach in similar projects: “social abstractions...are best understood through the experiences of the individuals whose work and lives are the stuff upon which the abstractions are built” (p. 10). The conceptual discussion of integration summarized in the previous chapter certainly suggests that the subject should be viewed as a social abstraction.

Planning and implementation for interviews took place in two main categories; the first for resettlement professionals and the second for Bhutanese refugees themselves. As for resettlement professionals, the objective of interviews was to gather the perspectives of those who work with Bhutanese refugees or who are familiar with their situation in Pittsburgh. As for Bhutanese refugees, the objective of the interviews was to collect refugee perspectives regarding their own experience of integration and that of their community in general. These interviews aimed to establish the concept of integration by using relevant language that is likely within the experience of interviewees, including the feeling of being “at home,” “accepted,” or “well-adjusted” to new surroundings. Ager and Strang’s research on integration provides a strong rationale

for employing this approach: “The priority was to avoid imposing definitions of integration, and to stimulate conversation around experiences of integration in order to elicit dimensions of understanding” (2004b, p. 20).

Interviews with both groups were guided by topical protocols informed by the conceptual sources described in chapter three, particularly the IoI Framework and its major dimensions of integration. Possible topics of discussion were also borrowed from a qualitative study conducted by Ager and Strang, including perceptions of receiving communities; place of residence; family circumstances; perceived barriers and facilitators of integration; access and utilization of social services, education, and healthcare; institutional affiliations; and the nature of social support networks (2004b).¹² This approach provided some structure for the interviews while still encouraging participants to identify and discuss their own perspectives rather than impressing concepts from the literature or measuring integration according to predetermined indicators.

Regarding the selection of resettlement professionals, I contacted potential interviewees mainly from local refugee-serving agencies whose staff are working directly with Bhutanese refugees. These efforts produced five interviews with a range of professionals in the refugee resettlement field, including program directors and refugee case managers.¹³ Regarding the selection of refugees, I utilized the network of Bhutanese community leaders and resettlement agencies to facilitate contact and provide access, employing a purposeful approach to establish a small sample of eight interviewees with some variation across common demographic characteristics such as age and gender. As selection criteria, I established a minimum length of residency in the US (two years), so

¹² Interviews with resettlement professionals also included questions regarding refugee resettlement policy.

¹³ Two Bhutanese refugees were interviewed who work for refugee-serving agencies; however, because of their personal experience with integration, they are included in the refugee sample.

that interviewees had some degree of experience with the process of integration, and a requirement of moderate English proficiency, due to the complexity and additional time associated with interpretation.¹⁴

Notably, this sample is not intended to establish generalizability of findings; instead, the goal was to select a variety of knowledgeable participants with both personal experience and insight regarding the Bhutanese refugee community in general. The small size of the sample also allowed for a deeper level of discussion with interviewees and a more thorough analysis of interview content.

Basic questionnaires were also administered at each refugee interview to collect standard demographic and social data such as age, gender, length of residency, employment, education, housing status, and English ability, as well as more abstract data regarding the interviewee's sense of belonging, social connection, and feeling of inclusion. The purpose of these questionnaires was to gather additional information to supplement and enhance the interview results.

Key demographics of the sample of Bhutanese interviewees are provided below for general information:

¹⁴ The exclusion of interviewees with limited English proficiency is certainly a limitation of the study, which is further discussed chapter seven.

Key Demographics – Sample of Bhutanese Interviewees (n=8)	
Age range: 19 to 43	Median age: 37.5
Length of US residence: 4.3 to 12 years ¹⁵	Median length of US residence: 5 years
Length of local residence: 1 to 6 years	Median length of local residence: 3.5
Educational attainment:	Master’s degree – 3 Bachelor’s degree – 2 Technical degree – 2 High school degree – 1
Employment:	Full-time – 5 Part-time – 3
Housing status:	Homeowners – 5 Renters – 3
US Citizenship:	None at time of interview

Individual interviews with participants from both groups were approximately one hour in duration. Twelve of the thirteen total interviews were recorded with an audio device.¹⁶ The recordings were then transcribed to facilitate review and analysis, which is described in the next section. In addition, hand-written notes were taken during interviews to identify important themes and document contextual information not captured by the recordings.

4.4. Data Analysis and Discussion

Analysis of the interview data is conducted here in two main parts. The first involves an inductive analysis of the interview content to identify and describe prevailing themes associated with the perception, feeling, or experience of integration and the second utilizes the IoI Framework and similar typologies of integration to develop and

¹⁵ Two Bhutanese interviewees did not enter the US through the USRAP, which began resettling Bhutanese refugees in 2008, although they experienced the same displacement and encampment as those who did.

¹⁶ One participant requested that the interview not be recorded.

expand on these emerging themes. This approach and its results are also represented here in two main parts. The first is contained in chapter five and provides general observations and findings from the interviews. I present this material within a proposed framework of integration, which I have constructed to facilitate discussion based on patterns within the data—functional dimensions (Zetter et al., 2002), social connections (Ager & Strang, 2004a), and identificational dimensions of integration (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006). The second part, contained in chapter six, elaborates on this framework and combines empirical data from the interviews with concepts from the literature to develop additional themes. Throughout the analysis, interview results are referred to in general and in the form of direct quotes where they add value to the discussion and to incorporate refugee voices.

5. Interview Results: A Proposed Framework of Integration

This chapter presents and discusses the results of interviews with Bhutanese refugees and resettlement professionals.¹⁷ Aiming to address the primary question and objectives of this thesis, I have situated interview data below into three conceptual dimensions—functional dimensions, social connections, and identificational dimensions—acquired from Zetter et al. (2002), Ager and Strang (2004a), and Bosswick and Heckmann (2006), respectively. I employ this arrangement in order to logically organize interview data, facilitate a descriptive and conceptual discussion of the results, and build a foundation for further elaboration in chapter six. Although I refer to this construct as a “proposed framework of integration,” it should not be viewed as an

¹⁷ All interview results and themes are not included here due to the limitations of time and scope; I have made selections based mainly on frequency and clarity in the interview data.

alternative to the IoI Framework, but rather a supplement, intended to increase the presentation and general understanding of the interview results.¹⁸

Sections 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 each define one of the three dimensions of the proposed framework and then develop descriptive and conceptual discussions of the interview content according to groupings and themes within these dimensions. Furthermore, these sections are arranged in a possible hierarchy, from the urgency of self-sufficiency in the functional dimension, to the more intricate aspects of social connection and the subjectivity of identification and belonging.¹⁹ Ager and Strang's IoI Framework serves as a useful point of reference throughout these sections and the following chapters, even though the work of others is drawn in to add further meaning and support the framework proposed here.

Section 5.4 introduces a number of significant issues that may not fit clearly into the proposed framework but were identified by the majority of interviewees as factors affecting their integration, including the unique functions of age, gender roles, expectations upon arrival, and resettlement services. Some of these issues are typical to the refugee experience while others are distinct to Bhutanese refugees; regardless, they pervade the interviews and the discussion of interview content. Finally, section 5.5 summarizes this comprehensive chapter, providing a more concise account of the interview data.

¹⁸ This framework is referred to generically as the "proposed framework" throughout the thesis for practical purposes and to facilitate discussion.

¹⁹ I do not suggest a defined sequence of integration here, but rather varying proximities of factors and dimensions to the process of integration, further described in chapter six.

5.1. Functional Dimensions of Integration

This section discusses interview results within the “functional dimension” of integration (Zetter et al., 2002). After a brief examination of the term “functional integration,” I offer a definition of its use in this thesis, which guides the placement of interview content into the following sections: self-sufficiency; the importance of language proficiency and employment; safety, residential location, and cultural competence; and educational experience and perspectives.

5.1.1. The Meaning of Functional Integration

The IoI Framework contains a collection of four domains—employment, housing, education, and health—which Ager and Strang call “markers and means” (2004a). They are called “markers” because achievement by refugees within these domains indicates possible progress along the track of integration and “means” because such achievement may lead to progress in other domains. However, a broader conception of these domains is developed below to include additional factors that interviewees often discussed in conjunction with those mentioned above.

In a large-scale study of local refugee integration, Atfield et al. (2007) adopted the “functional domain” of integration identified by Zetter et al. (2002), comprising the factors of employment, education, housing, and language ability. The same study also cites Jeff Crisp (2004), who suggests that success in the functional dimension is central to the achievement of self-reliance, a connection that often emerged during the interviews. Indeed, many interviewees spoke of employment, education, housing, and language skills as building blocks of self-sufficiency,²⁰ which interviewees identified as crucial to integration. The inclusion of self-sufficiency into the functional dimension, as defined by

²⁰ The concept of self-sufficiency is generally defined as independence from public support.

Zetter et al. (2002), parallels much of the interview results. It also allows for the incorporation of three additional factors into the functional dimension, based on their association with self-sufficiency by the majority of interviewees—cultural competency, safety, and stability.

In summary, I apply the term “functional integration” to discuss a broad range of factors related to the urgent goal of self-sufficiency, including employment, housing, education, language proficiency, cultural competency, safety, and stability. This arrangement also accommodates the apparent association of these factors during the interviews. Indeed, one resettlement professional described many of these factors in close proximity when asked about the state of Bhutanese integration, articulated below:

Overall, I think [Bhutanese refugees] are doing very well.... Most of them are able to pay their rent, manage their lives. Kids are in school, parents are working. Health needs are taken care of. English is starting to come in. We see seven Nepali-owned grocery stores.... People have cars and homes. Kids are in post-secondary education. Those are all very good signs.

5.1.2. Self-Sufficiency

Although the term self-sufficiency can be applied broadly, it has a specific, economic connotation in the context of refugee resettlement policy. The achievement of economic self-sufficiency is a primary goal of many government-funded programs for refugees, which the US Office of Refugee Resettlement defines as “earning a total family income at a level that enables a family unit to support itself without receipt of a cash assistance grant” (Newton, 2007). Regardless of the policy context, the majority of interviewees indicated that self-sufficiency and self-reliance were of utmost concern.²¹

²¹ The extent to which this concern results from the influence of refugee assistance programs, the pressure of economic realities, or the ambition and agency of individuals is unclear.

Interviewees expressed the concept through various terms and phrases, including “standing on your own feet,” “getting out of welfare,” and the ability to “sustain your family,” to name a few. More practically, interviewees often described the importance of employment that provides for the independent payment of all necessary and regular expenses. The comments of one resettlement professional reflect a common theme from the interviews, which is that self-sufficiency is an urgent concern of many refugees and that its achievement may act as a foundation or enabler of integration:

Interviewer: What's most important, in terms of integration? *Respondent:* I think the most important component is to be economically self-sufficient. Because after you do that, then you have freedom to do other things, to become more integrated into the community.

Although the concept emerged from the interviews as a central theme, many interviewees explained that self-sufficiency for refugees, in and of itself, is not integration but a vital component thereof. The distinction is important to highlight due to the intense focus on self-sufficiency in resettlement policy and the potential diversion it may create away from integration as a separate phenomenon. In any case, the theme of self-sufficiency was often discussed by interviewees alongside functional factors of integration, indicating a possible association.

5.1.3. The Importance of Language and Employment

Of the functional factors discussed in the interviews, English language proficiency and employment were among the most salient and often discussed. Regarding employment, interviewees repeatedly described work as an immediate priority and often the first essential step for many Bhutanese refugees in the US toward self-sufficiency. Beyond immediacy, discussion of employment during the interviews was multi-

dimensional, ranging from economic necessity to the learning opportunities that can be found at the workplace.

Another clear theme was the frustration, stress, and family tension that many Bhutanese refugees experience as they try to progress beyond low-paying, entry-level jobs.²² Frustration with employment seemed especially acute for those who arrived in the US with advanced degrees or professional experience and now find themselves underemployed. Several interviewees had bachelor's and even master's degrees from abroad but were working in unrelated sectors or positions that do not utilize their qualifications. Some interviewees also described tension between refugees and other local residents in the workplace varying from harmless misunderstandings to hostile confrontations. As is common in the mainstream immigration debate, one interviewee suggested that other American workers may view refugees as unfair competition.²³

Regardless of the difficulties they face, the majority of interviewees viewed the general progress of Bhutanese refugees in terms of employment as largely encouraging. Many interviewees suggested that Bhutanese refugees are eager to enter the workforce and support themselves through earned income. One Bhutanese interviewee attributed employment success to the perceived work ethic that Bhutanese refugees may value and exude:

Wherever Bhutanese people work...so far, I don't say [one hundred percent], but I say ninety [percent] of our people are successful. Our people, they work really hard, and are very sincere and very punctual.

²² Associated challenges include precarious financial status, multiple jobs and workers per household, and limited availability of time for other pursuits, to name a few.

²³ The extent of this perception among local residents is not possible to estimate from interview content.

Shifting to the topic of language, all interviewees viewed English proficiency as a significant factor in securing gainful employment above the entry-level. Due to the positive correlation between English proficiency and employment, and the important association of employment and self-sufficiency, language is salient to the discussion of the functional dimension. However, English proficiency also spans the many factors of integration discussed throughout this thesis and has a meaningful, pervasive impact on the experience of resettlement for any refugee.

Many factors likely relate to the achievement of self-sufficiency and success within the functional domain; however, employment and English proficiency are prominent for Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh. Furthermore, when specifically asked about the most important factors of their own integration, many interviewees offered employment and language proficiency as primary contributors.

5.1.4. Safety, Residential Location, and Cultural Competence

Interview results suggest an association between safety, residential location, local cultural competence, and social cohesion or stability. The IoI Framework includes safety and stability in the category of “facilitating factors” to accommodate refugee perceptions of their locality, including concerns over harassment, crime, and social unrest (Ager & Strang, 2004a).²⁴ The IoI Framework also identifies cultural knowledge as a facilitating factor to capture refugees’ understanding of “national and local procedures, customs and facilities.” Interviewees often discussed the above factors in relation to residential

²⁴ Recognizing the two-way nature of integration, the perspective of local residents regarding the impact of refugee resettlement on these factors is also an important consideration, although not a focus of this thesis.

location, housing, and self-sufficiency. Consequently, I draw these items together within the functional dimension for a combined discussion below.²⁵

Interviewees expressed a wide range of perceptions regarding safety, offering several anecdotes involving harassment, assault, and racial tension²⁶ as potential sources of perceived danger based mainly on residential location, with some areas evoking more concern than others.²⁷ One resettlement professional proposed that differences in culture and communication may contribute to the sense of danger that some Bhutanese refugees feel toward their neighborhood:

[We] explain that different cultures communicate differently.... African American cultures are verbal.... In the Bhutanese culture, they're very quiet and passive.... So, we have to help them understand...that doesn't make you unsafe.

In any case, for refugees who perceive a high level of danger in their neighborhood, fear may negatively affect functional integration by creating anxiety and complicating essential tasks such as transportation, work, and educational participation. Fear may also extend beyond the functional dimension to discourage the formation of social connections and belonging. As such, the feeling of safety may be a condition or prerequisite of integration, a theme which is further discussed in chapter six.

No matter where Bhutanese refugees live, many interviewees suggested that a basic understanding of American social etiquette and local competence is essential to the maintenance of safety, citing behaviors ranging from common pleasantries to more nuanced “street smarts.” Specifically, interviewees stressed the importance of knowing

²⁵ This section discusses the topic of cultural knowledge in terms of refugee understandings at the local level; it does not include a national understanding, as defined in the IoI Framework.

²⁶ The extent of these occurrences beyond the accounts of interviewees is difficult to determine; however, most interviewees reported that such incidents, especially the most serious, are likely isolated.

²⁷ Such concern was focused largely in and around the Pittsburgh neighborhoods of Carrick and Mount Oliver; although the majority of interviewees viewed Pittsburgh as a safe place to live in general.

which areas are safe to travel through, when and how to exchange basic remarks with other residents, and how to look like you “belong” in a neighborhood.

Many refugees also described housing conditions and status, especially home ownership, as important mechanisms and indicators of integration, which aligns well with Ager and Strang’s classification of housing in the category of “markers and means.” Indeed, within the sample of interviewees, Bhutanese refugees who owned their own home seemed to be very well-adjusted and integrated. One Bhutanese interviewee confirmed this possible association according to this own personal experience:

Interviewer: When did you really start to feel well-integrated? How long did it take you? *Respondent:* Maybe a couple of years.... I feel like when I bought the house, that was a big boost. And, feeling that when you buy a house, you are here permanently.

From the majority of interviews, it is reasonable to infer that safety, stability, housing, and social cohesion have a significant impact on functional integration and the sense of wellbeing that Bhutanese refugees experience in their neighborhoods. At the same time, their residential mobility is affected by numerous considerations, including the factors of employment and self-sufficiency discussed in the previous sections. These observations illustrate another layer of the relationship between these factors, as well as additional rationale for discussing them within the functional dimension of integration.

5.1.5. Educational Experience and Perspectives

This section describes the broad perspectives and experiences of Bhutanese refugees regarding education as it relates to the experience of integration. To begin with, interviewees explained that basic educational backgrounds within the community are somewhat predictable, based primarily on age and gender. More specifically, there is a division of educational attainment rooted in the extension of public education in Bhutan

to Nepali-speaking people, the educational system established in the refugee camps, and the ability to leave the camps to pursue post-secondary education. All these factors create an observable scaffolding of educational attainment in the Bhutanese refugee community.

The role of education in the process of integration may be most significant to younger members of the Bhutanese refugee community who are enrolled in elementary and secondary schools. Indeed, many interviewees described the hope they have for their children through educational opportunities in the US, the concern they have for rapid changes in their behavior, and the frustration they feel when they are unable to help their children navigate the American educational system.

Regarding higher education, several interviewees who earned their advanced degree abroad lamented the difficulty of transferring their experience and achievement to the US workforce. Reflecting a common theme in the immigration literature, interviewees explained that employers are often unable or unwilling to verify their overseas credentials or do not recognize the equivalency of international degrees. Consequently, some interviewees expressed a desire to attend college in the US, drawing a connection between education earned domestically and new economic opportunities. Nonetheless, access to and utilization of higher education systems for Bhutanese refugees is understandably challenging. Still, most interviewees viewed the educational progress of the community as a success in general. For example, many Bhutanese refugees have completed nursing assistant programs and are now employed in the healthcare sector.

References to education by Bhutanese refugees also seemed to apply beyond formal educational experience, indicated by the commonly used phrase, “he/she is not educated” to suggest a lack of competency or understanding in another person. These

nuanced usages of the word “education” may indicate a unique cultural understanding of the term, although specific meanings are difficult to determine from the interviews.

In summary, interviewees offered accounts of education in Bhutan, in Nepal, and in the US to explain levels of individual job readiness and access, language proficiency, and general competence, which they also discussed in conjunction with self-sufficiency and the process of integration. Furthermore, these accounts highlight the dynamics of age and gender in the resettlement context, discussed further below.

5.2. Social Connections

This section discusses interview content within the category of “social connections,” as defined by the IoI Framework, which may be the most useful dimension identified by Ager and Strang for discussing interview data without the assistance of additional sources. In developing the category of social connections, Ager and Strang draw from Robert Putnam’s work on social capital (2000) to incorporate three distinct domains into the IoI Framework: social bonds, social bridges, and social links. These may be viewed as connections and relationships within the same community, between different communities, and with mainstream institutions, respectively. In this case, the Bhutanese refugee community defines the boundaries of “social bonds;” relationships between Bhutanese refugees and all other residents are viewed as “social bridges;” and relationships between Bhutanese refugees and mainstream institutions comprise the category of “social links.”²⁸

In general, interview content fits nicely into these three categories, which are discussed individually in the sections below. Notably, the word “integration” was

²⁸ Examples of such institutions and organizations include school districts, public assistance agencies, social service providers, police departments, and hospitals, to name a few.

encountered more often while discussing these social issues than it was while discussing the functional domain. This may be especially true regarding social bridges. The full implications of this observation are difficult to determine; however, such an association may indicate a perception that Bhutanese refugees have of integration as a predominately social process.

5.2.1. Social Bonds: Strength of the Bhutanese Community

The factor most often cited for the success of the Bhutanese refugee community is the strong connection among its members and the support available through its social networks. One Bhutanese interviewee described this connectedness as an intrinsic characteristic of the community that has guided Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh from the beginning of their resettlement:

We always look for our ethnic connectedness.... We try to find people who can speak our same language and share our feelings, and then we help each other in the beginning.

Explanations for this closeness varied, although it may be viewed as a product of pre-migration factors and the general cultural nature of the group. Regarding the former, interviewees spoke of the shared experience that many refugees mutually endured before their resettlement. Their common life together in Bhutan, their displacement and flight from the country, their prolonged stay in the refugee camps of Nepal, and their resettlement in the US all provide a rich milieu that may bond the community together, as explained by one Bhutanese interviewee:

In the camps, everybody lived like a family, because everybody has the same situation.... So, that's what they expect here too.

Another theme from the interviews regarding social bonding was the tendency of community members to provide material assistance to one another. Although such

assistance seemed strongest within family networks, it also transcended these traditional boundaries. One interviewee described how the community responded to a recent death by collecting money to pay for funeral expenses. Other examples were also offered to describe the ways in which the community supports its members. If these comments are somewhat representative, they may depict a “collective sufficiency” that the community has achieved, which appears to be a major asset to its members, described by a Bhutanese interviewee below:

I'm doing well, [but that] doesn't mean that I should not give back to my community. My idea of this community is [that] those people who can do well need to pull up those people who cannot do well.

A few interviewees did express mild concern over the negative effects that strong social bonds may have on other aspects of integration. However, the majority agreed that connections within the Bhutanese community provide advantages across multiple dimensions of integration, facilitate the preservation of culture, and promote social and emotional stability without necessarily impeding other factors of integration, such as English language development or participation in mainstream American society. Thus, Bhutanese refugees generally do not view strong social bonds as impediments to the development of social bridges and links.

Another factor that was repeatedly mentioned during the discussion of social bonds was the role of a volunteer organization called the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh (BCAP). The mission of BCAP is “to ensure a high quality of life for all members of the Bhutanese community in Pittsburgh and to support their integration into American society through culturally-informed services and activities” (Ramsden & Brouwer, 2012). Several interviewees discussed the ways in which BCAP

strives to connect and mobilize the community, provide forms of informational and material support to its members, and advocate for general community empowerment. Many interviewees also suggested that BCAP helps raise awareness of Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh, which emerged as an important aspect of integration during many interviews. Although some interviewees were less enthusiastic about BCAP than others, the majority spoke positively of the organization, some even passionately so.

Strong social bonds were clearly a vital component of integration for all Bhutanese interviewees. The relationships they form with fellow members of their community seem to provide deep personal satisfaction and material stability, as well as social capital that can be utilized to increase integration across many different dimensions. A deeper understanding of social bonding within the community would certainly provide a clearer, more detailed picture of Bhutanese integration.

5.2.2. Social Bridges: Relationships Outside the Bhutanese Community

The next classification of social connections within the IoI Framework is social bridges, defined here as relationships between Bhutanese refugees and others from outside their community. Many interviewees identified social bridges as an essential aspect of integration, even though most did not report a high level of development. Furthermore, the nature and characteristics of relationships that could be classified as social bridges varied. Interviewees discussed the friendliness and accessibility of their neighbors, their feeling of inclusion or the opportunity to be included in community events, and the occasion and ability to mutually share and learn from cultural exchange with local residents. Offsetting positive reports of social bridge-building from

interviewees were several accounts of separation and isolation from the local community, especially among young and elderly Bhutanese refugees.²⁹

While describing underdeveloped social bridges, many interviewees explained that limited English proficiency understandably creates a barrier to meaningful communication with other English speakers. Several interviewees also suggested that differences in language can sometimes create tension between Bhutanese refugees and others, which reportedly manifests in different forms, from common misunderstandings to discrimination. In any case, interviewees identified limited English proficiency as an impediment to social bridge-building and a hindrance to integration.³⁰

Several interviewees offered another possible explanation for underdeveloped social bridges, which is the wedge created between Bhutanese refugees and other Americans by differences in daily habits and social customs. One interviewee suggested that common activities such as going out to eat, watching sports, or regularly exercising at a gym could facilitate the formation of social bridges by providing points of contact for members of each group, although few of these common activities currently exist.

A platform for social bridge-building that was highlighted by many interviewees was the workplace. As already discussed, not all workplace interactions between Bhutanese refugees and others have been positive. Even so, for many interviewees, the workplace provides the opportunity to learn social norms and the occasion for social bridges to form through interaction with coworkers. Several interviewees also contrasted

²⁹ As with other dimensions of integration, the experiential variation associated with age is salient to the domain of social bridges.

³⁰ The overlap of limited English proficiency across the dimensions of integration illustrates the interconnections between factors and the limitation of the proposed framework in describing them.

the regularity of contact with coworkers in the workplace against irregular, sporadic contact with local residents in other settings.

In summary, interview results suggest that social bridges are understandably forming well for some and poorly for others, largely dependent on English language proficiency, residential location, workplace interactions, and opportunities created by participation in common social activities.

5.2.3. Social Links: Accessing and Navigating the System

The final classification of social connections within the IoI Framework is social links, defined here as relationships and connections built between the Bhutanese community and the institutions and organizations of the Pittsburgh area.³¹ As is true with social bridges, establishing social links may be a long-term process that generally requires concentrated effort. Even so, interview results seem to suggest that Bhutanese refugees are progressing in this regard at the basic community level.

For Bhutanese refugees, the formation of social links is likely connected to the strong social bonds that exist among community members, which may contribute to some level of collective sufficiency or internal capacity. Many interviewees perceived a high degree of overall awareness among Bhutanese refugees regarding public and community resources. They also explained that Bhutanese refugees often help each other gain access to programs and services. Even so, others suggested that continued participation in welfare programs can still be difficult for many Bhutanese refugees due to the complexity of requirements and reporting, which may largely depend on individual levels of English ability and familiarity with the system.

³¹ Examples of such institutions and organizations include school districts, public assistance agencies, social service providers, police departments and hospitals, to name a few.

In any case, several accounts were shared that indicate a high level of communication between the Bhutanese community and local institutions, including some degree of responsiveness from such institutions. One interviewee described how a group of Bhutanese refugees approached the local police department to express concerns about increased incidents of harassment and crime in the neighborhood. Notably, the encounter was facilitated by the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh (BCAP)³² and resettlement agency staff, which may indicate an understanding among Bhutanese refugees regarding effective institutional communication and community organizing.

Overall, discussions surrounding the topic of social links established a picture of apparent progress. However, as with social bridges, this picture did not emerge without challenge. There were stories of institutional discrimination, some of which have already been included, and examples of isolation from public programs and community resources. Even so, Bhutanese refugees seem to be building valuable social links with local institutions and other communities at a steady pace.

5.3. Identificational Dimensions of Integration

In this section, I focus on the sense and significance of belonging for Bhutanese refugees and associated factors that interviewees often discussed in conjunction, including cultural understanding, tolerance, and perceptions regarding citizenship.³³ Although Ager and Strang have discussed belonging extensively (2004b; 2008; 2010), it is not included as a factor in the IoI Framework. Consequently, I adopt Bosswick and Heckmann's concept of "identificational integration" to facilitate discussion, which they describe as "inclusion in a new society on the subjective level...indicated by feelings of

³² Interviewees mentioned BCAP on several occasions while discussing the formation of social links.

³³ The legal aspects of citizenship are not discussed in this section; instead, the focus is on refugee perceptions of citizenship related to identity and belonging.

belonging to, and identification with, groups, particularly in ethnic, regional, local and/or national identification” (2006, p. 10). Perceptions of identity and belonging illustrate a deeper, personal aspect of integration that is difficult to articulate, but nevertheless important to the resettlement experience of Bhutanese refugees.

5.3.1. Sense of Belonging

“Sense of belonging” is an abstract term and a subjective phenomenon with important implications for integration. Indeed, Ager and Strang found that many refugees perceive belonging as the “ultimate mark of living in an integrated community” (2008, p. 178). The degree to which interviewees reported feeling a sense of belonging varied. For those who experienced the feeling, there seemed to be a clear connection between belonging and the development of social bridges. Several interviewees reported that participation in neighborhood activities and sharing information with local residents increases their sense of belonging in general. One Bhutanese interviewee even suggested that belonging cannot develop without participation in the local community:

Interviewer: Your interaction with other Americans, has it been important for your integration? *Respondent:* Oh yeah, definitely.... Until and unless you interact with that particular local community, you don't feel that you belong.

However, a number of barriers may prevent the formation of social bridges and belonging, some of which have already been discussed. To begin with, the development of social bridges usually takes time and intentional effort, which are strained resources for many Bhutanese refugees. For example, several interviewees described the time-consuming effects of work, school, and transportation as impediments to social connection. According to others, a perceived lack of local understanding regarding the culture, language, and background of Bhutanese refugees acts as another barrier, as well

as a possible cause of tensions between groups and individuals, and even in some cases, discrimination.³⁴ For refugees facing these barriers, a sense of belonging may be difficult to develop.

Additional discussions regarding the sense of belonging were multi-dimensional, spanning a range of issues. A few of these are discussed below, including cultural understanding, cultural identity, and perceptions of citizenship.

5.3.2. Cultural Awareness and Understanding

In the IoI Framework, cultural knowledge is described as a “facilitator” of integration.³⁵ In this section, I discuss culture somewhat differently, as it relates to awareness and understanding of Bhutanese refugees within the local community, which emerged from the interviews in close connection to integration and the sense of belonging. Indeed, many interviewees expressed a desire for local residents to know the background and struggles of their refugee experience and the basic characteristics of their cultural identity. Furthermore, some suggested that increased awareness could facilitate positive communication between groups and create a common understanding from which to build relationships. Toward this goal, one Bhutanese interviewee emphasized the importance of an intentional, two-way exchange between Bhutanese refugees and local residents:

Teaching the community about refugees and teaching refugees about the community, that's part of integration too.... So, people understand who the refugees are, where they are coming from, and why they are here.

³⁴ These themes were most intense in reference to young Bhutanese refugees, which may indicate another area where age heavily impacts the resettlement experience.

³⁵ I have already applied this definition during the discussion of functional integration, focusing on the importance of cultural competence among Bhutanese refugees.

Despite its perceived importance, most interviewees suggested that the level of awareness and understanding regarding Bhutanese refugees is low among the local population in general.³⁶ The attitudes of refugees who shared this perception toward their local community varied from sympathy, to irritation, to major frustration. In particular, the majority of interviewees viewed the general lack of awareness as understandable, given the small size of Bhutan. Conversely, a smaller group of interviewees viewed the lack of awareness as insensitive and inexplicable, considering the access that Americans have to knowledge and information. In any case, these factors influence Bhutanese perceptions of the local community, which likely impact their sense of belonging and integration.

5.3.3. Cultural Identity

Another theme from the interviews that can be included in the identificational dimension of integration is the way that many Bhutanese refugees perceive their own cultural identity. According to interviewees, Bhutanese refugees may identify themselves across a range of ethnic and political categories, largely related to age. For example, youth are less likely to describe themselves as Bhutanese, with many preferring to adopt the Nepali identity instead, which may be understandable since many were born in the refugee camps of Nepal. One interviewee also suggested that refugee youth may identify themselves as Nepali because other Americans are less familiar with Bhutan. Furthermore, young members of the Bhutanese community may perceive a stigma surrounding the term “refugee,” which causes them to disassociate with their recent background in Bhutan, articulated by a Bhutanese interviewee below:

³⁶ This may relate to the newness of Pittsburgh as a receiving city for immigrants in recent years.

[Bhutanese youth] don't want [to be called] refugee.... These are the kids who were born in camp, and raised as a refugee for almost 15 years.... Once they come here, they don't want to be a refugee anymore. Refugee is a bad word for them.

Conversely, senior and middle-aged members of the community are much more likely to assert their Bhutanese identity. Interviewees suggested that this propensity likely comes from strong memories of life in Bhutan, where many of their identities took shape, and the importance of a maintaining a common bond during displacement and resettlement to sustain group cohesion and well-being.

Finally, there were interviewees who described emerging cultural identities in the community, hybrids of traditional influences and the norms of American society, reflecting both subtle shifts—choosing to eat different foods or shop online—and dramatic changes—rejecting the norms of the caste system or separating from one's spouse. Like many refugees who have been displaced from their origin, who may have been members of minority groups to begin with, and whose fate has been uncertain for long periods of time, the tension between various identities is understandable. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that such considerations have complex implications for the sense of belonging and the process of integration.

5.3.4. Citizenship

The topic of citizenship is comprehensive and steeped in legal and political context. Ager and Strang place citizenship in the category of “foundations” within the IoI Framework (2004a), Bosswick and Heckmann place it in the “structural dimension” of integration (2006), and Zetter et al. place it in the “legal and citizenship domain” of integration (2002). However, most interviewees commented on citizenship in relation to identity-related issues and the sense of belonging. Consequently, the topic is discussed

here, within the identificational dimension of integration, although overlap with the other dimensions is apparent and the complexity of citizenship is certainly overlooked.³⁷

Most interviewees described citizenship as an important component of integration, although the nature of importance varied. In one common view, interviewees identified the attainment of citizenship as a facilitator of integration and the length of residency required before applying for citizenship as an impediment, illustrated by one Bhutanese interviewee's comments below:

I have come to a country where I'm sure I can become a citizen. I have been stateless for over 20 years. Considering this opportunity for the future, I will feel that I'm very well integrated.... But for now, [citizenship] is a partial hindrance.

Some Bhutanese interviewees viewed citizenship as a social status that may put them on equal footing with other Americans, not only legally, but in terms of the general public's perception and acceptance of them as fellow citizens. Others suggested that the term immigrant or refugee may have negative connotations among local residents. These interviewees proposed that citizenship might help them dispel such connotations.

There were also interviewees who surmised that citizenship would likely increase their access to jobs that may explicitly or implicitly require citizenship. The discussion of an implicit citizenship requirement indicates possible employment discrimination, which elicited different opinions from interviewees, including both indifference and resentment. The implications of discrimination are complex and likely produce a multidimensional effect, reflecting the interconnectedness of factors that animate integration.

Notably, there were also interviewees who did not stress citizenship as a factor of importance to the same degree as others. For example, one interviewee suggested that

³⁷ Citizenship was also discussed in reference to the functional dimension of integration; however, comments on citizenship related to identity seemed to outweigh these references.

many refugees already benefit from the rights and entitlements that are currently available to them as noncitizens. Consequently, he did not see the value added by official citizenship status or its associated timing.

The functional aspects of integration that surface in the above discussion (e.g., employment) indicate that citizenship may be precariously placed within the identificational dimension of the framework proposed here. Even so, Bhutanese interviewees stressed the identity-related aspects of citizenship, which are likely associated with the experience of displacement, statelessness, and resettlement. They also demonstrated enthusiasm and anticipation regarding citizenship, perhaps suggesting a deeper meaning behind the subject for Bhutanese refugees.

5.4. Additional Issues of Importance to Integration

This section describes issues that underpin and permeate the structured discussion of integration above but may not fit easily into the dimensions of the proposed framework, highlighting its descriptive limitations. Some of these issues are typical to the refugee experience while others are distinct to Bhutanese refugees. Nonetheless, their inclusion increases our understanding of how Bhutanese interviewees view their own integration and fulfills a commitment to elevate refugee voices in this thesis. They represent only some of the additional themes emerging from the interviews; others were excluded to maintain a more concise focus.³⁸

5.4.1. Generational Dynamics

The variation of resettlement and integration experiences according to age may be the most salient issue emanating from the interviews. Although such variation is

³⁸ Other issues not covered here include secondary migration to Pittsburgh, the newness of Pittsburgh as a receiving city, the Nepali caste system, mental and behavioral health issues, and pre-migration factors.

universal to the phenomenon of immigration, this section discusses some effects of generational membership on the experience of resettlement for Bhutanese refugees. References to “the old,” “the young,” or those “in the middle” were made by interviewees when discussing almost every aspect of integration, from jobs to cultural preservation, citizenship to English proficiency. In some cases, the views and experiences of refugees within these groups were sharply diverse, as discussed below.

Many interviewees described the fast pace of integration for young Bhutanese refugees with mixed feelings, including excitement, caution, and concern. Like young members of many new immigrant groups, Bhutanese youth are quickly learning English, adjusting to American social norms, and questioning traditional aspects of their culture, all of which can create tension within families. One Bhutanese father explained the transformative effect of American education and socialization on his children:

Their way of thinking [Bhutanese youth] is totally different than the way we think. My daughter goes to school and when she comes back, I talk to her.... The way she sees things is not the same way that I used to see.... It becomes very difficult for me to digest the way she is thinking.

Interviewees also described changes in the attitudes and behaviors of Bhutanese youth, such as increased truancy and substance abuse, which they viewed as problematic. The degree of actual occurrence is difficult to determine; however, such accounts suggest that many Bhutanese youth may be expressing a form of “oppositional behavior.” This observation could be explored through the concept of “segmented assimilation” (Portes & Zhou, 1993) or “segmented integration” (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006), which have been offered as theories to explain similar behaviors among second generation immigrants.

In any case, parents clearly invest hope for the future of their community in Bhutanese youth. One interviewee even suggested that many refugees immigrate to the US to provide opportunities for their children, not for their own purposes. Regardless, as Bhutanese refugees adjust to resettlement, there is a concern for cultural preservation and economic success that directly relates to Bhutanese youth.

Perhaps understandably, Bhutanese seniors are experiencing resettlement and integration in ways that differ significantly from youth.³⁹ Interviewees suggested that seniors are generally less likely to learn English, socialize with Americans, or adopt new cultural practices; relying instead on the traditional lifestyle of Bhutanese and Nepali culture, which provides social and emotional support, but may also isolate them from the American mainstream. Combined with the grief of loss, isolation may produce sadness and depression for Bhutanese seniors. One Bhutanese refugee described how he encourages his elderly parents to adapt despite the challenges they face:

I keep telling my parents, try to observe how things are going on around you and then adapt and learn from them.... Some parents, especially older parents and uneducated parents have a very tough time changing their habits.

Then there are those Bhutanese refugees who are “in the middle;” the most well-represented group in the sample of interviewees—young and middle-aged adults who are the community’s source of economic stability and perhaps the bridge between youth and seniors. Although much variation exists within this group, interviewees suggested that these individuals are the ones whose lives are largely shaped by the urgency and pressure

³⁹ Bhutanese refugees generally view community members as “senior” sooner than other Americans; however, an exact age range is unavailable.

of securing gainful employment and providing support for their families in an unfamiliar environment.⁴⁰

Regardless of age, many interviewees recognized that the Bhutanese community as a whole currently occupies a position common to many new immigrant groups, characterized by precarious economic standing, cultural disruption, and large-scale social change. However, most viewed this as a temporary and transitional position that they hope to transcend in the future as the community establishes itself, which may explain the concern that so many have over the attitudes and behaviors of Bhutanese youth.

5.4.2. Gender Roles

Gender-related issues featured prominently in the interview data, especially major shifts in gender roles stemming mainly from the entrance of Bhutanese women into the US workforce and participation in American public schools. Indeed, such issues are evident within the discussion of the proposed framework above. Even though the impetus for change may come from outside the household, growing pressure on gender roles understandably seems to manifest most acutely at home among family members. As women assume the extra work associated with employment they are still often expected to manage domestic affairs. In the words of one interviewee, female refugees often feel “culturally bounded” as these dynamics become clear. The comments of another Bhutanese interviewee illustrate the kind of discussions that Bhutanese men and women are beginning to have regarding gender roles:

[Men] from our community need to understand that both [men and women] are equal, and if the wife is working outside, then the man needs to cook, or if a man is going out, then the wife needs to cook.... It's a big adjustment.

⁴⁰ Most refugees become ineligible for specialized support programs within the first year of resettlement; see chapters two and three for further information.

Although attitudes and reactions toward shifting gender roles are certainly connected to culture and levels of conservatism, interview results suggest that they are also largely dependent on age. Specifically, older refugees may be more likely to oppose these changes while middle-aged and younger refugees may be more likely to accept them. In any case, it can be inferred that one's attitude regarding changes in traditional norms such as gender roles has an impact on the individual experience of integration.

5.4.3. Expectations Upon Arrival

Many interviewees explained that newly resettled Bhutanese refugees are often surprised and disappointed by unmet expectations, which vary in nature and degree. Regardless of the specific concern, most unmet expectations seemed to relate to the common refrain that life in the US will be easier and more accommodating, illustrated by the comments of one Bhutanese interviewee below:

People have lost their homes, their citizenship, and so many things.... Their expectations are so high.... When they arrive here [in the US], they think, it should be like a heaven. Everything should be perfect.

Instead, like most newly arrived refugees, many interviewees explained that Bhutanese refugees often struggle to meet their financial obligations and find decent-paying entry-level work, including those with educational backgrounds and professional experience. According to interviewees, the distance between these realities and common expectations is often frustrating and can even have an adverse effect on mental health. As such, there may be a negative correlation between unmet expectations and integration. In other words, those with low unmet expectations may have a more positive experience of integration, whereas those with high unmet expectations may have a more negative one.

It may also be possible to infer that those who adjust their unmet expectations have a more positive experience of integration as well.

5.4.4. The Role of Resettlement Agencies

Resettlement agencies offer a number of services to support and empower refugees that can reasonably be assumed to influence their experience of integration. As such, the basic role of resettlement agencies in the lives of Bhutanese refugees is an important factor to consider. Much of the information collected regarding this role comes from interviews with refugee service providers, which is explicable given their professional understanding of refugee resettlement in the US.

During the interviews, most resettlement professionals described their services as essential in the formational stages of integration, to stabilize and orient refugee clients, guiding them toward self-sufficiency. However, they viewed integration as a long-term process; the beginnings of which they attempt to influence by helping refugees get on the right path. One resettlement professional expressly distinguished between the short-term focus of US resettlement policy and the longer-term process of integration:

I think it would be too ambitious to say [that the goal of resettlement agencies] is integration.... We're trying, with self-sufficiency, to help as much as we can. But, with how the resettlement process is set up, I would be lying if I said it's for integration. It's what comes after that.

From the Bhutanese perspective, most interviewees regarded the services of resettlement agencies with satisfaction and appreciation, although some suggested that agencies are often unable to provide the level of assistance necessary, perhaps because of inadequate resources and staffing. Even so, interview results suggest that resettlement services can have a significant influence on the process of integration for refugees, in

both good and bad ways, as indicated by one Bhutanese interviewee who left his initial resettlement city mainly because of mistreatment by resettlement agency staff.

5.5. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented and discussed interview results by situating data into three conceptual dimensions—functional dimensions (Zetter et al., 2002), social connections (Ager & Strang, 2004a), and identificational dimensions (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006). These dimensions comprise a distinct framework that provides a descriptive, albeit incomplete picture of resettlement and integration for Bhutanese interviewees and a conceptual foundation from which to base further analysis.

Throughout the chapter, I used the IoI Framework as a point of reference for discussion, as well as additional guidance from Bosswick and Heckmann (2006), Atfield et al. (2007), and Zetter et al. (2002) to further characterize interview data. Results are summarized below, according to the order of dimensions presented above.

Firstly, I acquired the functional dimension of integration from Zetter et al. (2002) and expanded its scope to include the factors of employment, housing, education, cultural competency, safety, and stability. Interviewees often discussed these in conjunction with self-sufficiency, which they viewed as an urgent and foundational priority, although not integration itself. Of the functional factors, language proficiency and viable employment were frequently cited as immediate concerns. Interviewees also associated the factors of safety, stability, and housing with the concept of self-sufficiency and the functional issues above while perceptions of crime and harassment within certain neighborhoods clearly had a negative impact on integration across all dimensions.

Putnam's conception of social connections (2000), incorporated by the IoI Framework, may have facilitated the most cohesive discussion of interview data. In summary, strong social bonds clearly exist among Bhutanese refugees, likely due to the shared experience of prolonged displacement and cultural group disposition. These bonds provide community members with social, emotional, informational, and even material support, which can be viewed as a type of "collective sufficiency." Although some interviewees were somewhat concerned about possible negative effects of strong social bonds, the majority did not view them as impediments to other dimensions of integration.

Most interviewees identified relationships with other local residents (social bridges) as essential to integration, even though they did not describe highly developed social bridges. Expectations regarding the nature of these relationships varied, from basic acknowledgement, to cultural exchange and active relationship-building. Even so, some interviewees described accounts of social disconnection, or underdeveloped social bridges, more common among young and elderly members of the Bhutanese community. Barriers to the development of social bridges included limited English proficiency, dissimilar activities, lack of cultural understanding, and perceived danger or intolerance. Finally, interviewees viewed the workplace as a possible platform for the formation of social bridges, although some also described negative workplace interactions with their coworkers.

In the third dimension of the framework, I acquired the term "identificational integration" from Bosswick and Heckmann (2006) to explore the subjective concept of belonging, which many interviewees discussed in conjunction with cultural understanding, identity, and perceptions of citizenship. Interview results suggest that

belonging is central to the identificational dimension for many refugees, similar to the centrality of self-sufficiency in the functional dimension, and closely related to the development of social bridges and the overall concept of integration. As such, interviewees described many of the same restricting and facilitating factors that apply to social bridges (e.g., English proficiency, cultural awareness, understanding, and tolerance). Finally, I also discussed the various cultural identities of Bhutanese refugees, as well as interviewee perceptions of citizenship, as they relate to the sense of belonging.

Although the framework proposed here describes much of the interview data, I presented additional issues that underpinned and permeated the discussion of interview content across the dimensions of the framework. These issues include generational dynamics, gender roles, expectations upon arrival, and the role of resettlement agencies. Some of these issues are typical to the refugee experience while others are distinct to Bhutanese refugees. In any case, they contribute meaning to the experience of integration for interviewees.

6. Further Discussion: Developing Themes and Implications

This chapter elaborates on the discussion of empirical data presented in the previous chapter through further analysis and development of selected themes that emerge from the interview results. Section 6.1 offers several findings on the general use of conceptual frameworks and typologies in integration research, based on applications for this project. Section 6.2 shifts attention to the framework of integration proposed in the previous chapter—functional dimensions (Zetter et al., 2002), social connections (Ager & Strang, 2004a), and identificational dimensions (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006)—which I attempt to characterize and expand on with support from the interview

results. I also suggest a conception of the dimensions and components of the proposed framework as a loose hierarchy of integration, comprised of factors that are proximal and distal to the process of integration.

Subsequent sections describe separate themes that emerge from the analysis and classification of interview data according to the proposed framework, which I have selected based on prevalence and clarity.⁴¹ These themes are the prime functions of social bonds and bridges; the notion of safety, tolerance, and understanding as conditions of integration; and the focus of US resettlement policy on self-sufficiency and functional factors of integration. Although these themes and constructs may produce useful implications, they are also problematic in some respects, which I attempt to illustrate by highlighting certain anomalies.

6.1. Applying Frameworks to Understand Integration

In the previous chapter, I applied the IoI Framework to describe and conceptualize interview data, with particular attention to the framework's classification of "social connections" and supplemented by the concepts of "functional integration" and "identificational integration." From this approach, some general observations can be made regarding the use of broad conceptual frameworks and classifications to describe experiences of integration, which I describe below before offering a basic characterization of the IoI Framework according to these observations.

To begin with, rigidly defined conceptual frameworks are problematic in application, in that they cannot fully encapsulate particular factors of integration for specific groups into distinct typologies or completely describe relationships between

⁴¹ Due to certain limitations discussed in chapter seven (e.g., sample size and characteristics), the observations presented here are intended as possible implications, with further testing and development required.

factors. Indeed, interview results suggest that many variables overlap and interact across the domains and dimensions of integration. For example, language acquisition and cultural competency were strongly linked to the development of relationships with other local residents (social connections) and access to employment opportunities (functional integration); safety and tolerance were seen as conditions of success in the functional dimension of integration and also key contributors to the subjective sense of belonging. The relationships between these and other factors of integration are difficult to describe and predict, highlighting the multidimensional nature of integration and perhaps explaining some of the controversy surrounding its definition within the immigration debate.

Furthermore, general frameworks and typologies cannot be expected to capture the full variety of variables that comprise integration, including the social and cultural diversity of individuals and groups. As such, the IoI Framework and the arrangement I have proposed here are limited in their ability to uncover all the distinct factors of integration for each case and describe the particular interactions between them. Indeed, after analyzing the data for this thesis, I chose to incorporate the supplementary concepts of “functional integration” and “identificational integration” to further characterize the interview results. Analysis also uncovered several additional themes from the interviews that distinctly influence the experience of integration for Bhutanese refugees, but may not fit comfortably into the proposed framework (e.g., unique functions of age, gender, pre-migration factors, and unmet expectations). Consequently, frameworks should remain flexible and broadly defined when used to observe and describe the experience of

integration for particular groups in order to accommodate unique factors and capture emergent themes.

Another factor that must be considered when applying typologies of integration is the agency and character of refugees as active participants in their own integration. Indeed, Bosswick and Heckmann suggest that we should not overlook the “specific goals, needs, motivations, competencies or problems” of individual refugees or refugee groups (2006, p. 12); this suggestion is supported by interviewee perceptions regarding individual characteristics and attributes as factors of integration. For example, many interviewees proposed that a major component of integration is the choice of individuals to pursue its development. They explained that some refugees simply do not aim for increased integration while others take purposeful steps with integration in mind. Furthermore, interviewees often mentioned an individual “attitude” conducive to integration, which some described as progressive, courteous, resilient, and tolerant. Frameworks of integration cannot be expected to reflect this individual variation and agency, even though such factors may strongly influence integration.

Overall, the IoI Framework provided a flexible structure for this thesis, serving as a blueprint for research design, an important conceptual point of reference, and a basic lens with which to view integration for Bhutanese refugees. Although its descriptive power may be limited, its classifications and dimensions illustrate a logical portrait of integration. Furthermore, when applied to specific groups and contexts, the IoI Framework may capture valuable information that can be used to inform and prescribe policies. Thus, broad typologies of integration may be useful in their application, but

perhaps fall short of distilling a common understanding.⁴² When applying the IoI Framework, it may be important to ask: which conceptual characteristics and arrangements are most helpful for understanding a particular experience of integration? I attempt to focus on this question in the following section.

6.2. Exploring the Proposed Framework and Emerging Themes

The primary research question of this thesis seeks to understand the extent to which prevailing conceptual frameworks explain the experience of integration for refugees. This section addresses the question by exploring elements and implications of the framework of integration proposed in the previous chapter to analyze the interview results. I begin by characterizing and elaborating on the dimensions of integration that comprise the framework—functional dimensions, social connections, and identificational dimensions.⁴³ I then discuss three themes that emerge from the interview results and their placement within the framework, which are the prime functions of social bonds and bridges; the notion of safety, tolerance, and understanding as conditions of integration; and the focus of resettlement policy on self-sufficiency and functional factors of integration.⁴⁴

6.2.1. Characterizing the Dimensions of Integration

The experience of integration for Bhutanese refugees could be conceived in various ways; however, the proposed framework described in chapter five produces some interesting observations. Firstly, many of the components within the functional

⁴² It should be noted that Ager and Strang offer the IoI Framework as a tool for exploring integration and measuring its progress, not as a grand theory for explaining the phenomenon.

⁴³ This framework is not proposed as an alternative to the IoI Framework; instead complimentary concepts have been incorporated to further describe interview results. Indeed, the IoI Framework underpins the following discussion.

⁴⁴ These are not the only themes from the interview results that could be explored; however, they are included here while others are not because of their salience and the limited scope of this thesis.

dimension—employment, housing, education, cultural competency, safety, and stability—are immediate concerns to Bhutanese refugees, essential to self-sufficiency, and foundational to integration. As such, these functional components may be seen as roots, or proximal factors of integration, at least in terms of their basic stability and security in the lives of refugees.⁴⁵ In other words, interviewee perceptions of immediacy may place these factors close to the basic foundation and formation of integration.

Even so, interviewees often related social connections and identificational factors more closely and directly to the concept of integration. Unlike the urgency of self-sufficiency, however, interviewees suggested that many factors strongly associated with social connection and identificational integration have longer-term courses of development, especially social bridges, cultural understanding, and the sense of belonging. As such, these may be viewed as distal factors that typically play more significant roles toward future development of integration beyond initial resettlement and the urgency of functional considerations.

The conception of functional factors as proximal to integration, and social connections and identificational factors as distal to integration, supports the arrangement of dimensions within the proposed framework into a loose hierarchy of integration. In other words, refugees may place immediate priority on stability within the functional dimension of integration and the attainment of self-sufficiency. Once achieved, more space and opportunity may open for social connections, especially the formation of bridges and links. In time, through sustained, positive activity across these dimensions, refugees may eventually develop a sense of belonging, which interviewees often discussed in conjunction with the concept of integration. I do not suggest that integration

⁴⁵ Progress beyond self-sufficiency in the functional dimension may be more distal to integration.

is necessarily sequential, only that the proposed dimensions seem to imply a priority and proximity to integration.

Even so, this conception is challenged by the nonconformance of several observations. For example, many interviewees reported that social bonds with other Bhutanese community members are immediate sources of information and support, suggesting that bonds may be more proximal to integration than other aspects of social connection. Also, the proposed framework technically places homeownership in the functional dimension, even though it is generally not an immediate concern of newly arrived refugees. Furthermore, as suggested in the previous section, there is overlap and interaction between the three dimensions of the proposed framework. For example, social bonds have numerous functional implications, although they exist in the domain of social connections.

These observations highlight the difficulty of fully describing the relationships and connections that animate the process of integration within a defined typology, underlining the need to maintain conceptual flexibility. Although these observations challenge the arrangement of the framework proposed here, I suggest that such limitations do not damage its ability to describe integration for Bhutanese refugees. The concept of proximal and distal factors arranged into a hierarchy of integration is worth consideration, although it requires further development.

6.2.2. The Significance of Social Bonds and Bridges

In the qualitative study on which the IoI Framework is based, Ager and Strang found that “relationships are seen [in the communities studied] as the core mechanism for securing integration” (2004b, p. iv). Indeed, many interviewees generally described

integration as a predominately social phenomenon, supporting Ager and Strang's findings. The most useful tool within the IoI Framework for exploring interview results related to this finding may be Putnam's classification of social connections as bonds, bridges, and links (2000), which I attempt to apply below with particular attention to the possible functions of social bonds and social bridges.

As described in the previous chapter, strong social bonds play an essential role within the Bhutanese refugee community by providing important social, emotional, and even material support. Other possible benefits include access to employment opportunities, housing assistance, language support, and facilitated contact with local institutions, to name a few. All these advantages, amplified by the growing size of the community, create some level of apparent "collective sufficiency," described by both Bhutanese refugees and resettlement professionals.

At the same time, for many Bhutanese interviewees, relationships with other local residents (social bridges) exemplified the concept of integration, even though many did not report a high level of development regarding such relationships. Although not all interviewees directly described the connection between social bridges and integration, it can be inferred through strong interviewee associations among the factors of cultural understanding, social bridges, the sense of belonging, and the feeling of integration.

Considering the strength of social bonds among Bhutanese refugees and the possible connection between social bridges and increased integration, it is reasonable to explore the extent to which social bonding actually impedes the development of social bridges and integration. The majority of interviewees viewed social bonds within the Bhutanese refugee community as advantageous and not harmful to the development of

social bridges, while only a few expressed concern over a negative relationship between bonds and bridges. Findings from Ager and Strang provide evidence to support the majority view of interviewees that strong bonds do not impede bridges (2004b).

Bosswick and Heckmann concur, at least in the short term, although they suggest that prolonged social bonding may isolate members from mainstream society and discourage the development of social bridges (2006).

Atfield et al. (2007) shift this debate regarding the possible effects of social bonds on the development of social bridges toward a different direction, which may be useful here, by applying another element of Putnam's work on social capital (2000) that distinguishes the kind of relationships that form within social bonds and across social bridges. They explain that bonding relationships tend to produce "thick" connections that help refugees "get by," whereas bridging relationships tend to produce "thin" connections that enable refugees to "get ahead" (2007, p. 11). Thus, the collective sufficiency of the Bhutanese refugee community (social bonds) may assist its members in getting by, while relationships with other residents (social bridges) may provide opportunities to get ahead. This conception aligns well with interview results. It depicts bonds and bridges as serving two distinct purposes, both of which may further integration and are not necessarily in competition, perhaps explaining the low level of concern among interviewees over the tendency for close bonds to impede bridges.

In light of the possible connection between social bridges and integration, the barriers to development of social bridges described by interviewees take on additional, problematic significance. These mainly include limited English proficiency, cultural misunderstanding, lack of common activities, and perceptions of prejudice. Thus, for

policymakers interested in furthering integration for refugees, identifying and supporting effective ways to reduce these barriers should become a priority.⁴⁶

6.2.3. Conditions of Integration: Safety, Tolerance, and Understanding

Ager and Strang's formational study of the IoI Framework offers another concept that is particularly relevant to the interview results, which is the effect of relational expectations on the sense of belonging and integration (2004b). I apply this concept below to explore the notion of safety, security, tolerance, and respect as conditions for social connection between Bhutanese refugees and other local residents, and thus conditions for integration.

Ager and Strang (2004b) suggest that a continuum of refugee expectations may exist regarding relationships with local residents, including associated conditions that facilitate fulfillment of such expectations and contribute to positive experiences of integration. They describe the minimum relational expectation of refugees as “no trouble,” dependent on a basic level of local safety and tolerance and indicated by an individual's positive sense of personal security. For Bhutanese refugees living in certain areas, the occurrence of crime, harassment, and discrimination, whether actual or perceived, may prevent the fulfillment of this basic expectation, discouraging social connection with other community members.⁴⁷ If relationships are viewed as crucial to integration, as interview results suggest they are, then the conditions needed to fulfill basic relational expectations—personal safety and security—may be viewed as prerequisites or conditions of integration.

⁴⁶ Some specific recommendations are provided in chapter seven.

⁴⁷ Chapter five provides a discussion of interviewee perceptions regarding crime, harassment, and discrimination.

Although some refugees may be contented simply by the absence of trouble,⁴⁸ others have higher expectations of interaction with local residents further along the relational continuum. Indeed, Ager and Strang describe “mixing” as the expectation of “friendliness, acceptance of difference and diversity, and participation in shared activities” (2004b, p. 5). For many Bhutanese interviewees who expressed these relational expectations, a perceived lack of common activities and cultural understanding among local residents may prevent mixing. Thus, the conditions for fulfillment of expectations related to “mixing” can be viewed as a deeper level of understanding and interaction, the absence of which may limit the formation of social bridges, the ability to “get ahead” through social capital, and the forward progress of integration.

At the far end of Ager and Strang’s continuum is an even higher relational expectation that involves “committed friendships and shared values,” the fulfillment of which is indicated by belonging (2004b, p. 6). Interviewees suggested that many Bhutanese refugees look forward to the sense of belonging, even though it may not be presently widespread within their community. If the conditions of relational expectations described above are not established, a limited sense of belonging among refugees would be understandable. Furthermore, in such a case, one could speculate that the underdevelopment of such conditions may be connected to the short duration of Bhutanese residency in the US or the newness of Pittsburgh as a receiving city for immigrants.

Therefore, considering the association between social bridges, belonging, and integration, Ager and Strang’s work on relational expectations may be particularly useful,

⁴⁸ This may be especially true for those who face barriers to the development of social bridges (e.g., limited English proficiency, cultural conservatism, etc...).

especially when adapted to illustrate the notion of Bhutanese perceptions regarding safety, tolerance, and cultural understanding as necessary conditions for the formation of social connections with local residents.

6.2.4. Resettlement Policy and Functional Integration

While many Bhutanese interviewees described integration as an important social phenomenon, they placed equal and at times even greater importance on functional considerations and the achievement of self-sufficiency. Indeed, the difficulty of establishing oneself and supporting one's family financially and materially weighed on many Bhutanese interviewees. Given these concerns, the current focus of resettlement policy on self-sufficiency and the functional factors of integration, especially employment, housing, and language acquisition, may be well-founded. Even so, in light of the social and relational nature of integration, it seems prudent to ask the following question: Do resettlement policies that focus on economic self-sufficiency actually help refugees become "integrated members of American society" (US Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2013c), as is claimed? If functional factors and self-sufficiency are proximal to integration,⁴⁹ as described above and suggested by many interviewees, then I propose the answer is yes, especially in terms of establishing a stable foundation for further development of integration.

Still, the logical connection between resettlement policy, economic self-sufficiency, and integration is not axiomatic. For example, one can attain economic self-sufficiency without necessarily integrating. Regardless of the logic behind resettlement policy, the rationale for focusing efforts within the functional dimension of integration may also be based on feasibility. Indeed, policymakers traditionally favor functional

⁴⁹ Section 6.2.1 provides a discussion regarding the concept of proximal and distal factors of integration.

forms of support because they are seen as closer to the state's conventional influence and ability to implement (Phillimore & Goodson, 2008).

These observations align well with the view of resettlement professionals that refugee self-sufficiency is essential and foundational to integration, but that achievement of self-sufficiency is not necessarily integration itself. These observations also align well with the concerns of Bhutanese interviewees over functional aspects of integration and their desire to establish themselves and support their families. Thus, resettlement policy seems to be providing vital and relevant services to refugees in areas and forms of support that policymakers perceive as fundamental and feasible. Still, the close association of social connections and identificational factors with the concept of integration suggests that policymakers should also consider ways to improve the local conditions of integration and encourage the formation of social connections, especially since resettlement policies expressly claim to facilitate integration.⁵⁰

6.3. Chapter Summary

This chapter has developed several implications of the framework of integration proposed in chapter five to analyze the interview content, consisting of functional dimensions, social connections, and identificational dimensions. Analysis suggests that factors and dimensions of integration will inevitably overlap; no matter how soundly constructed the framework. Consequently, typologies of integration must avoid rigid definitions and remain flexible to accommodate high levels of variation among refugees and refugee groups. The IoI Framework meets these basic criteria, demonstrated here by

⁵⁰ It is also possible (although not suggested here) that policymakers have co-opted the term "integration," due to its popularity, and that policies do not necessarily align with the concept.

its effective use as a blueprint for research design, an important conceptual point of reference, and a basic lens through which to view integration.

Even so, I found the additional concepts of functional integration and identificational integration useful for guiding a more focused analysis and discussion of the interview results in this and the previous chapter. Combined with the IoI Framework's classification of social connections as bonds, bridges, and links (Ager & Strang, 2004a), these dimensions constitute a mid-level framework of integration, characterized above and summarized here. Firstly, functional factors—employment, housing, education, cultural competency, safety, and stability—are urgent considerations that may be conceived as foundational to self-sufficiency and proximal to integration, even though interviewees saw distinctions between these two concepts. Social connections and identificational factors, on the other hand, elicited a more direct association with integration. Regardless, recognizing that these factors typically require longer-term courses of development, they may be viewed as distal to integration. Arranged and viewed in this way, the proposed framework represents a loose hierarchy, in terms of priority and proximity of factors to the process of integration. It should be noted, however, that this conception is not without flaws, as demonstrated by the nonconformance of social bonds and homeownership to the construct.

In any case, although self-sufficiency and functional considerations were compelling, interviewees saw integration as a largely social phenomenon. As such, applying the IoI Framework's classification of social connections generated some interesting observations. Specifically, social bonds were seen as important sources of information and stabilizing support for Bhutanese refugees, whereas social bridges may

provide additional opportunities for increased integration and advancement. Furthermore, interview results suggest that strong social bonds do not necessarily compete with or impede the development of social bridges; instead, bonds and bridges seem to provide distinct benefits that support integration in different ways.

Another relevant aspect of Ager and Strang's work is its characterization of refugee expectations regarding relationships with other local residents. Interview results suggest that there is likely a correlation between the fulfillment of these relational expectations and increased integration for refugees. Factors facilitating such fulfillment may include the perceived presence of safety, tolerance, and understanding in the local community, whereas factors preventing such fulfillment may include the perceived occurrence of crime, harassment, discrimination, and cultural misunderstanding. The potentially significant role of safety, tolerance, and understanding in fulfilling relational expectations of refugees suggests that these factors may also function as conditions of integration. Consequently, encouraging the establishment of these conditions for Bhutanese refugees should be highly encouraged.

The final topic of the chapter shifted the discussion back to functional dimensions of integration, particularly the emphasis of US resettlement policy on the achievement of economic self-sufficiency. I propose that such an emphasis is likely appropriate given the perceived urgency and priority of self-sufficiency and the notion of functional factors as proximal to integration. In a more pragmatic sense, policymakers may also view the functional domain as an area within the state's conventional influence. Regardless, interview results indicate that social and identificational factors are equally or even more

directly associated with integration, suggesting that a wider scope of policy formation should be encouraged.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I begin by synthesizing the information presented above into a more concise summary of findings and observations. I then propose recommendations for planning and policy, shaped around the interview results and the notion of integration as a predominately social phenomenon. I also suggest additional areas and ideas for research that could shed further light on the findings and observations presented here. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of limitations, validity, and generalizability.

7.1. Thesis Conclusion

This thesis has sought to better understand the concept of integration and its occurrence for Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh through application of prevailing conceptual frameworks, such as the IoI Framework, and similar typologies that attempt to describe and classify integration. Toward this objective, I conducted interviews with Bhutanese refugees and resettlement professionals, largely guided by the factors and dimensions of the IoI Framework, and employed an inductive analysis of the resulting data. Based on this analysis, I proposed a framework of integration consisting of functional dimensions (Zetter et al., 2002), social connections (Ager & Strang, 2004a), and identificational dimensions (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006) in order to facilitate a descriptive and conceptual discussion of the interview content. I also offered general observations regarding the use of typologies in integration research and developed several themes that emerge from the interviews. In addition to these implications, I propose that the collection, presentation, and description of interview data provides its

own value in the form of participant accounts regarding the Bhutanese refugee community in Pittsburgh and the occurrence of integration in general. I attempt to synthesize these contents and provide concluding remarks below.

To begin with, application of the IoI Framework and related sources for this thesis suggest that flexible typologies of integration are useful methods for examining the experience of particular refugee groups. However, flexibility and broad scope also produce descriptive limitations, such as possible inattention to intricate relationships within and across the classifications of integration. Furthermore, models such as the IoI Framework cannot be expected to reflect unique group characteristics and dynamics, which one should seek to understand when exploring experiences of integration.⁵¹ Still, the domains and dimensions of the IoI Framework provide parameters for observing and discussing key factors that comprise the process of integration. In many cases, however, a more complete explanation may require incorporation of supplementary concepts.⁵² This observation does not dilute the value of the IoI Framework; in fact, it may highlight its ability to accommodate particular applications and emergent themes.

Findings suggest that Bhutanese interviewees generally view integration as a largely social phenomenon, connected to relationships within and outside their community, referred to here as social bonds and social bridges, respectively. Regarding bonds, interviewees described strong relationships with other Bhutanese community members produced by shared experiences and cultural disposition that provide social, emotional, informational, and even material support, which can be conceived as a form of

⁵¹ Interviews for this thesis suggest that the unique functions of age, gender, cultural traditions, and pre-arrival expectations are essential to an accurate understanding of Bhutanese integration.

⁵² For example, I have incorporated the concepts of “functional integration” and “identificational integration” for further characterization of the interview results.

“collective sufficiency.” Bridges were more closely related to the concept of integration and the sense of belonging, although accounts did not suggest a high level of development, at least at present. In any case, interviewees did not view strong social bonds as impediments to social bridges; instead, both forms of social connection seem to produce distinct benefits—bonds may help refugees “get by” while bridges help refugees “get ahead.”

However, for social connections to form between Bhutanese refugees and other local residents, certain conditions should exist that align with the basic relational expectations of refugees. The establishment of these conditions, which generally include positive perceptions of safety, tolerance, and understanding within the local community, may create opportunities for social bridges to develop and eventually foster a sense of belonging among refugees, which is strongly connected to increased integration.

Conversely, negative perceptions of safety, tolerance, and understanding are likely to act as barriers to the development of social bridges and belonging, suggesting that location and neighborhood conditions are central to the process of integration. Other barriers to social connection, and thus integration, include limited English proficiency, a lack of common interests and activities, and time constraints associated with work, school, and high levels of family engagement and obligation.

Although social connections and belonging are strongly associated with integration, interviewees described economic self sufficiency and functional considerations as an urgent priority, and perhaps the foundation of higher-level integration processes. Functional variables include employment, housing, language, safety, and cultural competence, to name a few. I propose that these interviewee

perspectives support a characterization of functional factors and self-sufficiency as proximal to integration, while social connections and identificational factors may be viewed as distal to integration, due to the longer-term courses of development associated with social bridges and the subjective sense of belonging. In this arrangement, the three dimensions of the framework proposed here and their related factors may be conceived as a hierarchy, not necessarily in sequential terms, but rather in terms of priority and proximity to the process of integration.⁵³

Thus, the current focus of US resettlement policy on functional factors of integration and the attainment of self-sufficiency may be generally supported by interviewee perceptions of urgency and priority regarding these considerations. Whether or not this policy focus is due to feasibility or intentional planning is a matter for separate discussion. However, since social connections and identificational factors appear to be directly associated with integration, greater attention toward facilitating achievement within these domains would likely be productive. Of course, limited resources and political support are always a constraint.

The themes and concepts selected for discussion here require further development. More attention could be focused on the specific interactions, social processes, and relationships that animate integration, even acknowledging the precarious definitions of integration in the literature. In any case, I hope this thesis reflects the accounts of its participants and that its findings and observations are valuable to local stakeholders, as well as other communities that are presently welcoming some of the 70,000 Bhutanese refugees that have arrived in the US over the last five years.

⁵³ This characterization faces several challenges and anomalies, described in chapter six.

7.2. Recommendations for Planning and Policy

Many recommendations for planning and policy in the area of integration could be developed according to the interview results; however, in order to align this section with the general themes developed above, I focus the following recommendations mainly on the notion of integration as a social phenomenon, offering basic proposals that foster local tolerance and understanding and encourage the formation of relationships within and outside of refugee communities (social bonds and social bridges). This section also includes brief recommendations for applications of the IoI Framework and similar typologies.

Recognizing that most attention to planning and policy for refugee resettlement currently exists at the national level, perhaps due to jurisdictional traditions related to immigration, I propose that policymakers and other stakeholders place a higher priority on organization and planning at the local and regional level. Indeed, as the processes of integration mostly occur and develop in the neighborhoods where refugees resettle, the entities and governments with the greatest knowledge of local conditions should certainly be involved in planning to receive refugees and facilitate their integration.⁵⁴ Specifically, interview results suggest that policymakers and other stakeholders should dedicate additional efforts toward improving local conditions for integration by increasing awareness, tolerance, and understanding within receiving communities and encouraging the formation of social connections between refugees and other residents.

⁵⁴ Although it is difficult to accurately describe the extent to which this type of involvement is actually occurring in Pittsburgh, I speculate from the interviews and my own professional experience that the level of planning and preparation is currently somewhat low, limited mostly to refugee resettlement agencies and several engaged, local institutions and communities.

A variety of approaches toward these local objectives could be developed around the basic goal of increasing contact and communication between refugees and other local residents by developing opportunities for interaction and common activities. Some possibilities include organizing awareness campaigns, “meet and greet” events, community-based informational presentations, local sponsorship or mentoring programs, and displays of refugee culture. Much of the support for these efforts would likely be voluntary; however, national agencies (e.g., Office of Refugee Resettlement), state governments, municipalities and counties, local foundations, faith-based organizations, and other nonprofits should all consider leveraging their resources and capabilities to support these efforts, which would likely require nominal material investment. Existing community assets that could act as natural venues include schools, libraries, and municipal buildings, to name a few.

Interview results suggest that one organization in particular is well-positioned to facilitate such efforts on behalf of Bhutanese refugees—the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh (BCAP). The majority of interviewees expressed an appreciation for BCAP and many reported positive accounts of the organization’s ability not only to provide a vehicle for cultural preservation and celebration, but also a forum for exchange with the local community and advocacy for increased integration among its members. Furthermore, BCAP has demonstrated its ability to improve the collective sufficiency and stability of the Bhutanese community in general. Currently, however, BCAP is limited by a lack of resources and material support. Thus, many of the organizations mentioned above could increase the local impact of BCAP’s efforts by promoting and even investing in its efforts and development.

It might also be worthwhile to establish a local information center, perhaps in the form of a website sponsored by municipal or county government, a refugee resettlement agency, or another nonprofit organization, which provides stories, news, background, and statistics regarding refugees and other immigrants residing in the area. Similar to the approaches above, the objective here would be to raise the level of awareness and advance the local dialogue surrounding refugee resettlement. A central source of accurate information might also improve the ability of local governments, institutions, and communities to plan for and respond to the unique needs of refugee residents.

Additional proposals that would likely promote integration could focus on increasing the local availability of quality, affordable interpretation services and the level of access, responsiveness, and cultural sensitivity among essential institutions, such as schools, hospitals, police departments, social service providers, and public assistance agencies. However, specific recommendations involving program development and institutional adaptation are not goals of this thesis; further research and consideration would certainly be needed to develop such proposals.

Shifting focus to the analysis and observation of integration, I propose that the IoI Framework and related typologies are valuable tools that can be used for gaining a better understanding of integration in general and for particular groups. Considering the descriptive and prescriptive potential of these models, I recommend increased application by researchers, policymakers, and even local program managers who are interested in assessing or planning for refugee resettlement in order to gain valuable information about local refugee communities, observe the occurrence of integration among their members,

establish indicators for evaluating integration, or facilitate further discussion of the concept and its related factors.

As in other sections, I recognize the important role that existing refugee policies currently play in addressing the functional factors of integration and fostering economic self-sufficiency for newly arrived refugees. However, interview results suggest that social connections and identificational factors of integration may not be adequately reflected in resettlement policy. Indeed, the longer-term courses of development associated with these factors do not align well with the dominant short-term focus of policy on establishing self-sufficiency as quickly as possible. In any case, this section has provided some basic ideas for strengthening the social conditions of integration at the local level, where the majority of its processes occur. Regardless of the level where these ideas are developed and incorporated (e.g., national, state, regional, local), various organizations and institutions could certainly be involved in shaping and implementing them.

7.3. Possibilities for Further Research

In order to gain a clearer picture of the concept of integration in general and for Bhutanese refugees in particular, this thesis employed a broad, exploratory research approach rather than focusing more narrowly on one component of integration. Although this wide scope of research may contribute to a general understanding, it also produces more specific topics and areas of research that deserve further attention beyond this thesis, a number of which are described below.⁵⁵ Some of these are directed toward refugee resettlement and integration research in general and others are specifically

⁵⁵ Other possible topics not developed here include the role of ethnic organizations and the extent to which they should be supported; the specific influence of pre-arrival factors on the experience of integration; the extent to which the term “integration” has been co-opted by policymakers; and the extent to which the perceived urgency of self-sufficiency is a product of policy or other factors.

intended for the Bhutanese refugee community or the location of Pittsburgh as a receiving community for refugees.

One potential area of research that clearly emerges from this thesis is the significant influence of receiving communities on the occurrence of integration. For example, one could explore the relationship between the experience of refugees and local characteristics that have been identified here as favorable conditions of integration, including safety, tolerance of diversity, and understanding of other cultures in the neighborhoods of Pittsburgh where refugees are settling.⁵⁶ In a broad sense, this line of research could probe the present level of “immigrant-friendliness” in Pittsburgh and the general attitude of local residents and institutions toward newly arrived immigrants and refugees.

Recognizing that positive relationships between refugees and other local residents (social bridges) may increase integration, it would also be helpful to identify and assess programs and approaches that could effectively facilitate the development of social bridges. I have identified some related recommendations in the section above based on the notion of safety, tolerance, and understanding as favorable conditions of integration, but a more thorough, evidence-based evaluation of efforts to promote local relationship-building could produce promising results for those aiming to encourage the formation social bridges.

Another area of research that deserves further attention is the development and function of strong social bonds within refugee groups, such as the Bhutanese refugee community, which are clearly an essential asset to its members. Interview results suggest that significant shared experiences and cultural disposition may be major contributors to

⁵⁶ It would also be useful to examine practices that may establish or improve these conditions.

the formation of social bonds; however, it would be productive to examine more closely the factors that facilitate social bonding between refugees; the specific kinds and functions of social capital that is produced; the effect of social bonds on the experience of integration; and whether strong social bonds actually impede the development of social bridges. Perhaps one could explore the variation of integration experiences between refugee groups that exhibit different levels of social bonding.

The topic of refugee expectations also materializes from the interview results as an area for potential research. Although they may assume numerous shapes and forms, the two main types of expectations identified in this thesis are those that develop prior to arrival in the US regarding the kind of life that awaits refugees upon resettlement and those concerning the nature of relationships with members of receiving communities. It is not difficult to imagine that the character and degree of these expectations, as well as the conditions that facilitate their fulfillment affect the experience of integration for refugees.

Another potential topic of interest is the concept of “segmented assimilation” (Portes & Zhou, 1993), or in the words of Bosswick and Heckmann, “segmented integration” (2006), which introduces the notion that integration may occur outside of the core institutions and behaviors of society. Using my own observations of data collected for this thesis to speculate, segmented integration may explain some of the oppositional behaviors of Bhutanese youth that interviewees expressed concern over. Indeed, Portes and Zhou specifically focus their discussion of segmented assimilation on social processes related to second generation immigrants (1993). As such, it may be productive to explore the occurrence of segmented integration among Bhutanese youth.

Regarding the concept of integration in general, it would be helpful for researchers and policymakers to gain a better understanding of the relationships, connections, and dependencies between its associated dimensions and factors. I have suggested that increased use of the IoI Framework and similar typologies of integration could contribute to this understanding, although any approach that provides further characterization and clarification of the concept would be welcome. In any case, with the comprehensive view of integration in mind, more focused studies should be conducted on particular interactions and relationships within the realm of integration.

The last possible area of research I would like to suggest is the notion of integration as a “hierarchy” of factors, a term which I have used here in reference to the framework of integration developed in chapters five and six—functional integration, social connections, and identificational integration. A particular area of interest could be the possible dependencies that exist between the dimensions and factors of integration. For example, one might ask: to what extent is identificational integration (perhaps indicated by the sense of belonging) dependent on functional integration, self-sufficiency, and social connectedness? Such lines of inquiry attempt to probe and develop the relationships and connections between the dimensions and factors of integration and contribute to a deeper conceptual understanding of its occurrence.

7.4. Limitations, Validity, and Generalizability

Some clear limitations of this study relate to the size and characteristics of the interview sample. Firstly, the sample does not include members of the receiving community, whose attitudes and behaviors certainly affect the experience of integration. Their perspectives should be taken into consideration for a more complete understanding,

especially as integration is conceived here as a multidirectional process. Also, the sample is not very diverse. For example, elderly members of the Bhutanese community or individuals with a low-level of English proficiency are not included. Finally, several interviewees were actively involved with the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh (BCAP), which may have influenced their view or the nature of their responses. These limitations are mostly related to the limited scope and resources of the research. Regardless, I propose that the size and characteristics of the sample allowed for more in-depth interaction during the interviews and a higher quality of subsequent data analysis. Furthermore, although the sample is not highly diverse, I suggest that enough diversity was incorporated to challenge and balance dominant interviewee perspectives.

The findings of this thesis also face a number of potential validity threats, which I recognize in two broad categories—reflexivity and subjectivity. As for reflexivity, I acknowledge that my professional position in the field may have influenced the topics and nature of discussion with interviewees.⁵⁷ In other words, some participants may have filtered or altered interview responses according to their perception of my affiliation. However, such occurrences were minimally observable, perhaps due to certain research precautions. Namely, I attempted to draw clear distinctions with each interviewee between efforts related to this thesis and other work activities, taking care to explain the general purpose of the research, as well as the concepts of confidentiality and discretion. As for subjectivity, I acknowledge that my background, experience, and conceptual

⁵⁷ I am currently employed by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, working on a project called the Immigrants and Internationals Initiative. In this capacity, I often interact with staff from immigrant and refugee-serving agencies. I have also worked as a case manager for a local resettlement agency. Despite the potential for associated validity threats, I believe my experience benefited the study by providing access and increasing the level of trust with interviewees.

preference for broad, holistic interpretations of integration likely affected the research design and prompted me to focus on certain themes over others.

Another possible validity threat is the potential for general or cultural miscommunication during interviews. One strategy I employed to minimize this threat was to utilize increased “member checking” throughout the interviews by clearly summarizing, restating, and asking for confirmation of important themes. Audio recordings of each interview also allowed for additional opportunities to interact with the original material in the context of its collection. Still, cross-cultural communication is complex and misunderstandings cannot be completely eliminated.

Establishing external generalizability—the universal extension of conclusions to a larger population (Maxwell, 2012)—is not a goal of this thesis; instead, it seeks to gain a deeper, contextual understanding of a social abstraction—integration—as it occurs among a particular group of participants. Nonetheless, some level of internal generalizability—the extension of conclusions to the case as a whole (Maxwell, 2012)—regarding the findings and observations described here may be appropriate. In other words, results and conclusions may be extended to the Bhutanese refugee community of Pittsburgh, albeit with caution and discretion.

Furthermore, the content of this thesis may also be useful to other service providers, receiving communities, and refugees in similar settings, provided that stakeholders apply the findings critically, within the context of the experience at hand. Indeed, the social processes under examination in qualitative studies are likely to exist among other, comparable groups, although their operation may produce different outcomes in different settings (Maxwell, 2012, pp. 137-138).

One last observation regarding validity and generalizability is that many of the conceptual sources for this thesis, such as the IoI Framework, originate from the European context, which understandably presents a different set of social, political, and historical influences. Regardless, I propose that these sources are general and broad enough to accommodate different contextual variables. Indeed, one of the main goals of the IoI Framework is to allow for flexible applications, so that users can shape its typologies to suit specific purposes (Ager & Strang, 2004a, p. 6).

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