Examining the Acculturation Experiences of Syrian Refugee Emerging Adults in the United States of America

Fatemah Alghamdi

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EXAMINING THE ACCULTURATION EXPERIENCES OF SYRIAN REFUGEE EMERGING ADULTS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A Dissertation
Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for
The degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Fatemah Samir Alghamdi

May 2019
EXAMINING THE ACCULTURATION EXPERIENCES OF SYRIAN REFUGEE EMERGING ADULTS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
ABSTRACT

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By
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May 2019

Dissertation Supervised by Dr. Waganesh Zeleke

Refugees are vulnerable populations who experience premigration traumatic events and postmigration acculturation stress. While research on immigrant mental health issues has been plentiful, there has been a clear lacuna of scholarly investigation into the acculturation experiences of Syrian emerging adults, particularly as it relates to the types and dynamics of acculturation behaviors. Acculturation is a factor that predicts emerging adults’ academic and occupational success and their interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships.

This qualitative investigation was conducted within the framework of interpretative phenomenology, which allows for meaningful, organic exploration and description of participants’ stories. Data were collected from 12 emerging adult Syrian refugees who were at least 18 years of age. The participants were recruited in the greater Pittsburgh area via a local organization working with Syrian refugees, in-person conversations, and the use of purposive
and snowball sampling. Semistructured in-depth interviews, observations, and a reflective journal were used for assistance in analyzing the data.

The inquiry examined and presented various theories to offer a comprehensive background related to this topic. Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Human Development (1979) was used to examine the experience of emerging adult refugees and the impact of acculturation on the individual’s microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Additionally, Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) was used as a theoretical framework to understand and analyze the data collected. IPA aims to understand how people create meaning from these experiences.

After analyzing the emergent themes resulting from the data collection process, the findings suggested that the acculturation behavior of Syrian emerging adult refugees is shaped by their encounters before, during, and after refugee settlement. Their acculturation behavior appears to be described better as "dynamic". The most ubiquitous dynamic acculturation behavior was characterized by constant progress and effective change, promoting positive personality growth among refugees and immigrants. Dynamic acculturation provides a broader set of strategies utilized by an individual. The findings also indicated that the participants’ interpersonal skills and community support were factors that promote health dynamic acculturation behavior. The data indicated that interpersonal skills, such as holding positive attitudes, resilience, self-learning, and social skills, were used to facilitate dynamic acculturation. The community support that was provided by the family, neighbors, friends, teachers, and coworkers promoted dynamic acculturation among emerging adult Syrian refugees.

These exploratory research findings have suggested multiple factors that affect how emerging adult Syrian refugees developed acculturation behaviors and viewed the process of
their acculturation to American culture. This inquiry aimed to encapsulate how past and present traumas have been integrated into the lived experiences of Syrian emerging adults and to illuminate the effects of traumatic experiences on their acculturation behaviors. The current research indicated that trauma effects are transmitted via the acculturation process, which become manifested in the emerging adults’ acculturation behaviors and which can be better understood within the Syrian community cultural context. Notably, risk and protective factors were identified, as well as a commonly incorporated coping mechanism, within the Syrian emerging adult acculturation experience, which could prove particularly useful for counselors who work with clients in this population.

Keywords
Dynamic Acculturation, Trauma, Resilience, Interpersonal Skills, Community Support.
DEDICATION

To Angelina Jolie, who saved Syrian refugees, including the families under the care of Ansar of Pittsburgh
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like first to thank Allah, who empowers me to dedicate my time and effort to the service of all people. Being a counselor and a university teacher was the highest honor that Allah has given me to serve all people. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge all of the people who aided me through this journey, which would have been impossible to accomplish without their support. Thank you to my committee members, who dedicated their time and effort to supporting me and provided professional feedback for my work. I truly appreciate your accommodation to meeting my due dates and your cultural awareness. It has been an honor to work with you.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The number of refugees and migrants in the US has increased considerably in recent decades, and there are currently more people living outside of their countries of birth than at any other time in history (Essea, Medianu, Hamilton, & Lapshina, 2015). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2015) reported that more than 200 million individuals have migrated from their native countries. People frequently migrate in search of food, lodging, freedom, and security (IOM, 2015). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2018), nearly 68 million individuals worldwide have been involuntary removed from their homes; more than 25 million of these individuals are refugees, and the majority are younger than 18 years old. The UN (2018) reported that, since 2011, more than 11 million individuals have escaped the conflict in Syria to live in neighboring countries, such as Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan, where millions of Syrian refugees have been displaced. Furthermore, approximately one million Syrians have arrived in Europe as asylum seekers or refugees.

The number of Syrian refugees has become a major focus of the US Refugee Administration over the last ten years. For example, Felter and McBride (2017) reported that, in 1990, the United States admitted more than 120,000 refugees, but only 85,000 refugees were admitted in 2016. A total of 33,000 were from Syria (Connor, 2018). Of the Syrian refugees who were admitted to the US since the beginning of the civil war, 72% of the refugees were women and children younger than the age of 14 years old (US Census Bureau, 2015). Emerging adults constitute an important refugee group and represent one of the fastest growing sectors of the population in several Western countries (Hernandez, 2012). This population is a significant
source of labor in many Western countries because of falling fertility rates and the aging of the population (National Academics of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017). For instance, refugees account for approximately 18% of the population of Erie, which is a city located in northwestern Pennsylvania. This proportion is relatively significant because the refugees contribute to Erie’s financial development and diversity enrichment (Jordan, 2017).

Zong (2015) reported that the Migration Policy Institute resettles Syrian refugees in 36 states, including California, Texas, Michigan and Pennsylvania. The PennLive website (2017) reported that Pennsylvania has resettled 1,204 Syrian refugees. Among the cities in Pennsylvania, Erie (363), Philadelphia (289), and Pittsburgh (222) have high rates of Syrian refugees compared to other cities, such as Harrisburg and Lancaster.

Syrian refugees experience several challenges that can be categorized into the following five major themes: health, education, unemployment, safety, and social integration (Salah, Pentland, Lepri, Letouze, Vinck, de Montjoye, Dong, & Dagdelen, 2018). Another study suggested that the incidence of anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) increased among Syrian refugee children after two years of resettlement in the US, which could negatively impact their mental health throughout their lives (Javanbakht, Rosenberg, Haddad, & Arfken, 2018). To the best of my knowledge, no previous investigation has explored Syrian refugee emerging adults who resettled in the US. Therefore, Syrian refugee emerging adults represent the core of this research because they have experienced a multitude of life stressors: premigration war, transition stressors, postmigration acculturation and adjustment issues.

Leaving one’s home country and settling in a new city and country is a daunting task that requires the refugee emerging adult to learn and adapt behaviorally, psychologically, and socially. To settle and move forward, these emerging adults must acculturate to the values,
lifestyle and culture of the dominant culture. Acculturation occurs in the context of settling into and adjusting to a new place and new culture.

Acculturation is a process involving the psychological, social and cultural engagement of an individual in another culture and learning about the values and lifestyle of the mainstream culture while simultaneously maintaining one’s native culture. Acculturation refers to the cultural changes that result from an encounter with a different culture because of migration (Berry & Sam, 2016). The anthropologists Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) introduced and defined the term “acculturation” as follows: “Acculturation represents the phenomenon that results when a group of individuals with different cultures comes into continuous first-hand contact, leading to subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (p. 149). Bailey (1937) elaborated that acculturation requires both contact between two or more autonomous cultures and a change in one culture as a result of this contact. Additionally, one culture must be that of a dominant group, emphasizing the flaws in the culture of the weaker group (Bailey, 1937). Berry (1976) mentioned that the eventual accommodation of the groups in contact is not always assimilation. Individuals can develop other positive outcomes, relationships, and adaptations.

Studies have increasingly highlighted the positive outcomes of acculturation. Positive acculturation results in a clear sense of personal identity and cultural belonging. Berry and Sam (1997) stated that acculturation is positively associated with psychological well-being, high self-esteem, and the achievement of cultural and social competencies. Individuals with unhealthy acculturation strategies are more likely to experience several mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, identity confusion, psychosomatic symptoms, and anomie (Berry & Sam, 1997; Phinney, 1998; Williams & Berry, 1991). Therefore, acculturation is an important
component of immigrant well-being that must be emphasized and addressed in counseling research.

The need for acculturation among immigrants and refugees has emerged as a topic in counseling since the 1980s (Yoon, Langrehr, & Ong, 2011). Scientific investigators have highlighted that the acculturation strategies of assimilation and separation are associated with a high level of acculturative stress and a higher risk of psychological maladjustment (Hwang, Chun, Takeuchi, Myers, & Siddarth, 2005). Furthermore, low self-worth, a poor sense of belonging, and low overall life satisfaction are linked to immigration-related acculturative stressors, such as language problems, a lack of social support, confused gender roles and marriage-family conflicts (Hans, 2001). Currently, refugee youth and families are considered among the top clinical populations with mental health issues.

Most studies investigating the acculturation behaviors of immigrants and refugees have focused on measuring the level of acculturation and its correlation with immigrant well-being (Bartlett, Mendenhall, Ghaffar-Kucher, 2017; Buchanan, Abu-Rayya, Kashima, Paxton, 2017; Li & Guo, 2018; Tozer, Khawaja & Schweitzer, 2018). However, research examining the life experiences of Syrian refugee emerging adults has been limited. This research aimed to fill this gap by investigating the experience of Syrian refugee emerging adults who reside in Pittsburgh, PA, which is the city that has welcomed the most Syrian refugees in the state of Pennsylvania. As scholars, we have a moral, social, and professional responsibility to study such issues and to identify possible means of intervention. Therefore, the adjustment and acculturation behaviors of this population are concerns for professionals, particularly those in helping professions.

For many emerging adults worldwide, the years between their late teens and their twenties are important and are associated with frequent changes, including educational,
occupational, and social-emotional achievements (Chisholm & Hurrelmann, 1995). Several theories have indicated the importance of the age range (late teens to twenties) of the participants in this study. Erikson’s psychosocial development theory (1968) indicates that, during the stage of Identity vs. Role Confusion, adolescents aged thirteen to nineteen years old form their identities and must explore and anticipate the future. Additionally, Intimacy vs. Isolation is the first of stage of adulthood (from twenty to thirty-five years of age); during this stage, people form intimate relationships with other people, and the failure to achieve love generates feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006) reported that immigrant emerging adults might have a higher rate of mental health issues and acculturative stress than older immigrants. The literature has shown that immigrant emerging adults experience several complex challenges as they resettle in host countries (Reitz, Motti-Stefanidi, & Asendorpf, 2014). For instance, newcomers face identity confusion (Strohmeier & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2008), vocational issues (Sinacore, Park-Saltzman, Mikhail, & Wada, 2011), and issues with adaptation to new environments (Gitlin, Buendia, Crosland, & Doumbia, 2003). Thus, understanding immigrants’ acculturation behavior is essential for providing holistic mental health services via counseling.

Trauma and grief have been emphasized in refugee and immigrant studies. Intense traumatic events, such as witnessing the homicide of family and friends, sexual abuse, rape, and persecution, have been very frequently reported by refugees (Schwitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006). According to Fazel, Wheeler and Danesh (2005), 9% of adult refugees and 11% of child refugees who have resettled in Western countries reported symptoms related to PTSD. During the premigration phase, refugees witness mass murders and live with multiple losses in their countries of origin. These difficult experiences increase the likelihood of developing PTSD.
Schweitzer, Brough, Vromans, and Asic-Kobe (2011) revealed that postmigration living challenges have an influence equivalent to that of traumatic events in predicting trauma symptoms in refugees.

According to Ainslie (1998), during their journey to host countries, immigrants experience several losses, such as separation from extended family and friends; differences in diet, social surroundings, and places of worship; and changes in climate. Thus, refugees lose both the sense of their culture and familiar people and places. The acquisition of a new language and the loss of the native language represent further losses for refugees and immigrants whose native language differs from that of the host county (Ainsle, Harlem, Tummala-Narra, Barbanel, & Ruth, 2013). Thus, refugees lose their old self, which is left behind “at home”, causing grief and stress. Furthermore, as there is a positive association between acculturation and psychological well-being, counseling services must facilitate an integration strategy of acculturation. This study explored the experience of Syrian refugee emerging adults to better understand their lived experience, which could be helpful in designing interventions to foster positive acculturation behavior among this population.

I became motivated to focus on the acculturation behaviors of Syrian refugee emerging adults while performing volunteer work at Ansar of Pittsburgh, a nonprofit organization, as a bilingual counselor providing support and counseling to refugee families who resettled in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, from 2016 to 2018. One of the significant issues that attracted my attention was the increased level of stress among parents because of their children’s acculturation behaviors. Thus, I became interested in studying acculturation among emerging adults and the differences between emerging adults and their parents.
Statement of the Problem and Research Question

Statement of the Problem

Studies of Syrian refugee issues in North America have been limited. Several researchers have reported that Syrian refugees in Turkey suffer from the following major mental health issues: major depressive disorder (22.5%), adjustment disorder (20%), and PTSD (15%) (Al-Nuaimi, Aldandashi, Easa, & Saqqur, 2018; Alpak et al., 2015; Chung et al., 2017). Research studies investigating Syrian refugee emerging adults in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, have been significantly lacking. Magazines and newsletters represent the only information resource drawing attention to Syrian refugees. The Public Sources News St-Esprit (2017) interviewed a Syrian family with children who resettled in the Pittsburgh area, and these emerging adults reported several issues related to academics and adjustment in schools.

In addition, the Refugee Resettlement Project (2018) listed the services provided to Syrian refugees in West Chester, PA, including housing, employment, transportation, English as a Second Language (ESL) training, and clothing. Crain’s Chicago Business reported that a mentoring program and community support have helped Syrian refugees to resettle in Chicago (Ruby, 2017). Another agency in Pennsylvania, the Catholic Charities Diocese of Harrisburg (2018), helps refugees with their basic needs, including housing, job placement, ESL, and connection with refugee communities. However, these programs do not provide acculturation workshops for Syrian refugee emerging adults.

Ansar of Pittsburgh (2018) has established a refugee youth program that focuses on empowering emerging adults to become positive, active members and to give back to society. Moreover, the Jewish Employment and Vocational Service (JEVS) provides acculturation
workshops for newcomers to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to help them to understand American culture and history and to prepare them to become positive contributors to the workforce (JEVS, 2018). Therefore, Ansar of Pittsburgh is the only program that focuses on Syrian refugee emerging adults, while the JEVS program fosters acculturation among adult refugees from different backgrounds.

The purpose of this study was to illuminate the lived experience of acculturation among Syrian refugee emerging adults in the US. In addition, the United States is one of the few countries worldwide to admit refugees from all over the world, including Syrian refugees. Because the issue of Syrian refugees is relatively recent, only a limited number of studies have focused on Syrian refugee emerging adults in North America.

Acculturation has been investigated among immigrants and refugees; however, studies investigating this phenomenon among emerging adults have been lacking (Aronowitz, 1984; Kuo, 2013). Watenpaug and Fricke (2013) reported that there are approximately three million Syrian refugees in Turkey and that more than 10% of this population is between 18 and 22 years of age. Another study indicated that Syrian university-aged emerging adults face the following three major challenges: difficulties in learning foreign languages and the complexity of the educational system (Watenpaug & Fricke, 2013); financial problems in supporting themselves and their families (Dorman, 2014); and alterations in their social roles and a sense of insecurity (Harvey, Garwood, & El-Masri, 2013).

Karipek (2017) asserted that less attention has been paid to the experience of Syrian university-aged adults undergoing acculturation in Turkey. Recent research has proposed that language acquisition, cultural distance, ethnic identity, and a desire to return to the homeland are factors contributing to acculturation among Syrian refugees in Turkey (Karipek, 2017).
However, this research did not focus on acculturation behavior among the participants to understand the strategies used to minimize the gap between their culture and Turkish culture. Additionally, the researcher did not include the similarities between the Syrian and Turkish cultures, such as religion and proximity between the two countries, which contribute to reducing postmigration stress (Orosa, Brune, Huter, Fischer-Ortman, & Haasen, 2011). Moreover, a study exploring Syrian refugees’ coping skills in Jordan reported that more than 63% of Syrian refugees use avoidance and withdrawal from the host community as coping strategies (Alzoubi, Al-Smadi, & Gougazeh, 2017). Utilizing unhealthy coping strategies such as avoidance negatively impacts acculturation to the host country in emerging adult refugees.

This research could contribute to the literature by determining how counselors can become involved in preventing or addressing the mental health and adjustment issues of refugee emerging adults that might develop as a result of the failure to positively acculturate to the dominant culture. I strongly believe that this research is justifiable; hence, spending time, effort and resources on this research is warranted to obtain a detailed understanding of the lived experiences of refugee emerging adults with acculturation and adjustment, their experience of leaving their home countries and settling in Pittsburgh, and their evaluation of the support provided by the system and society in the US, as well as to determine what shapes their experiences, how their past and present experiences are interconnected, and what strategies or means that they used to survive as refugees and develop positive acculturation behaviors.

**Research Questions**

Consistent with the above statement of the problem, the following research questions were formulated to guide this study.
Primary Research Question

What are the lived and living experiences of Syrian refugee emerging adults related to learning and the acculturation process in the United States?

Secondary Questions

1. What are the demographic characteristics of Syrian refugee emerging adults?

2. What are the major push-pull factors that cause emerging adults to become refugees?

3. How do Syrian refugee emerging adults experience life during their travels to, arrival to and stays in the US?

4. What strategies do Syrian refugee emerging adults use to develop acculturation behaviors?

5. How are these emerging adults’ daily activities shaped and impacted by their levels of acculturation?

6. How do Syrian refugee emerging adults evaluate the support that they receive from the system and society to adjust and acculturate in the US?

Study Objectives

1. To explore the demographic characteristics of Syrian refugee emerging adults

2. To understand how Syrian refugee emerging adults experience life during their travel to, arrival to and stay in the US

3. To explore the strategies used by Syrian refugee emerging adults to develop acculturation behaviors
4. To emphasize the differences in acculturation between Syrian refugee emerging adults and their families

**Significance of the Study**

Refugees are vulnerable populations who experience premigration traumatic events and postmigration acculturation stress. Women and children have an increased vulnerability to mental health issues as a result of traumatic events, such as war. To provide appropriate support to these populations, it is necessary to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences by designing research studies that emphasize their issues and needs. Refugees and immigrants have participated in only a limited number of studies.

This research has significance for counselors. The importance of this research lies in its focus on psychological trauma and acculturation stressors. Additionally, this study aims to show the value of psychological support for learning coping skills and for behavioral acculturation in minimizing the effects of trauma after war. Moreover, this research is significant because it reviews stressful experiences and stress related to acculturation among emerging adults and draws attention to counseling interventions, cultural awareness, and ethical considerations in providing therapy for refugee populations and the research field. Additionally, this investigation aims to minimize the gap between emerging adults and their families based on their acculturation levels. It is as crucial for counselors as it is for policymakers to perform empirical research, develop adequate research instruments, adjust counseling theories, and analyze refugees. This research is beneficial to policymakers who require an in-depth understanding of refugees’ needs to advocate for them. Moreover, this research is significant because it reports acculturation stressors among emerging adults, which could be beneficial for Syrian refugee emerging adults in their host countries.
This study aims to highlight acculturation behaviors among Syrian refugee emerging adults in the US. Several studies have addressed mental health issues among Syrian refugees, but no studies have yet explored acculturation among emerging adults. Acculturation is a factor that predicts emerging adults’ academic and occupational success and their interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. Additionally, this study could be beneficial for counselors and teachers who directly interact with refugees.

**Theoretical Foundation of the Study: Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model**

Regarding Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Human Development, since the major goal of this study is to examine the experience of refugee emerging adults, it is vitally important to use an ecological model to view the lived experiences of emerging adults. Thus, Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Human Development was used to understand the research subjects’ lived experience. Bronfenbrenner (1979) introduced the Bioecological Model of Human Development, highlighting the significant impact of the environment on an individual’s behavior. Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined development as the change that occurs after an individual perceives and interacts with the environment. Bronfenbrenner also described ecological transitions in which individuals’ roles impact the environment, and changes in these roles are considered part of human development.

Bronfenbrenner (2004) addressed the interconnected systems of human development in the bioecological model. First, the microsystem is the immediate environment, composed of interpersonal relationships, roles, family, and peers. The mesosystem represents the links among microsystems. The exosystem includes the environmental systems that indirectly impact the individual’s development, such as his/her community and neighbors. The macrosystem consists of the societal schema of a specific culture, its attitudes toward different nationalities and its
governing political system. The chronosystem is defined as the longitudinal perspective of the elements within the system.

In this research, acculturation has been defined as an interaction with a new culture that causes changes in refugees’ personalities. Bronfenbrenner also described two factors that result from the interaction between an individual and a negative environment; he referred to these factors as risk factors and protective factors. The absence of protective factors increases the likelihood of an interruption in normal development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). Risk factors are factors that might hinder the healthy development of an individual, and protective factors are factors that protect individuals against the impact of risk factors (Lynch & Levers, 2007). Bronfenbrenner’s (2004) ecological model was used in this research to structure Syrian refugees’ lived experiences of acculturation in the United States. Syrian refugees have recently arrived in the United States, and their acculturation has been influenced at all bioecological levels.

**Theoretical Framework of the Research Method: Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA)**

Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) was used as the framework to understand and analyze the data collected in this study. IPA was introduced as a qualitative research approach that concentrates on examining individuals’ lived experiences and how people create meaning from these experiences (Smith, 1994). Moreover, IPA is well established in health psychology as a means of understanding how individuals make sense of their lived experiences of illness, and it is a developing research method in counseling, clinical, and social psychology (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Smith and Osborn (2007) proposed the following four major research analysis stages, which included seven embedded substeps.
1. Searching for Themes in the First Case – This stage involves reading and rereading transcripts and making meaningful notes. The researcher then transforms the initial notes into themes that invoke more psychological terminology. The number of emerging themes reflects the richness of the data.

2. Connecting the Themes – During this stage, the researcher makes sense of the connections among the themes that can either be clustered or emerge as superordinate concepts. Then, the researcher creates a table of the themes, identifies the clusters and names the superordinate themes.

3. Continuing Analysis of Other Cases – During stage 3, the researcher proceeds to the following case’s transcript and identifies the themes. During this stage, the researcher has the following two options: a) use the themes and table from the first transcript to orient the subsequent analysis; or b) work on the second transcript from scratch without utilizing the themes from the first transcript. The researcher then identifies repeating patterns across the cases and constructs a final table illustrating the superordinate themes.

4. Writing – During this final stage, the researcher translates the themes into a narrative account by reconstructing the final themes into meaningful statements that reflect the participants’ lived experiences.

**Delimitation and Limitation of the Study**

This study primarily focused on the experiences of Syrian refugee emerging adults aged between 18 and 25 years old regardless of their religion, gender, and educational background. This study utilized a qualitative inquiry involving in-depth interviews with emerging adults. In a qualitative study, the research sample selection was purposeful (Patton, 2002). The sample was
selected from a population that the researcher wishes to understand or describe. Merriam (1998) referred to this type of sampling as purposive sampling or judgment sampling (Gay, Mills, & Airsasian, 2006). Thus, to understand acculturation among Syrian refugee emerging adults in the United States, I utilized purposeful selection for participant recruitment.

The data collection in this study was limited to emerging adults under the care of Ansar of Pittsburgh, which is a nonprofit organization that helps refugees to resettle in the United States. Ansar provides services and advocates for immigrants. The organization also provides workshops to empower emerging immigrants to reach their potential. Ansar plays a significant role in addressing immigrants’ academic needs and their career development. I have a prior working relationship with Ansar of Pittsburgh through volunteering, and as a result of this working relationship, Ansar of Pittsburgh facilitated the recruitment of the research subjects.

Realizing the limitations of a study is a way to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the data (Glesne, 2006). The following limitations could impact the present study: generalizability, purposeful sampling, and the trust concerns of the participants.

The main concern about this qualitative investigation was its lack of generalizability because this research aims to highlight the acculturation process specifically among emerging adult Syrian refugees. Purposeful sampling was utilized in this research, and the sample size was relatively small, which could impact the applicability of the findings to all refugees and immigrants from different backgrounds. Additionally, the sampling criteria and demographic data contributed to the generalizability limitation because the participants shared the same geographic location (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania). Therefore, the results of this qualitative study are intended to be transferable but not generalizable.
Refugees who have resettled in a new host country experience trust issues because of the traumatic and fearful events that they have experienced (Yu & Liu, 1986). Therefore, I used several strategies to foster trust. First, I utilized my counseling skills to build a rapport with the participants to foster trust. Second, I contacted the heads of the households before the interviews and welcomed them to join the discussions at any point, which was significant to building the participants’ trust during the interviews. Additionally, the research purpose, confidentiality, and data storage were explained in detail to the study subjects. Moreover, the participants utilized pseudonyms to protect their identities. Therefore, participant trust was fundamental to be achieved to collect valid data in this research.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The numbers of refugees and migrants have increased considerably in recent decades. Millions of refugees worldwide have fled life-threatening incidents to safer environments. One of the most recent incidents was the Syrian civil war, which has impacted millions of women’s and children’s physical and psychological well-being. The Syrian refugees fled the civil war to neighboring countries to seek safety in refugee camps. The children who witnessed the trauma of the war became emerging adults who have acculturated in new home countries, including the US. The cultural differences and the nature of the society have caused stress to Syrian refugees who came to the US to seek lives worth living. Therefore, they needed to acculturate with US culture to reduce transitional stress and premigration trauma.

Acculturation consists of the cultural changes that result from an encounter with a different culture because of migration. Several studies have indicated the positive outcomes of acculturation on mental health, personality, and achievement. The need for acculturation is significant among refugee populations. There is a lack of acculturation programs provided by the
organizations that aid refugees during their acculturation process. The limitations of these programs could cause several stressors among refugees because of information limitations. Fostering acculturation among refugees promotes their well-being and minimizes premigration trauma and grief. Furthermore, acculturation is a factor that predicts emerging adults’ academic and occupational success and their interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships.

The purpose of the present study was to illuminate the lived experience of acculturation among Syrian refugee emerging adults in the US. The phenomenon of acculturation has been investigated in several previous studies. However, acculturation among emerging adult Syrian refugees has yet not been studied. The reason why this age range was the focus of this work is because they have witnessed the civil war in Syria and experienced acculturation stressors in the US. In addition, there have been limited numbers of studies emphasizing acculturation among emerging adults in the US.

The present research is significant because it provides a necessary in-depth understanding of the refugees’ experiences. Additionally, this research could be beneficial for counselors due to the nature of the phenomenon researched to highlight the importance of psychological trauma and acculturation stressors. Additionally, this study aimed to show the value of psychological support in learning coping skills and behavioral acculturation to minimize the effects of trauma after war.

The theoretical framework focused on two main theories. First, Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Human Development (1979) was used to examine the experiences of trauma and acculturation of the emerging adult refugees according to the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. This model emphasizes the significant impact of the environment on an individual’s behavior and the changes that occur during
interaction with the environment. The Bioecological Model of Human Development (1979) introduces risk and protective factors: risk factors hinder the healthy development of an individual, and protective factors are the factors that protect individuals against the impact of risk factors. This model and acculturation are aligned because both focus on interaction with a new culture and environment, causing changes in the refugees’ personalities and behaviors.

The second theoretical framework was Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA), which was used to understand and analyze the data collected from the informants who created meaning from their experiences. IPA is a developing research method in counseling, clinical, and social psychology that aims to promote in-depth understanding of the researcher in terms of how the participants’ make sense of their experiences. There are four major steps in IPA research: searching for themes, connecting themes, continuing analysis of other cases, and writing the narrative.

The primary limitations of the present research are similar to those of other qualitative studies: purposeful sampling was used, and the sample size was relatively small. The data collection was limited to 12 emerging adults under the care of Ansar of Pittsburgh, a nonprofit organization that helps refugees to resettle in the United States. Therefore, the generalizability, purposeful sampling, and trust concerns of the participants were major limitations of the present research. Additionally, the sampling criteria and demographic data contributed to the generalizability limitation because the participants shared the same geographical location (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania). Therefore, the results of this qualitative study are intended to be transferable but not generalizable. Moreover, building a trusting rapport with the participants was a concern. However, it was not an issue because of the utilization of several strategies, such as contacting the heads of households and obtaining their initial consent, explaining in detail the
research purpose, confidentiality, and data storage, and utilizing pseudonyms to protect the participants’ confidentiality.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Acculturation**

Acculturation refers to the cultural changes that occur between two or more cultural systems (The Social Sciences Research Council, 1954).

**Behavioral Acculturation**

Behavioral acculturation refers to the actual acts performed, which are assumed to represent acculturation outcomes. External adjustment is the result of an individual’s interaction with the dominant culture and involves acquiring culturally appropriate skills and knowledge (Clenk & Van de Vijver, 2011).

**Psychological Acculturation**

Psychological acculturation refers to internal adjustment, including well-being, mental health, and satisfaction with life in a new culture (Clenk & Van de Vijver, 2011).

**Refugees**

Refugees are individuals who escaped life-threatening incidents and might never return to their original country (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2008).

**Emerging Adulthood**

Emerging adulthood is the developmental stage between the end of adolescence and the adulthood phase (18 to 25 years old).
Syrian Refugee Emerging Adults

Syrian refugee emerging adults are individuals aged 18 to 25 years old who were born in Syria, escaped the civil war in Syria, and resettled in the United States or other Western countries.

Organization of the Dissertation

This study has been organized into five chapters. Chapter I explores the background of the study and provides a historical framework for the statement of the problem to be examined. Additionally, a theoretical and conceptual framework is presented, along with a statement on the importance of the study and a definition of the terms used throughout the study. Chapter II examines the relevant literature, including a review of the existing work on the politics of refugees; the processes of migration and acculturation; and individual challenges, educational challenges, employment challenges, familial challenges, and systemic level challenges.

Moreover, Chapter II provides the theoretical and conceptual framework, including the Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model, Erikson’s psychosocial developmental theory, and emerging adulthood theory. Chapter III includes an overview of the dissertation’s research design, methods, and sample, and it describes the conceptual and theoretical frameworks incorporated, as well as the rationale for choosing the methodology. A presentation of the research design, data analysis, ethical considerations regarding participants, and limitations and delimitations of the study has also been included.

Chapter IV includes my exploratory findings of the themes generated from in-depth interviews related to the theoretical frameworks that I found most appropriate in rendering explicit the acculturation experiences of the participants. In addition, I discuss the factors that
influence Syrian emerging adult refugees' acculturation behaviors. Finally, I provide information that will assist in breaking through the social and institutional barriers that prevent seeking help for the effects of acculturation issues, particularly among Syrian emerging adult refugees.

Chapter V presents an overview of my research and a discussion of the major findings presented using Developmental Theory, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Bioecological Model of Human Development and Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis to delineate the themes of the interviews. Next, I describe the implications and how my research can apply practically to counseling and other mental health professions. The chapter concludes with a description of the limitations of the study, future research considerations, research questions generated by the study, the contributions of this study to the literature, and a summary.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

“Refugees live in a divided world between countries in which they cannot live and countries which they may not enter”.

Moorehead, 2005

This goal of this dissertation was to examine the acculturation experiences of emerging adult Syrian refugees in the US. As reviews of previous studies are necessary for orderly knowledge building, the purpose of this chapter is to review the literature in greater breadth and depth to obtain a clear understanding of the dynamics of refugees, their politics and the processes and effects of acculturation behaviors in the adjustments of refugee emerging adults. The first section of this chapter aims to provide an in-depth understanding of refugees, the politics of the refugee process, and the push-and-pull factors of immigration based on previous studies. Moreover, the second section emphasizes the following three major processes of refugees and the major issues that occur during each stage: premigration, transition, and postmigration. Then, the definition, types and processes of acculturation are explained.

The third section of this chapter focuses on the challenges experienced by refugee emerging adults in a new country. These challenges can be divided into the following three areas: individual challenges, familial challenges, and systematic challenge. In the discussion regarding personal challenges, I discuss the individual obstacles that impact refugee emerging adults’ acculturation, such as mental health, identity, gender roles, education, and employment challenges. Familial challenges, such as family roles, divorce, and intimate partner violence, are significant because they impact individual challenges.
The fourth section is related to the theoretical and conceptual framework. To understand refugee emerging adults’ needs and acculturation challenges, the present study utilized the following primary theories: Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Human Development and Erickson’s Psychosocial Model. Finally, this chapter provides a discussion of interventions and the implications of previous research.

**Previous Research and Literature on Refugee and Acculturation Behavior**

**Defining Refugees**

The UN Refugee Agency defines refugees as people who crossed an international border because of violent conflicts and war to find safety in another country (UNHCR, 2018). Refugees are unwilling to return to their homeland because of fear of being persecuted for their race, religion, nationality, or political opinion (The Refugee Convention, 1951).

Under the law, the term “refugee” differs from “asylum seeker”, although these terms are often used interchangeably. Asylum seekers are individuals who seek protection as refugees, but their claim of refugee status has not yet been assessed (Refugee council of Australia, 2016). In contrast to refugees, migrants seek information about their new homes, plan their travel, say goodbye to the important people in their lives, and decide to leave their countries to seek a better life in another country (Refugee council of Australia, 2016). However, refugees leave their homelands to seek safety, rather than for economic reasons.

**Politics of Refugees**

The number of migrants has significantly increased over past decades, with more people living outside their countries of birth than ever before (Essea, Medianu, Hamilton, & Lapshina, 2015). The International Organization for Migration (2009) reported that more than 200 million
individuals have migrated from their countries of origin. People leave their countries for various reasons, such as economic disparities, civil and international conflicts, communication and transportation networks, and joining the mobile work force (International Organization for Migration, 2009). Recently, the civil war in Syria has displaced approximately five million people; many of these individuals have experienced trauma and difficult life situations, such as overpopulated camps that could not provide them with basic needs (UNHCR, 2017). In contrast to immigrants who move to achieve a better economic status, refugees who move to escape life-threatening incidents might never return to their original countries (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2008). The current crisis in Syria affects not only Syrians but also all other refugees who resettled in Syria, such as Iraqi refugees (UNHCR, 2012).

In early 2011, protests occurred against the Syrian regime after police officers arrested emerging adults for spraying graffiti on walls (Ismail, 2011). Rebel groups formed to defend against the Syrian regime, and this defense was transformed into a civil war that was responsible for the deaths of more than 400,000 individuals (Ibrahim, 2017). As a result of the civil war, 11 million individuals have escaped the conflict in Syria since 2011 to live in neighboring countries, such as Turkey (3 million), Lebanon (one million), Egypt (122,000), Iraq (242,000) and Jordan (660,000), and millions of Syrian refugees have been displaced (UN, 2018; World vision, 2017).

Syrian refugees escaped the civil war, which was responsible for the loss of thousands of lives and displaced millions of people. These refugees lost their homes, businesses, properties, families and friends. Syrian refugees are more likely to be viewed as a threat because they originate from a war zone (Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson, 2012) that impacted their economic, educational, and health statuses (Koca, 2016).
Processes of Immigration/Refugees

Stages of Migration

The experience of being a refugee involves a multitude of stressful incidents. Indeed, studies have highlighted the intense experiences associated with migrating to another country, including trauma, pain, and loss (Fazel & Stein, 2002). Drachman and Paulino (2004) created a framework useful for understanding the variables that influence refugees’ experiences at each of the following stages: premigration, transit, and postmigration. These factors include age, family background, education, race, socioeconomic status, occupation, belief system, and social support (Drachman & Paulino, 2004).

Premigration

Premigration experiences have a significant impact on refugees’ mental health and influence refugees’ adaptation quality during the postmigration phase (Khawaja, White, Schweitzer & Greenslade, 2008). Many studies have asserted that traumatic experiences are associated with severe mental illnesses, such as PTSD and major depressive disorder. In addition, anxiety, somatic symptoms, and dissociative disorders are very common among refugees (Patil, Maripuu, Hadley, & Sellen, 2015). Moreover, depression is an important part of the refugee narrative. Steel, Chey, Silove, Marnane, Bryant and Van Ommeren (2009) reported that 31% of refugees have reported depressive symptoms, which is quite understandable given the grieving process experienced after refugees lose their loved ones, jobs, homes, and health.

Transit

To reach the final place of resettlement, transit is the second phase of migration during which refugees must leave their home countries for another country for a certain amount of time.
This stage is important because it impacts refugees’ mental and physical status. However, there has been a lack of adequate research evaluating transit stressors. The transit phase is very stressful for all refugees for many reasons. Refugees flee crises in their home countries and travel to a border country, which might not be equipped to receive thousands of people seeking shelter. Refugees live in community camps with limited ability to provide for basic needs, such as food, water, shelter, and medical supplies. Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, and Greenslade (2008) reported in their study that, although the UN provides food and clean water to refugees, these supplies are frequently stolen by rebels attacking the camps. Thus, complex trauma can occur after refugees escape their countries of origin.

**Postmigration**

Postmigration is defined as the process by which a person enters a new country for future resettlement. This stage includes the following two relatively distinct periods: the time in the new home country as an asylum seeker; and the first year of permanent residency (Laban, Gernaat, Komproe, Scheuders, & De Jong, 2004). Although the “new home” might be full of potential stressors, there is only limited knowledge of the stressors experienced by refugees while resettling in their host countries. Lindencorona, Ekblad, and Hoff (2008) asserted that research investigating the impact of environmental stressors on the mental health of newly resettled refugees has been inadequate. In addition, the lack of a psychological assessment that measures postmigration stressors creates a challenge in developing plans to assist with mental health issues among these populations (Hollifield, Warner, Lina, Krakow, Jenkins, Kesler, Stevenson, & Westermeyer, 2002). Thus, to help refugees, it is highly recommended that future studies create assessments focusing on gender roles and cultural sensitivity.
PTSD has been linked to premigration trauma experiences. Trauma is a major source of the mental distress suffered by refugees since traumatic experiences are overwhelming, life threatening, and frightening. Disturbed individuals are more likely to develop a variety of mental illnesses, such as PTSD, depression, borderline personality disorder, and anxiety. Traumatic experiences are terrifying and overwhelming life-threatening situations. According to the DSM 5, clinicians can diagnose individuals with trauma and stress-related disorders if they meet the following criteria: a) a consistent pattern of inhibited emotions and withdrawn behavior toward a caregiver; b) persistent negative social behavior, such as limited positive affect and unexplained irritability, sadness, and fearfulness evident during nonthreatening situations; and c) emotional and physical neglect by a caregiver as a child (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Refugees report having experienced a high level of traumatic events, such as witnessing the homicide of family and friends, sexual abuse, rape, and persecution (Schwitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006). During the premigration phase, refugees witness mass murders and live with multiple losses in their countries of origin. These difficult experiences increase the likelihood of developing PTSD.

Scheweitzer, Brough, Vromans, and Asic-Kobe (2010) revealed that postmigration living struggles had an almost equal influence on refugees as traumatic events in predicting trauma symptoms. Fazel, Wheeler and Danesh (2005) reported that 9% of adults and 11% of children with refugee backgrounds who resettled in Western countries reported symptoms related to PTSD. Carlson and Rosser-Hogan (1991) found a correlation between trauma and PTSD. These authors found that greater exposure to trauma was related to higher levels of PTSD. Furthermore, postmigration stress affects psychological well-being. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008) stated that Burmese refugees experienced the following mental health issues after resettling in
Australia: 2.7% of refugees reported having anxiety disorders, 4.1% of refugees reported having depression, and 6.4% of refugees reported having PTSD. Kinzie and Manson (1983) found that 49% of refugees from Southeast Asia to the United States presented with depression and anxiety symptoms linked to postmigration living difficulties.

These findings could be explained by the refugees’ cultural perspectives, which emphasize that it is often much safer and more acceptable to exhibit physical pain than emotional pain. Kinzie and Manson (1983) reported that 39% of refugees expressed a high level of somatization, which is more culturally acceptable than mental distress among Southeast Asian refugees. Additionally, PTSD symptoms have been found among Cambodian refugees twenty years after their resettlement (Marshall, Schell, Elliott, Berthold, & Chun, 2005).

Living with loss is also a significantly common struggle among refugees during the premigration phase. Almost all refugees describe losing some aspect of their lives. For example, in their qualitative study, Khawaja, White, Schweitzer and Greenslade (2008) reported that refugees experienced the loss of significant others, life activities, homes, and the ability to meet basic needs. Tribe (1999) found that refugees also encountered multiple losses, separation, and the sense of broken lives during the premigration phase.

The United States Committee for Refugees (2004) indicated that refugees experience many difficult situations and extreme limitations of living needs, including raided villages, limited medical supplies, and scarce food and water. Gender appears to interact with mental issues during and after traumatic experiences. Yong and Chan (2015) asserted that women experience more gender-based violence and are more vulnerable to becoming involved in human or sexual trafficking. An Australian study involving Sudanese refugees found that female refugees are more vulnerable to high levels of PTSD, depression, and anxiety (Schwitzer,
Melville, Steel & Lacherez, 2006). Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, and Greenslade (2008) reported that women and elderly populations have a higher risk of mental health issues during all migration phases. These studies showed that women are more susceptible to mental health issues and sexual trafficking during the premigration phase.

Fear of the future is another major factor that escalates stress and overwhelms refugees. During the transit phase, refugees have an extreme sense of terror and anxiety about subsequent events and about where they will finally settle. In addition, refugees are extremely fearful of being sent back to their home countries and are extremely concerned about the painful and unsafe conditions of living in camps subjected to constant attacks (Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade, 2008). Therefore, refugees experience several mental health issues during this phase. Female refugees from the Middle East have strong relationships with their families. Lindencorona, Ekblad, and Houff (2008) conducted research involving Middle Eastern refugees who settled in Sweden for 12 months and found that the greatest concerns were related to their families abroad.

Refugees also experience many social justice stressors during this phase. For example, refugees reported experiencing alienation, isolation, and racism during the resettlement phase in the UK (Tribe, 1999). Moreover, Lindencorona, Ekblad, and Hoff (2008) found that refugees in Sweden experienced discrimination, violence and threats. Another study indicated that refugees face racism during resettlement; however, these experiences are indirect and less violent than those experienced during the premigration and transit phases (Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade 2008). Prejudice and discrimination were also significant struggles among Somali refugees living in Sweden (Svenberg, Mattsson, Skott, 2009). Therefore, mental health counselors must advocate for Syrian refugee emerging adults in the United States.
Acculturation

Acculturation has a significant influence on emerging adults’ mental health, educational needs and vocational choices. The anthropologists Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) introduced the term acculturation. These authors proposed the following definition:

“Acculturation represents the phenomenon that results when groups of individuals with different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, leading to subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (p. 149). The Social Sciences Research Council (SSRC) (1954) provided a more specific definition of acculturation as “cultural change that occurs between two or more cultural systems. The change could be driven by noncultural causes, such as ecological or demographic modifications induced by an impinging culture; may be delayed, such as internal adjustment following the acceptance of alien traits; or may be a reactive adaptation to the traditional modes of life” (p. 974).

The nature of acculturation requires contact between two or more autonomous cultures with change in one culture as a result of the interaction. Additionally, one group must be a dominant group that emphasizes the flaws in the minor group’s culture (Bailey, 1937). Barry (1976) noted that eventual accommodation between the groups in contact is not always assimilation. Individuals can develop other positive outcomes, relationships, and adaptations. Studies have increasingly emphasized the positive outcomes of acculturation. Positive acculturation involves a clear sense of personal identity and cultural belonging. Berry and Sam (1997) stated that acculturation is positively associated with good mental health, high self-esteem, and the achievement of efficient cultural and social competencies.
Acculturation vs. Other Terms

When researching a complex phenomenon, such as acculturation, it is useful to review the original conceptualization and definitions and to analyze concepts related to acculturation to understand the differences among these concepts.

In cross-cultural psychology, distinctions must be made among concepts that are similar to acculturation but that represent different phenomena. One such concept is enculturation. Berry et al. (1992) described enculturation as the process by which developing individuals learn the language, norms, and values of their own group. This definition indicates that enculturation and socialization form the mechanism of cultural transmission within a culture. In contrast, acculturation refers to second-culture acquisition through contact with different cultures (Castro, 2003). Therefore, enculturation describes learning the heritage culture, whereas acculturation occurs when an individual interacts with a different culture.

Cultural change is another term that is important to distinguish from acculturation. Cultural change is an internal process that leads to changes at the population level, such as inventions, discoveries, and innovations within a culture. In contrast, acculturation is a process that leads to changes at the group level as a result of interaction with other cultures (Berry, 1995). Moreover, the interaction between cultural groups is assumed to be continuous. However, Castro (2003) highlighted that some interactions, such as short-term accidental encounters or the diffusion of ideas, values, and artifacts over long distances, such as through mass media, are not directly included in the definition of acculturation.

Psychological acculturation has been distinguished from acculturation. Graves (1967) stated that acculturation refers to changes in the social structure, economic basis, and political
organization of the groups involved in the acculturation process, while psychological acculturation refers to changes in a group member who experiences acculturation. The individual’s changes include identity, values, attitudes, and behavior. Thus, acculturation research has focused on individual differences in acculturation within a cultural group and the systematic relationship between group-level and individual-level phenomena (Pettigrew, 1996).

In addition, psychological adaptation refers to the level of “fit” between an individual and the mainstream cultural context. Berry (1997) stated that adaptation is the personal long-term outcome of the cultural encounter. Therefore, psychological adaptation refers to the psychological outcomes of acculturation.

**Strategies of Acculturation**

Berry (1997) conceptualized four strategies to indicate an individual’s level of acculturation. The four strategies are assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. Assimilation is described as a “melting pot”, in which individuals contact the dominant culture and lose their cultural identity (Berry, 1997). Individuals who assimilate have a positive relationship with the dominant society and feel ashamed of their cultural identity. Integration occurs when individuals maintain their culture of origin and accept contact with the new culture.

Separation (Rejection) refers to self-imposed withdrawal from the larger society and the maintenance of the inherited culture. Thus, individuals who use the separation strategy have a good relationship with their own people and avoid interacting with the dominant culture. Marginalization (Deculturation) occurs when individuals avoid psychological and cultural contact with both their traditional culture and the dominant society (Stonequist, 1935). Therefore, individuals who use this strategy have a negative view of both their culture and that of the host society.
A study involving Central American refugees found that integration was favored over the three other acculturation strategies (Dona & Berry, 1994). Consequently, individuals who integrate their own culture with the new culture have better acculturation outcomes. Yako and Biswas (2014) measured acculturation stress among Iraqi refugees and found that female refugees reported significantly higher acculturation stress levels than male refugees. Refugees from a Muslim background have a higher level of acculturation stress in the United States than Christian refugees (Yako & Biswas, 2014).

**Types of Acculturation**

Psychological acculturation, which emphasizes individuals’ ability to incorporate two cultures, was described in Berry’s work (1980). Birman, Trickett, and Vinokurov (2002) viewed psychological acculturation in terms of the skills used to cope with cultural transition. Psychological acculturation refers to an individual’s internal adjustment, which is composed of well-being, mental health, and life satisfaction within the new culture (Clenk & Van de Vijver, 2011).

Behavioral acculturation refers to the actual acts performed, and it is assumed to be related primarily to acculturation outcomes. External adjustment is the result of an individual’s interaction with the dominant culture, and it involves the acquisition of culturally appropriate skills and knowledge (Clenk & Van de Vijver, 2011). Therefore, behavioral acculturation is the set of adjustments to living within a dominant and/or new cultural context across places and over time. It is fundamental to understand the behavioral acculturation of the Syrian refugee emerging adults as problem-solving skills that reduce the impact of the acculturation stressors caused by the challenges that they experience.
Challenges Experienced by Refugees

Refugee emerging adults experience several challenges in their daily lives that impact their acculturation processes. Utilizing the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1976), the following section addresses these challenges from the following three levels: individual challenges, familial challenges, and environmental challenge. These levels actively impact and interact with the other levels and influence the acculturation process and strategies.

Individual Challenges

Mental health and psychological well-being

Several studies have focused on acculturation with an emphasis on cultural change over time by analyzing individuals’ changes in attitudes, values, language, dress, family size, and educational-vocational status (Krishnan & Berry, 1992; Moghaddam, Ditto, & Taylor, 1990). Refugees and immigrants experience several changes in areas such as finances, lifestyles, and social environments. Although acculturation occurs gradually with minimal conflict, it can result in acculturative stress in refugees (Berry, 2005).

The literature examining refugee emerging adults’ psychological well-being has been much less prevalent than that focusing on refugees in other age groups. The Council Linkage Project conducted research to examine the psychological well-being of emerging adult refugees. The researchers identified several factors, such as exposure to traumatic events, maternal depression, parental death or separation, parental unemployment, poverty, language challenges, and cultural isolation (Ziaian, Procter, Stewart, Sawyer, Baghurst, & Tsoulis, 2006). In addition, seeking mental health care is a taboo among refugees because of the fear of stigma related to mental illness, and poor communication with professionals increases psychological problems.
among refugees (Strijik, van Meijel, & Gamel, 2011). These factors increase the likelihood of mental health issues among emerging adults from refugee backgrounds and their families. Therefore, it is beneficial to examine mental health problems among refugee emerging adults to help them to acculturate and meet their developmental needs.

Scientific investigators have emphasized that a high level of acculturative stress and an increased risk of psychological maladjustment are associated with the adoption of an assimilation or separation strategy of acculturation (Hans, 2001; Hwang, Chun, Takeuchi, Myers, & Siddartha, 2005; Rogler, Cortes, & Malgudi, 1991). In addition, according to Hans (2001), immigration-related acculturative stressors, such as language problems, lack of social support, problems related to sexuality and marriage, and conflict in the family, are associated with low self-worth, a poor sense of belonging, and low overall life satisfaction. Thus, family and individual issues are associated with acculturative stress.

Grief and trauma have been addressed in several studies focusing on refugees and immigrants. According to Ainslie (1998), immigrants experience several losses during their journey to the host country, including separation from their extended family and friends; the loss of familiar foods, social surroundings, and places of worship; and differences in climate. Thus, refugees lose the sense of their culture and familiar people and places. The acquisition of a new language and decreased use of the native language represent further losses for refugees and immigrants whose native language differs from that of the host country (Ainsle, Harlem, Tummala-Narra, Barbanel, & Ruth, 2013).

From a psychoanalytical perspective, Antokolets (1994) introduced the term “cross-cultural journeys” to describe immigrants’ struggles with integrating the new culture into the values that they inherited from their parents and culture of origin. Thus, refugees lose their old
self, which was left behind “at home”, causing grief and stress. Homesickness is another symptom of refugees’ grief and traumatic loss. Hofer (1688) coined the term “nostalgia”, which refers to a sad mood originating from the desire to return to one’s native country. Nostalgia is commonly linked to unhappiness, despair, shame, frustration, and abuse (Laubscher, 2012). Knappert, Kornau, and Figengul (2018) interviewed Syrian refugees who resettled in Turkey and found that the refugees felt angry, isolated, rejected, and abused by the dominant culture.

Numerous studies have explored how traumatic experiences are interpreted by survivors (Marshall, Schell, & Miles, 2009; Norois, Perils, Ibanez, & Murphy, 2001). Although traumatic experiences impact psychological well-being, these experiences can generate unique strength and resilience (Goodman, 2013; Lenette, Brough, & Cox, 2012). Therefore, understanding traumatic events is crucial for understanding the coping strategies and resilience of survivors. Resilience is defined as a basic human adaptation to negative events that occur in an individual’s life (Masten, 2001). Resilience is a personality trait that facilitates protection against mental health issues resulting from exposure to traumatic experiences, such as mass violence and life-threatening events (Edward & Warelow, 2005). Masten and Obradovic (2008) asserted that resilience is a dynamic process influenced by personal and cultural factors. Furthermore, individuals who are secure and functioning are better able to tolerate traumatic events. However, adaptation strategies vary (Goodman, Vesely, Letiecq, & Cleaveland, 2017).

Arnetz, Rofa, Arnetz, Ventimiglia, and Jamil (2013) determined that psychological distress and PTSD symptoms are more relevant among Iraqi refugees than other Arab immigrants in the United States. This study also reported that resilience is considered a protective factor against psychological distress but not against PTSD symptoms (Arnetz, Rofa, Arnetz, Ventimiglia, & Jamil, 2013). Holtz (1998) concluded that factors such as commitment,
spirituality, and preparedness foster resilience against psychological distress. Moreover, Sleijpen, Boeije, Kleber, and Moonren (2015) investigated how emerging refugees addressed trauma as a resource of resilience. These authors concluded that social support, acculturation strategies, education, religion, avoidance, and hope are considered sources of resilience (Sleijpen, Boeije, Kleber, & Moonren, 2015). Therefore, there is an interplay between protective and risk processes in the mental health of emerging adult refugees.

**Identity and acculturation**

Several studies have not distinguish between ethnic identity and acculturation (Liebkind, 2001; Phinney, 1998). Indeed, Nguyen, Messe and Stollak (1999) used the terms “ethnic identity” and “acculturation” interchangeably. Phinny (1999) suggested that acculturation encompasses a broad range of behaviors, values, and attitudes and defined ethnic identity as the sense of belonging to a culture and commitment to a group. Several factors, such as age, gender, time of migration, and generation of migration, moderate the relationship between identity and acculturation (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). Understanding the role of ethnic identity in adaptation can be achieved by understanding the interaction of immigrants’ attitudes and characteristics with their responses to the host culture (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001).

Positive acculturation has been associated with physical and mental health, high self-esteem, good life satisfaction, competent work and satisfactory academic performance (Liebkind, 2001). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) highlights the positive link between group identity and self-concept. Therefore, emerging adults with a positive social identity are more likely to have high self-esteem. Brown (2000) suggested that individuals who are unsatisfied
with their social identity are more likely to leave their group and seek ways to achieve a positive distinction.

Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, and Vedder (2001) found that ethnic identity is more likely to be strong in immigrants who have a strong desire to retain access to their country of origin. Moreover, positive acculturation and ethnic identity promote secure feelings of self-evaluation and personal strength. Thus, a secure ethnic identity and acculturation significantly contribute to emerging adults’ psychological well-being. Berry and Sam (1997) stated that acculturation is positively associated with good mental health, high self-esteem, and the achievement of efficient cultural and social competencies.

Several studies have emphasized the importance of integrative strategies among emerging immigrants and reported that an integrated identity promotes the healthiest psychological adaptation. In contrast, emerging adults with a marginalized identity exhibit the lowest levels of psychological adjustment (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). Individuals who adopt unhealthy acculturation strategies are more likely to have several mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, identity confusion, psychosomatic symptoms, and feelings of anomie (Berry & Sam, 1997; Williams & Berry, 1991; Phinney, 1991). The absence of a sense of belonging in a new country is a significant predictor of mental illness (Beiser & Hou, 2016, 2017). Furthermore, the pressure to assimilate with the dominant culture and relinquish one’s identity can increase anger, depression, anxiety, and violence among immigrants (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). Sever (1999) warned that encouraging such assimilation in educational settings and discouraging students from speaking their native languages could lead to feelings of alienation in school. Thus, schools must find a balance between respecting students’ heritage and culture and promoting acculturation.
Migrating to another culture impacts refugee emerging adults’ physical, emotional and psychological development. Emerging adults might be more open to the influence of a new culture because their identities are not yet fully defined (Matsuola, 1990). Some emerging adults choose to isolate themselves as a means of addressing transitional stress, while other emerging adults choose acculturation. Tamura (1994) investigated acculturation among Nisei youths born to parents who migrated from Japan to Hawaii. The Nisei youth initially kept their Japanese names; however, they adapted their names to English once they reached adulthood. The adoption of American names reflects the acculturation stage, their desire to fit into the dominant culture (p. 169), and their identity.

Peer pressure contributes to youth self-identity. A study reported that 20% of Honolulu eighth graders have English names and have been exposed to Western ideas, leading them to change their native culture to fit into the dominant society (Tamura, 1994). Therefore, immigrant emerging adults experience peer pressure to assimilate into the dominant society and replace their native cultures. Immigrant students who resist such changes might experience bullying and racism at school, both of which are systemic issues that impact refugee emerging adults.

**Gender roles**

Studies focusing on the relationship between gender and acculturation among immigrants have been limited. Some studies have noted differences between men and women in strength of acculturation (Abu-Rabia, 1997; Liebkind 1993, 1996; & Eisikovits, 2000). The relationship between gender and acculturation can vary according to several factors. For instance, among some immigrants, adult women are responsible for carrying on the culture, maintaining traditions, and remaining at home, while younger women exposed to Western cultures might
identify with Western values and seek freedom (Liebkind, 1996). Therefore, different attitudes toward gender roles across generations can cause stress among family members.

Lindert et al. (2008) revealed that, compared to Iranian men, Iranian female refugees in the Netherlands reported positive outcomes of acculturation, such as positive affect, self-esteem, joy and happiness. The researcher asserted that, because Iranian female refugees had low financial status in their homeland, they did not experience a significant change in financial status upon moving to the Netherlands. Moreover, Darvishpour (2002) reported that father-daughter relationships fluctuated among Iranian refugees due to differences in acculturation strategies. Darvishpour (2002) described refugee men tending to live in the past, women in the present, and children in the future.

**Educational Challenges**

Conflict and wars have devastating impacts on education. The US Department of Health and Human Services-Refugee Processing Center (2013) has reported that approximately 30,000 refugee children arrive in the United States every year. According to Hirano (2014), several studies have explored refugees in K-12 school settings; however, the topic of refugees in higher education remains unexplored. Vasques (2007) noted that, because of the limited number of refugee students in higher education, limited studies have been conducted to understand this population. Humanitarian agencies view higher education as unimportant and provide less funding for higher education than primary education (Wright & Plasterer, 2010). Therefore, understanding the needs of refugee emerging adults is essential to helping them achieve developmental milestones.
The few studies that have investigated the college experiences of students from a refugee background involved Generation 1.5. In the United States, Generation 1.5 refers to the generation that belongs neither to the first generation (those born and raised in their homelands) nor to the second generation (those born in the United States) (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). In one study, the researchers argued that grade point average (GPA) and acculturation are highly linked. These authors reported that refugee students with high assimilation to American culture earn good grades; however, it is possible that students feel more acculturated and less stressed when they receive good grades (Birman, Trickett, & Vinokurov, 2002).

A limited number of studies have investigated higher education issues among refugees. Refugee emerging adults’ access to higher education affects their economic development, increases their families’ overall well-being (Ferede, 2010), expands their opportunities (Crondahl & Eklund, 2012), and improves their mental health and sense of belonging (Mitschke, Aguirre, & Sharma, 2013). Education is a powerful tool that can reconstruct the lives of refugees by enhancing their identities, instilling hope, and building resilience among refugee emerging adults (El Jack, 2010). In addition, refugees who obtain higher education can become role models and inspire younger generations to contribute to their communities. Education facilitates refugees’ transition and acculturation to a new culture (Wright & Plasterer, 2010).

Crea (2016) interviewed refugee emerging adults with higher education levels at three locations to explore how higher education impacted their lives. The participants emphasized that they were able to help their communities directly, gain awareness, and learn skills, such as leadership, time management, problem solving, and self-care. In addition, the students expressed a sense of pride, personal growth, and self-esteem. Thus, higher education is a fundamental need for refugee emerging adults’ mental health and well-being.
Despite the documented benefits of refugee education, refugee emerging adults have reported several obstacles to obtaining higher education. Dryden-Peterson and Giles (2010) listed several such challenges, including limited economic support, institutional requirements, and difficulties in transferring educational and identification documents. Gender issues have also been mentioned among the educational challenges experienced by refugees. Female emerging adults are more likely to drop out of high school because of early marriage and the need to work part-time jobs (Kaprielian-Churchill, 1996). In addition, limitations in the local language and barriers related to culture and gender impact refugees’ ability to pursue higher education (Watkins, Razee, & Richters, 2012). Family can also be a source of stress. Joyce and Liamputtong (2017) reported that refugee families had high expectations for their children, increasing stress and placing pressure on the students to make their families proud.

**Pedagogical challenges in higher education**

Other reported challenges include pedagogical differences and lack of school materials (Crea, 2016). The differences in pedagogy between the homeland’s educational system and the host society’s educational system can be a source of frustration among refugee emerging adults and their families. For instance, at a refugee camp in Kakuma, located in the northwestern region of Kenya, refugee students had difficulty understanding the materials and examples included in the curriculum because the material was developed in the United States (Crea, 2016).

Furthermore, nonacademic subjects and extracurricular activities are viewed as time wasters with no educational benefit (Kaprielian-Churchill, 1996). Moreover, the parents of refugee emerging adults view sexual education and dancing as promoting promiscuity and a lack of discipline, and they feel that schools should focus on basic skills, such as mathematics, science, reading, and writing (Kaprielian-Churchill, 1996). Vasquez (2007) asserted that, even if
a refugee student graduates from high school with good grades, he/she faces many challenges in the college admission process and in adapting to university-level courses. The lack of understanding of US-developed materials can impact students’ understanding of the course content and their communication with professors.

However, these obstacles can have positive impacts on a refugee’s higher education. For example, Ortmeir-Hooper (2008) interviewed a first-year immigrant student who reported that academic challenges empowered the student to improve in academic skills. Refugee students’ academic performance is influenced by internal and external factors. The main internal factor is motivation to resettle in the new country and support their families, while external factors are related to the university support system, which can include writing centers, counseling centers, first-year seminars, and freshman learning communities (Hirano, 2014).

Assessment and standardized tests

In a case study, a participant asserted that admission to college was conditional upon passing the TOEFL, which is a standardized test for nonnative English speakers, and the participant needed to spend a year in an English program to be unconditionally accepted by a college (Hirano, 2014). Kaprielian-Churchill (1996) declared that assessment and re-evaluation are needed to revise programs according to students’ needs. This process is essential for detecting learning disabilities and mental or emotional issues. Educators insist that refugee students should not be given standardized tests, such as IQ tests, before they have been in the host school system for at least three years. Moreover, one researcher stated that inaccurate evaluations lead to long-term labeling and insufficient programming (Kaprielian-Churchill, 1996).
Hirano (2014) conducted a study to explore how refugee students cope with the challenges of academic writing. The participants reported that professors, peers, and the academic support director provided academic assistance to refugee students. Moreover, this researcher noted that the university that admitted this sample facilitates several accommodations, such as a bridging program, writing tutors, and a writing center. Because of this supportive environment, the refugee students could satisfy college standards for admission and coursework.

**Employment Challenges**

Employment is a fundamental element in the integration of refugees because it provides financial stability and resources that facilitate integration (Marmot & Wilkinson, 2006). However, Bloch (2002) highlighted the high rate of unemployment among newcomers. Career stability influences an individual’s overall well-being and life satisfaction. An earlier study noted that obtaining employment enhances refugees’ well-being and mental health (Porter & Haslam, 2003). Savickas (1997) defined career adaptability as an individual’s adjustment by utilizing self-regulatory skills to cope with career transitions and working conditions. Positive career adaptability depends on one’s readiness, available career resources, and the demonstration of adaptive beliefs and behaviors (Savickas, 2005). However, unemployment is a common issue among refugees. A Canadian study reported that 34% of refugees were unemployed, while only 19% of the comparison sample was unemployed.

Moreover, refugees who experience vocational discrimination are more likely to be depressed and anxious and to exhibit disturbed sleep patterns (Barnik, Hurst, & Eby, 2018). In addition, refugees might feel hopeless, disappointed, and frustrated because they must accept whatever work is offered to support their families (Knappert, Kornau, & Figengul, 2018). Such needs lead emerging adults to take responsibility for providing for their family instead of
attending school. Several studies have asserted that the challenge causing the greatest acculturation stress among Middle Eastern refugees is unemployment, especially after September 11, 2001 (Ramos et al., 2010; Lie, 2002; Nawyn, 2012).

Many refugees experience vocational stress, including uncertainty about finding employment and developing new skills (Porter & Haslam, 2003). Barnik, Hurst, and Eby (2018) found that 31% of refugees encounter vocational stressors related to access, including difficulty finding work, complicated job requirements, lack of education or experience, job insecurity, and limited career networking opportunities. Pajic, Uleceluse, Kismihok, Mol, and Hartog (2018) reported the following two major barriers experienced by refugees: a) administrative barriers, such as a lack of recognition of their qualifications, and b) social barriers, which are related to a lack of fit with the local culture.

To ensure a competitive national economy, vocational education and training in Germany involve a high degree of vocational specificity. German vocational education is designed to increase the skills of the country’s labor force and to promote workers’ professional identity (Hillmert, 2006). Unfortunately, refugees with limited education and poor skills are at a disadvantage in this type of system. Therefore, emerging adults require extended educational support, career counseling, and intensive training to satisfy Western vocational standards. Knappert, Kornau, and Figengul (2018) emphasized that the disadvantages affecting Syrian refugees include language barriers, scarce vocational training, and a lack of money and time to develop professionally.

In the United States, Yako and Biswas (2014) investigated Iraqi refugees’ concerns about licensure and certifications that would allow them to transfer their technical skills. These authors reported that failing to fulfill licensure/certification requirements damages refugees’ self-image.
and increases their exposure to unsatisfying work conditions (Yako & Biswas, 2014). In Switzerland, the legislative system has been shown to influence the careers of refugees. The requirements for obtaining an F-permit for employment cause frustration among many refugees because of the language barrier and the length of the forms. Under this political system, emerging adults hold the same residential permits as their parents. Emerging adults with this permit might finish their basic education in the host country but they cannot work (Newnham, 2006). In European Union countries, the most recent refugees remain in the initial stage of familiarizing themselves with the labor market (Pajic, Uleceluse, Kismihok, Mol, & Hartog, 2018). Fewer than 50% of refugees become employed after five to six years in the host country, and approximately 70% of refugees require more than fifteen years to obtain employment (Konle-Seidl & Bolits, 2016). Therefore, emerging adults find alternative and sometimes deviant ways to adjust to these ambiguities, leading them to encounter even more challenges in their daily lives.

Moreover, the resettlement location impacts the career opportunities available to refugees. For example, Greece has constraints that create substantial career barriers and impact the career adaptability of Syrian refugees (Pajic, Uleceluse, Kismihok, Mol, & Hartog, 2018). Thus, when a country experiences financial crises and high levels of employment protection legislation, there is a reduced likelihood that refugees will be able to find employment. The host governments determine the towns in which refugees may resettle, which sometimes have limited access to services and career options. Joyce and Liamputtong (2017) found that acculturation stress was increased among Congolese refugee youths in Australia because of the limited employment opportunities in small towns. These researchers also noted that these youths planned to leave the assigned town once they completed their education to live in metropolitan areas.
where employment opportunities were better. Thus, politicians should consider the availability of employment opportunities in planning and implementing regional resettlement.

Gender-based income is another stressor among refugees. Kivilcim (2016) stated that one-third of Syrian refugee households in Turkey depend on women’s incomes, which impact the entire family. Moreover, female refugees are likely to face difficult workplace issues in the host country, such as exclusion, abuse, and sexual harassment (Knappert, Kornau, & Figengul, 2018). Therefore, refugees require programs that promote awareness and knowledge about the laws and regulations in a host county.

**Familial Challenges**

Immigrant parents face several acculturation stressors in the host country. First, these parents are challenged with ensuring the continuity and transmission of their cultural heritage. Several studies have emphasized the parent-youth relationship during acculturation. Phalet and Schonpflug (2001) asserted that value conflicts between the culture of origin and the new culture increase the risk of intergenerational cultural dissonance, family conflicts and violence. In a Korean American study, researchers found that physical aggression among immigrant families is associated with acculturation conflicts among mothers and discrimination by the host culture (Park, 2001). Another study investigating immigrant mental health asserted that a high discrepancy in father-adolescent acculturation strategies was associated with depressive symptoms in emerging adults (Kim, Chen, Li, Huang, & Moon, 2009).

Moreover, differences in acculturation strategies among family members increase conflict and stress. Morrison and James (2009) found that differences in acculturation strategies cause conflict and emotional threats when one spouse is less acculturated than the other. This finding is
consistent with Khawaja and Milner’s (2012) study, which reported that female participants believed that they adopted the new values and behaviors of the host country, while their husbands focused on adhering to traditional customs and beliefs.

Immigrant emerging adults appeared to benefit from cohesive families. Molnar, Buka, Brennan, Holton, and Earls (2003) noted that immigrant youths who do not live with their biological parents are more likely to experience higher levels of anxiety and suicidal ideation than youths who live with their biological parents despite intergenerational conflicts regarding acculturation. Therefore, emerging adults who live in a supportive environment with a cohesive family experience less violence and less suicidal ideation.

Family Roles

A prior study involving Bosnian refugees reported several issues affecting immigrant families. Family members reported changes in family roles, less family time, challenges related to patriarchy, difficulties in communication, and living vicariously through their children (Weine et al. 2004). Additionally, family members who escaped conflicts experience traumatic memories associated with these experiences. Families with a refugee background are concerned about their emerging adults’ acculturation and becoming “Americanized” and are afraid of losing connections with their traditions, communities, and native tongues (Weine et al. 2004).

Frequently, peer influences lead to changes in emerging people’s social activities and dress that clash with their parents’ native culture, causing family conflict (Tamura, 1994). Indeed, refugees are concerned about their parenting styles and how to address emerging people’s issues that might not be recognized in their cultures. For instance, an ethnographic study was conducted to understand the influence of culture on teen refugees and their families. The
researchers noted that some parent refugees are unfamiliar with certain skills, such as supervision and monitoring, which are required to address adolescent issues (Weine, Ware, and Lezic, 2004). Therefore, there is a significant need to create a parenting guidebook with a multicultural perspective to minimize the gap between parents and children. Such a guidebook could reduce family conflicts and parental stress related to losing children to the dominant culture and could promote healthy acculturation by the entire family.

Fuligni (1998) listed factors contributing to difficulty in acculturation among refugee families, including less-educated parents, a lack of parental support, limited English skills, low income, family poverty, and racism against family members. Thus, parents experiencing these factors might face greater challenges accepting their emerging adults’ acculturation. In contrast, Joyce and Liamputtong (2017) identified that family, friends, and the community were significant sources of support for Congolese refugee youths in Australia.

The roles of refugee families change over time. In most Eastern cultures, the extended family might be involved in decision-making processes. For instance, grandparents are the heads of families and make all decisions. However, this role dramatically changes after the family resettles in the host country, and the extended family can become less involved (Hatton & Bacic, 2001). Another study reported that men might feel that their roles as fathers and husbands are undefined as a result of the loss of social status and social boundaries (Snyder, May, Zulcic, & Gabbard, 2005). In addition, the family structures of refugee families are diverse, and acculturation to Western norms can shift the family orientation from collective to more individualistic (Matsuoka, 1990). Hebbani, Obijiofor, and Bristed (2009) explained that individuals in collectivist societies respect their families and communities, have interdependent relationships, and hold hierarchical, authoritarian, and specific attitudes toward gender roles.
Understanding the host country’s regulations about issues such as child abuse is another challenge experienced by refugee families that leaves parents feeling powerless and anxious about controlling their children’s behaviors. Refugees from several backgrounds use physical punishment to discipline their children. However, these refugees must consider the child abuse laws in the United States because parents who break these laws could be jailed or deported (Lynn, 2007). Thus, normative parenting styles among refugees are not endorsed in the United States, and families must be educated and aware of US laws to prevent potential family stressors.

**Divorce among refugee families**

Divorce is considered a negative development associated with loneliness and isolation. However, the number of divorces among refugee families has increased. Divorce impacts refugee men and women differently. Following divorce, refugee men have reported hopelessness and shame and feeling that they have failed to maintain their family. In contrast, refugee women report that they feel more independent and that divorce gives them freedom in the host country (Darvishpour, 2002).

A report illustrated that divorce can be viewed as an opportunity, rather than as a detriment. Female refugees are more likely than male refugees to file for divorce so that they can have more freedom and protect themselves from abusive husbands (Darvishpour, 2002). Indeed, the host government questions couples individually about domestic violence. The police protect women from abusive relationships, and the host country provides financial support to women and grants them equal rights (Darvishpour, 2002).

There are several reasons for the increased divorce rate among refugees. Svedin, Back, and Wadsby (1994) found that the main reasons for divorce among refugees include conflicts,
abuse and domestic violence. In one study, the researchers found that 75% of refugee families experience conflict and domestic violence (Svedin, Back, & Wadsby, 1994). Additionally, these authors stated that conflicts were related to domestic matters and were present in the homeland before migration, but social and financial factors prevented refugee spouses from filing for divorce in their native country (Darvishpour, 2002).

Another factor is the power dynamic within the family. Traditionally, refugee men adhere to their native values, norms, and gender roles, which dictate that men provide for the family, and women raise children. However, the man’s power changes when immigrants encounter gender equality regulations in the new country. Darvishpour (2002) reported the following coping mechanisms used by refugee men when faced with powerlessness in the host culture: a) men can accept and adjust to their loss of control, or b) they can resist change and reassert their lost power, which can lead to divorce.

**Intimate partner violence and domestic violence among refugees**

The most commonly reported factors associated with child abuse and domestic violence are physical illness, financial issues, substance abuse, mental illness, trauma history, and acculturation stressors that change gender roles in the family (i.e., the husband no longer has control over his wife and family) (Lewig, Arney, & Salveron, 2009).

The family dynamic is influenced by the marital relationship. Several studies have reported marital issues among refugees during the resettlement stage of migration. A Canadian study found that financial strain, levels of support, and increased women’s autonomy were associated with postmigration marital conflicts among Ethiopian immigrants (Hyman, Guruge, & Mason, 2008). Women become more autonomous during the postmigration stage because they
attain economic independence (Darvishpour, 2002). In the United States, being independent and speaking English have been associated with Somalian women experiencing higher levels of emotional abuse and physical aggression from their husbands (Nilsson, Brown, Russell, & Khamphakdy-Brown, 2008). Therefore, conflict between couples arises from shifts in power and roles in the relationship (Flores, Tschann, VanOss, & Pantoja, 2004).

In addition, Khawaja and Milner (2012) investigated how acculturation stress manifests and affects marriages among South Sudanese refugees. These researchers concluded that several factors trigger conflict between spouses, including financial struggles, men adhering to traditional gender roles in which they control the family, women experiencing more freedom, and the availability of police support for victims of domestic violence.

Not all refugees move to host countries with their entire families. Several refugees have lost significant people and spouses. Israelite (1999) emphasized that refugee families often face the loss of a parent or separation from the family, and mothers can become the only parent available to provide financial and emotional support to children (Rousseau, Rufagari, Bagilishya, & Measham, 2004). Thus, a mother must fulfill both of the parents’ roles and be both mother and father to her children. Feelings of abandonment or betrayal can manifest among separated family members (Rousseau, Rufagari, Bagilishya, & Measham, 2004). Furthermore, single parents are more likely to neglect their children’s physical, emotional, and environmental needs (Lewig, Arney, & Salveron, 2009).

The Australian Center for Child Protection at the University of South Australia launched a project to investigate why certain parenting practices are utilized among refugees after it was noted that recently arrived families were reported to the child protection system. The project suggested providing educational, prevention, and early intervention information to families to
inform them about child protection laws and parenting in Australia (Lewig, Arney, & Salveron, 2009). The hope was that such information could render solo parenting less stressful, reduce social stigma, and help parents to focus on providing for their families, thereby reducing acculturation stress.

**System-Level Challenges**

The recent political atmosphere in the United States underscores the challenges related to migration and refugees by increasing the rates of xenophobia (Yakushko, 2009). The Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program (2018) reported that the number of hate crimes increased by approximately 17% in 2017. The UCR (2018) reported 7,175 hate crimes; of these crimes, 60% were related to race and ethnicity, 21% were related to religion, and 16% were related to sexual orientation. Addressing issues related to bullying and racism could impact refugee emerging adults.

Bullying has recently gained worldwide attention. According to the US Department of Education (2011), bullying is a major social, health, and educational concern worldwide. The recent literature has indicated that immigrant bullying targets an immigrant’s status and family history and manifests as physical aggression, social manipulation, and exclusion from the mainstream group (Scherr & Larson, 2010). Bullying among refugees and native students plays a significant role in increasing the school dropout rates among refugees (Visconti & Gal, 2018). Syrian refugee emerging adults who missed several school years felt embarrassed to be in classes with younger students (Visconti & Gal, 2018) and would rather skip school.

The developmental model of ethnic identity emphasizes the significant role of racism and acculturation strategies. Emerging adults exposed to racism and negative stereotypes about their
group might develop conflicting feelings about their ethnic identity (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). One study highlighted that refugee students of color who attended white-dominant schools were racially targeted by their peers (Fraine & McDade, 2009). In addition, Fraine and McDade (2009) noted that race-based bullying was unfamiliar to refugee emerging adults whose racial identity was the norm in their country. Students from immigrant backgrounds might also experience bullying based on their religion at school. Asali (2003) found that, since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, most students who have been bullied at school were Muslims, and these students were verbally bullied because of their religious practices, appearance, and diet.

Pottie, Dahal, Georgiades, Premji, and Hassan (2015) conducted a systematic international review to explore the relationship between immigration status and victimization. These authors found that first-generation immigrants from non-English-speaking cultures are more likely to experience bullying, peer aggression, and violence at school than immigrants from English-speaking cultures. School discrimination has been linked to loneliness, anxiety, and somatization (Juang & Avarez, 2010). First-generation immigrants’ reports indicate that they are more vulnerable to feeling unsafe at school than later generations of immigrants (Peguero, 2008). Such feelings of insecurity impact refugee emerging adults’ academic progress and educational success at school and their subsequent occupational success.

Bullying has been linked to physical and psychological issues among immigrant emerging adults. Forero, McLellan, Rissel and Bauman (1999) illuminated that bullying and peer aggression have been repeatedly associated with negative mental health repercussions. Moreover, students who were targets of race-based psychological bullying were more likely to develop lower self-esteem (Lee, 2011). Additionally, drug and alcohol use has been associated
with suicide attempts among immigrants who experience difficulties adjusting at school (Peguero, 2009). Individuals who use unhealthy acculturation strategies are more likely to have several mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, identity confusion, psychosomatic symptoms, and feelings of anomie (Berry & Sam, 1997; Williams & Berry, 1991; Phinney, 1991). Therefore, refugee emerging adults who adopt unhealthy acculturation strategies to fit in with their peers might experience additional psychological challenges.

The Syrian Scenario Related to Settling in the US as a Refugee

In the United States, Syrian refugees have resettled in 36 states, including California, Texas, Michigan and Pennsylvania (Zong, 2015). Of the Syrian refugees admitted to the US since the beginning of the civil war, 13,014 (72%) were women and children younger than 14 years old (US Census Bureau, 2015). Emerging adults represent an important refugee group and have been described as one of the fastest growing sectors of the population in several Western countries (Hernandez, 2012). After several years of the Syrian civil war, these children have grown and can be categorized as emerging adults who have experienced several stressors and who must learn new behaviors and skills to acculturate to American society regardless of the premigration and transit stages of their journeys.

Syrian refugee emerging adults have been unable to attend school for several years because of the Syrian conflict (Human Right Watch, 2016). These refugees fled to neighboring countries that do not have the capacity to provide them with an education. According to Connor (2018), the Pew Research Center estimated that nearly 13 million Syrians were displaced during the seven years of the Syrian conflict. By 2013, the number of emerging adults who were unable to attend school drastically increased from 265,852 to 979,378 (3RP, 2017-2018). The Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) (2013), launched by the UN and other nonprofit
organizations, is considered the most integrated international response to the refugee crisis. 3RP aims to educate Syrian refugee emerging adults, who have been called “the lost generation” because they missed several academic years because of the war in Syria. Furthermore, Syrian emerging adults have experienced multiple intense traumatic events (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015), which are associated with several psychological issues, including limitations in cognitive development, academic impairment, ADHD and conduct disorders (Halevi, Djalovski, Vengrober, & Feldman, 2016). These issues are considered a humanitarian call for all counselors, researchers and professionals to provide appropriate interventions and to advocate for a better future for this population.

Moreover, the number of studies addressing Syrian refugee issues has been inadequate. Although several news reports and magazine investigations have emphasized Syrian refugee resettlement in the United States, these investigations are not considered scholarly. Therefore, this study is important because it aims to fill the literature gap by adding to the refugee acculturation literature and highlighting the need for counseling and advocacy among refugee populations.

**Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

**Bioecological Model of Human Development**

Urani Bronfenbrenner (1979) introduced the theoretical system and the Bioecological Model of Human Development. This model views development as the “phenomenon of continuity and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings, both as individual and as groups” (Bronfenbrenner & Morries, 2006, p. 793). This theory focuses on biopsychological changes as an integral aspect of an individual’s development. The ecological
model represents the scientific study of the interaction between active human development and the changing properties of an individual’s immediate settings (Bronfenbrenner, 2004). This paradigm is useful for understanding individual growth and the synthesis between a person and his/her environment.

The Bioecological Model of Human Development indicated that human development is influenced by four component. First, the process refers to interactions with objects or people. Proximal processes are considered the main mechanism of the bioecological model, referring to the basic interaction between children and their caregivers and interactions with objects. The effectiveness of the process must occur consistently and over a long period of time.

The second component consists of the personal characteristics that an individual demonstrates in social interactions. Bronfenbrenner (2004) identified three personal characteristics that influence proximal processes over the individual lifespan: a) demand characteristics, such as age, gender, and physical appearance; b) resource characteristics that are not visible, such as mental health, skills, intelligence, and past experiences; and c) force characteristics related to motivation, temperament, determination and persistence.

The third component is context, which involves the five interconnected systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner (2004) addressed the five interconnected systems of human development in the bioecological model. First, the microsystem is the immediate environment, composed of interpersonal relationships, roles, family, and peers. For example, a Syrian refugee interacts with his/her family and friends. If these relationships are nurturing, a person achieves growth and meets his/her individual needs. The mesosystem represents the links among the microsystems. For instance, a case worker at an organization interacts with the family and teachers of a refugee to guarantee healthy personal
development. In contrast, an unclear relationship among the microsystems presents conflicting lessons that hinder an individual’s growth.

The exosystem includes the environmental systems that indirectly impact the individual’s development, such as his/her community and neighbors. For example, a refugee family lives in an underserved neighborhood, which can have negative effects on the parents’ jobs and incomes. A low family income negatively affects youth development. The macrosystem is the largest and most remote set of people and conditions. The macrosystem consists of the societal schema of a specific culture, its attitudes toward different nationalities and its governing political system. Finally, Bronfenbrenner added the following fifth level to the bioecological systems model: the chronosystem. The chronosystem defines the longitudinal perspective of the elements within the system, such as the external changes (i.e., the timing of losing a parent in the Syrian civil war) and psychological changes that occur as an individual ages.

The fourth component is time, which is considered the most important component of the bioecological model because it is measurable on a chronological scale. This element refers to the time during the process, the length of the process and the individual’s cultural and historical background. Time impacts the interaction within an individual lifespan and across generations (Bronfenbrenner, 2004). Time was viewed as consisting of microtime, which happened during the course of some specific activity or interaction, meso-time, which is the extent of the activities and interactions that occur through the developing of an individual’s environment, and macro-time, which refers to the chronosystem that indicates the differences in the processes according to historical events.

Bronfenbrenner’s (2004) ecological model was used in this research to structure Syrian refugees’ lived experiences of acculturation in the United States. Syrian refugees have recently
arrived in the United States, and their acculturation has been influenced by all bioecological levels. Therefore, Syrian refugees’ microsystems were examined at the following levels: mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The ecological model is essential for understanding multiple levels of acculturation, such as individual mental health, family acculturation, and educational and occupational challenges.

**Developmental Theory**

For many emerging adults worldwide, the years between the late teens and the twenties are considered important because they are associated with frequent changes in education, occupation, lifelong achievements, etc. (Chisholm & Hurrelmann, 1995). Several theories have explained the importance of the age range (late teens to twenties) of the participants in the current study. In the present research, Erikson’s Psychosocial Developmental Theory was used to promote an in-depth understanding of the participants’ experiences.

**Erikson’s Psychosocial Development Theory**

Erik Erikson (1968) described eight developmental stages from infancy to adulthood. This theory provides a significant understanding of the crisis that emerges from conflicts between psychological needs and societal needs. According to this theory, the successful accomplishment of each stage manifests as a healthy personality and the acquisition of strong characteristics that help the individual to resolve crises. However, if a person’s developmental needs are unmet, the likelihood of successfully resolving crises during future stages decreases, resulting in an unhealthy personality (Erikson, 1968).
Erikson’s (1985) eight developmental stages are as follows.

1. *Basic Trust vs. Mistrust:* This stage lasts from birth to the age of two years old. This stage is considered the most fundamental stage of an individual’s life, during which a child learns whether to trust other people.

2. *Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt:* From the ages of two to four years old, children need their parents’ support, patience, and encouragement to develop a sense of autonomy.

3. *Initiative vs. Guilt:* Children aged three to six years old become more independent, learn to take the initiative and become frustrated if they do not achieve their goals.

4. *Industry vs. Inferiority:* Individuals aged from six to twelve years old learn to be responsible and to develop feelings of inferiority regarding their capabilities if their parents do not praise them for their accomplishments.

5. *Identity vs. Role Confusion:* For adolescents aged thirteen to nineteen years old, to form their identities, they must explore and anticipate the future.

6. *Intimacy vs. Isolation:* This period reflects the first stage of adulthood and spans the ages of twenty to thirty-five years old. During this stage, people form love relationships with other people, and the failure to achieve love generates feelings of loneliness and isolation.

7. *Generativity vs. Stagnation:* Between the ages of thirty-five and sixty-five years old, individuals attempt to build their lives and focus on their careers and families.

8. *Ego Integrity vs. Despair:* During this stage (aged sixty-five years old to death), people reflect on their lives and contemplate their accomplishments.

There were two focal developmental stages related to the present study: Identity vs. Role Confusion; and Intimacy vs. Isolation. Erikson (1968) illustrated that, during the stage of Identity vs. Role Confusion, youths tend to explore their values and goals to search for a personal identity
and a sense of self. At this age, emerging adults become more independent and focus on their educational and vocational futures. In addition, such individuals seek a sense of belonging and focus on fitting into society. Those who receive proper reinforcement and support tend to emerge with strong self-esteem and become independent. McLeod (2018) concluded that progress during this stage leads to commitments to others and the formation of an identity based on the outcomes of explorations. Failure to accomplish this goal can lead to role confusion, a negative identity, and unhappiness.

Sense of identity refers to all of the individuals’ values, attitudes, and beliefs that map a person’s behavior to live by society’s standards and expectation. Erikson (1968) emphasized the development of ego identity, which is the proper focus of this psychosocial developmental stage. It refers to the conscious sense of self that emerges through the interaction between an individual and society. Ego identity progresses consistently because of the continued learning and interaction with the society that generate challenges to shape the individual identity.

Erikson (1968) believed that building a strong identity at this developmental stage impacts the development of intimacy that occurs during the next stage of Intimacy vs. Isolation. Refugees must adapt a new set of values, attitudes, and behaviors to meet the social norms of their new home countries. They must also overcome obstacles that emerge between young adults and their families due to the age range and point of view differences. Therefore, they confront challenges by interacting with the dominant society, hindering their psychosocial development.

Intimacy vs. Isolation is Erikson’s sixth psychosocial development stage (1968). During this stage, emerging adults explore relationships and share more intimately with others. He emphasized developing committed relationships among people, which provides a sense of security and attachment. This stage is marked by the ability to build meaningful, secure
relationships that last for a long time. Accomplishment during this stage leads to happy and healthy relationships and increased commitment and care within relationships. However, the avoidance of intimacy and fear of commitment can lead to isolation, depression, and loneliness (McLeod, 2018).

Intimate relationships among refugees have been examined in several studies (Darvishpour, 2002; Khawaja & Milner, 20012; Lewing, Arney, & Salveron, 2009). The acculturation stressors among refugees impacted their parental and marital relationships. Limitations in satisfying the need for secure attachments and long-term relationships increase the likelihood of divorce, domestic violence, and intimate partner violence (Nilsson, Brown, Russell, & Khamphakdy-Brown, 2008). Hence, both of the psychosocial developmental stages in this section are fundamental to emphasizing emerging adults refugees’ sense of identity, their relationships with their families, and their acculturation with the host society.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented a broad review of the literature related to acculturation among Syrian refugee emerging adults in the US. A clear understanding of the dynamics of refugees, the politics and the processes and effects of acculturation behavior on the adjustment of youth refugees was provided. The literature reviewed included the theoretical concepts underlying the refugees’ experienced challenges during the premigration, transit, and postmigration stages. The premigration experiences were traumatic incidents and related mental health illnesses, such as anxiety, PTSD, major depressive disorder, somatic symptoms and dissociative disorders. They are also related to individuals living with several losses, such as loved ones, jobs, homes and
health. During the transit period, refugees experience numbers of stressors that develop in refugee camps, such as inadequate shelter and limitations of basic needs. During postmigration, refugees enter a new country and start to experience different types of issues. For instance, mental health issues, grieving, fear of the unknown, isolation, racism, and prejudicial discrimination.

Furthermore, the chapter highlighted the acculturation definition and strategies among refugees. Acculturation occurs when a refugee or immigrant interacts with the dominant society. There are four strategies considered to be results of the interaction between a minor culture and a dominant culture: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Assimilation refers to a “melting pot”, in which individuals contact the dominant culture and lose their cultural identity. Integration occurs when individual maintain their native culture and accept contact with the new culture. Separation refers to self-imposed withdrawal from the larger society and the maintenance of the inherited culture. Marginalization occurs when an individual avoids all types of interaction with both his/her traditional culture and the dominant society. Acculturation has been examined among several refugee groups; however, no research-based data have focused on the acculturation behaviors of Syrian refugee emerging adults and the challenges that they experience in host countries.

This chapter provided the challenges experienced by refugees. The bioecological model was utilized to address these challenges. First, individual level challenges include psychological issues, such as trauma, grief, homesickness, and PTSD. Additionally, positive acculturation was associated with high self-esteem, resilience, and life satisfaction. Moreover, refugees experience educational challenges, such as complexity of the educational system, pedagogical differences, and assessment and standardized test obstacles. Employment is another individual challenge
correlated with educational challenges. Several researchers have indicated that refugees and immigrants counter vocational stressors because of uncertainty about finding employment and developing new skills.

The second level of challenges consists of familial challenges, such as family roles, in which emerging adults experience family conflicts and peer pressure. Additionally, divorce among refugee families was reported by several studies because of the conflict and new power dynamics after they interact with the dominant culture. Furthermore, intimate partner violence correlates with divorce rates among this population and impacts individual well-being. Finally, systematic level challenges highlight issues related to hate crimes, bullying, racism, and the political atmosphere in the US. At this level, refugees who use experience race-based bullying were more likely to develop lower self-esteem, drug and alcohol issues, and many psychological issues hindering their acculturation.

This study provides a qualitative examination of the acculturation of Syrian refugee emerging adults in the US. Limited previous studies have focused on this phenomenon among refugees in North America and among emerging adults in general.

In this chapter, Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Human Development (2004) was used to frame this study. This model addressed the interconnected systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. All of the systems are significant to promoting professional understanding of Syrian refugee emerging adults. This model aligns with this research because it examines the interaction between refugees and the dominant society. This model was applied in this research to promote interpretation on the refugees’ individual, familial, and systematic challenges and their acculturation.
Erikson’s Psychosocial Development Theory was utilized to comprehend the emerging adults’ needs in the new home country. The Identity vs. Role Confusion and Intimacy vs. Isolation stages were the main developmental stages related to the age range of the current participants. During Identity vs. Role Confusion, youths must develop their values, beliefs, and attitudes as components of their identity. Those who receive proper reinforcement and support tend to emerge with strong self-esteem and become independent. Developing intimate, loving, and secure relationships promotes the individual’s self-esteem and reduces conflicts among partners and families. Understanding each developmental stage is fundamental not only to identifying the needs of the development stage but also to being attuned to adequate recourse that fulfills their needs.
CHAPTER III: METHODS

“To begin with, we put forth the following proposition: pure phenomenology is the science of pure consciousness”.

Husserl

The purpose of this research inquiry was to investigate the lived experiences of Syrian refugee emerging adults undergoing acculturation in the United States. The main objective was to explore and describe emerging adults’ experiences to gain more insight into and understanding of this phenomenon. This chapter aimed to introduce the process of this investigation methodology regarding how emerging adult Syrian refugees acculturate in the US. This study sought to answer the primary research question: What are the lived and living experiences of Syrian refugee emerging adults related to learning and the acculturation process in the United States?

This study was conducted to examine the secondary research questions:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of Syrian refugee emerging adults?
2. What are the major push-and-pull factors that cause emerging adults to become refugees?
3. How do Syrian refugee emerging adults experience life during their travel to, arrival to and stay in the US?
4. What strategies do Syrian refugee emerging adults use to develop acculturation behaviors?
5. How are these emerging adults’ daily activities shaped and impacted by their levels of acculturation?
6. How do Syrian refugee emerging adults evaluate the support that they receive from the system and society to adjust and acculturate in the US?

The conceptional assumptions guiding this research were based on phenomenology and the constructivist point of view to address the gap in the existing knowledge. The qualitative research approach was the most appropriate genre because it highlights the relationships between variables (Creswell, 2003). Thus, this approach was appropriate to understand the phenomenon of acculturation among emerging adult Syrian refugees.

This chapter aims to provide the sampling procedure, which included the sample size, sample selection, and sample recruitment. Additionally, this chapter explains the data collection procedure, which included phenomenal interviewing, semistructured in-depth interviews, the interview guiding questions, and an overview of the researcher as an instrument. The data analysis process illustrated the interview, translation, and coding processes. The focal theory in the present research was the Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA), which aims to conceptualize how people create meaning from their experiences.

This chapter illuminates the ethical considerations that occur in the qualitative studies, including confidentiality, treatment of vulnerable population, and data storage. Trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability were reported as considerations for enhancing the quality of the present research.

Research Paradigm, Approach, Tradition and Design

Research Paradigm

Because the objective of this research was to explore Syrian youth acculturation experience in the US, I believe that constructive philosophical epistemology is the best fit. Since
advocacy is an existing goal of counselors, critical theory was utilized to draw society’s and policymakers’ attention to refugee issues. The conceptual assumptions guiding this study are based on phenomenology and the constructivist point of view. Epistemology is the “set of beliefs about how it is that we know what we know” (Luker, 2008). Phenomenology and constructivism are congruent philosophies that attempt to answer the question “What is real?” and focus on the answer from the individualistic nature of reality (Schwandt, 1994). Thus, the commonality between phenomenological epistemology and constructivism creates a meaningful relationship between the phenomenon and individuals. The guiding principle of constructivist research is that the data are unique to their time and place.

Constructivism is defined as an epistemology (theory of knowledge) that explains how people learn (Abdal-Haqq, 1998). Constructivism focuses on an individual’s understanding and interpretation of the world in the context of his/her subjective experience. Glesne (2006) elaborated that constructivism aims to construct knowledge of and understand an individual’s meaning while accepting that humans subjectively construct knowledge about their experiences and that no one’s personal knowledge is more accurate than any other’s. Lincoln and Guba (2000) asserted that multiple types of knowledge can coexist and that the creation of meaning is context dependent (Haley, 2002). In the present research, Syrian refugee emerging adults reported that they have experienced acculturation in the US and found meaning in their experiences.

Critical theory is the name given to traditional critical reflection on society (Haugaard & Cooke, 2010). Critical theory aims to critically explore the social structures that impact individuals. It aims to emphasize the irrational and unjust politico-economic structures of capitalism and seeks social organizations that satisfy the needs of humanity at large.
Critical theory pinpoints and ameliorates the causes of social injustice by analyzing the dominant organization of a society (Horkheimer, 1999).

Three criteria determine the efficacy of a critical theory. Horkheimer (1999) asserted that a critical theory must be simultaneously explanatory, practical, and normative. Thus, a critical theory must explain the issues in the present social reality, identify the actors to change them, and provide clear criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). Therefore, the present research utilized constructivism and critical theory. The constructivist approach aims to understand the acculturation process among Syrian refugee emerging adults and construct their meaning during their resettlement phases. Critical theory advocates for those underserved populations by delivering their voices to society and policymakers.

**Research Approach**

The match between the constructivist approach and qualitative research has been documented in the literature on research methods (Bronfenbrenner’s 1979 & 2005); (Creswell, 2013); (Mogashoa, 2014); & (Smith, 1994). Qualitative techniques have allowed researchers to share in the understanding and perception of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily experiences. Qualitative research has been used mainly to explore behavior that is assumed to be bound to social contexts and to view social phenomena holistically (Ulin, Robinson, & Tolley, 2005). Researchers have utilized the qualitative genre to develop an initial understanding of an issue and to highlight the different perspectives among groups (Jeanfreau & Jack, 2010).
According to the constructivist worldview, a phenomenon can be understood by the meaning of a shared experience among the members of a social group (Glesne, 2006). Mogashoa (2014) indicated that constructing a meaning is learning and that there is no other way of learning than constructing meaning and knowledge, both of which require involvement with content. The participants’ narratives provide details, but the research focuses on the experience and not the basic data provided by the participants (Finlay, 2011). Qualitative studies have attracted growing interest, and some editors allocate space in each journal volume for exploratory findings (Watkins, 2012).

There are several justifications for choosing qualitative methods in this study. First, each research question raised in the problem section can be better answered using a qualitative approach. The nature of the research questions is a major factor influencing the choice of a research method. Second, studies investigating Syrian refugee emerging adults’ acculturation behaviors have provided a primarily quantitative perspective or have involved populations in other countries, such as Turkey. A substantial amount of research has been conducted to emphasize the mental health needs of refugees worldwide; this research has reported a very high incidence of symptoms such as trauma and PTSD among refugees living in camps. However, few studies have highlighted the need for acculturation among refugees and the positive outcomes of the acculturation process. Moreover, the literature examining psychological well-being among refugee emerging adults has been much less prevalent than that investigating other age groups. Therefore, acculturation among Syrian refugee emerging adults in the United States has not been well researched. Because the existence of Syrian refugees is incredibly recent, limited studies have focused on Syrian refugees in North America.
From working with families with a refugee background, I learned that, in addition to coping with trauma symptoms, these families encounter considerable stress acculturating to their new homes. I found that familial and individual level challenges are synergistic and impact both individual and family acculturation. My counseling and Arabic language skills opened the door for me to advocate for refugees and empowered my one-on-one work with them. Additionally, sharing mainstream Arab culture built bridges of understanding and trust between the refugees and myself. In addition, as an international student and a mother of school-age children, I understood that acculturation has a significant influence on the relationships among family members.

Moreover, during my work with refugees, they shared their lived experiences in the US. For instance, a refugee client mentioned that she learned how to use the Pittsburgh public transportation system to travel to work by depending on her photographic memory. This type of narrative illuminates the notion of acculturation behavior among refugee emerging adults. Therefore, the phenomenon of acculturation has been of interest to me since I began my doctoral program.

**Research Tradition**

Although there have been various research traditions used in qualitative research, this study was phenomenological in nature. Phenomenology is a research method used to describe how human beings experience a certain phenomenon. This approach allows the researcher to delve into the perceptions, perspectives, understandings, and feelings of people who have actually experienced or lived the phenomenon or situation of interest.
Edmund Husserl is acknowledged as the father of phenomenology (Moran, 2000), which is an approach used to emphasize lived experience and how individuals make sense of it (Dowling, 2007). The phenomenological approach expresses how the world is intentionally formed and consciously experienced (Moran, 2000), and humans are referred to as “being in the world” (Spinelli, 1989). Husserl stated that the aim of descriptive phenomenology is to focus on pure phenomenology and to eliminate preexisting assumptions and attitudes that corrupt the understanding of a phenomenon (Touhy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixsmith, 2013). Moreover, Jacoby and Ochs (1995) stated that the real research findings are those that the researcher and participants co-construct. Using the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach, this study sought to understand the lived experiences of Syrian refugee emerging adults related to their acculturation in the United States. This phenomenon has not been well researched, and phenomena that are not well researched are usually not deeply understood (Carpenter, 1995). Thus, the perspective adopted in this study was phenomenological, and Syrian refugee emerging adults’ lived experiences are presented as they made meaning of these experiences.

**Research Design**

This study was an exploratory qualitative research study, as prior studies have not examined the lived experiences of Syrian refugee emerging adults in the US. Exploratory research designs are useful when knowledge of a new phenomenon or group of people with similar human service needs is limited. Creswell (2009) asserted that researchers should rely on qualitative approaches to seek understanding of a concept by exploring the gap in the existing knowledge. Marshall and Rossman (2016) defined exploratory studies as research that investigates phenomena to obtain understanding, discover important meaning, and generate hypotheses for future research. Exploring a phenomenon is performed by questioning the
research participants about experiences with the same questions to understand how they have constructed meaning from these experiences (Creswell, 2013). Thus, constructivism leads to valuing and negotiating the final interpretation of the experience (Creswell, 2013).

Since this study was interpretive and interactionist, I applied Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1994). IPA investigates and highlights lived experiences using systematic procedures and appropriate methods developed for the human sciences (Smith & Eatough, 2006). The use of IPA to understand how individuals make sense of their lived experiences of illness is well established in health psychology and is a developing research method in counseling, clinical, and social psychology (Brocki & Wearden, 2006).

Researchers performing an IPA study play an active role in a dynamic research process (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA focuses on the following two levels of interpretation: the participants make sense of their experiences; and the researcher makes sense of the participants making sense of their experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Thus, IPA is not a rigid data analysis method, and the researcher can adapt and modify the methods depending on the research process. The following requirements suggested by scholars in the interpretive interactionist design field (Jefford & Sundin, 2013) were followed in this study:

- Utilize multiple cases (I plan to use 10-15 cases to better understand the refugee emerging adults’ lived experiences);
- Find the crises and epiphanies in the participants’ lives (the main goal of this study is to explore the acculturation experiences of emerging adults before, during and after immigration);
- Employ sophisticated rigor (see the data collection and data analysis procedures below);
- Present the phenomena in the language, feelings, emotions, and actions of those being studied;
• Follow the five steps of interpretation, i.e., deconstruction, capture, bracketing, construction and contextualization; and

• Clearly state the researcher’s value position regarding the phenomena being studied (in this case, the acculturation experience of refugees).

Sampling Procedure

Sample Size and Sampling Methods

Sampling is an important concept in qualitative research design. Mason (2002) asserted that less attention has been paid to the sampling process in methodological textbooks and journals. Sampling is the process of selecting the “best fitting” individuals to provide data for the study (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenologically oriented exploratory study requires a limited number of participants to represent a larger population.

This study was not concerned with whether the sample is representative of a larger population and instead focused on the ability of the informants to make substantial contributions to the study. Robinson (2014) provided the following practical guidelines for sampling for interview-based qualitative research: defining the sample inclusion and exclusion criteria; choosing the sample size based on epistemology; selecting a sampling strategy; and sample sourcing.

Defining the Sample

The first step of sampling is to identify a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria that draw boundaries around the sample (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995; Patton, 1990; Robinson, 2014). Robinson (2014) referred to inclusion criteria as the attributes that participants possess to qualify
for the study, while exclusion criteria were defined as attributes that disqualify individuals from participating in a study.

Homogeneity within the sample is a significant criterion for qualitative studies. Homogeneous samples can be obtained by focusing on homogeneous demographic, geographic, physical, psychological, and life history characteristics (Robinson, 2014). In this research, the participants were selected based on demographic characteristics, including their age, race, ethnicity, education, marital status, occupation, and income level.

**Sampling**

In the present research, twelve participants were selected for individual interviews. The selected participants were emerging adult Syrian refugees ranging in age range from 18 to 25 years old. Two participants were related to each other. This relationship did not impact the participants’ confidentiality because they came from a collective society in which they value the familial relationship over confidentiality.

In the present study, the participants were considered Caucasian and refugees in the US because of the Syrian civil war. The age range of the participants in the present study was between 18 and 25 years old; seven men and five women agreed to participate. The participants were born and raised in Syria and shared the experience of the civil war in Syria. The participants had witnessed the process of migration by being in a third country, such as Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, or Egypt. Three participants were in the US educational system at the high school level, five participants had applied to community college, and four participants were seeking English language programs. Seven participants were single, two were married, one was engaged, one was separated, and one was divorced. Eleven participants were Muslim and spoke
Arabic as their first language; one participant was Yazidi and spoke Kurdish and Arabic. The interview language preference was Arabic. The reasons for focusing on this age range were as follows: a) these refugees experienced living in Syria before the war and resettled in the United States; b) these refugees faced considerable challenges in the workplace and/or US educational system; and c) these refugees might experience challenges at multiple levels in acculturating to American culture due to family and peer pressure.

Sample Size

The sample size is the second item that must be determined for sampling (Robinson, 2014). Several factors determine the sample size in IPA research, including practical restrictions, commitment to a case-by-case approach, and the informational richness of individual cases (Smith & Osborn, 2003). There is no specific agreed-upon number of participants required for a qualitative study. For example, Creswell (2013) proposed that 12-20 cases are sufficient for generalization from qualitative studies. Since generalization is not a major aspect of my study, and considering all of the previous literature, I recruited twelve participants for in-depth interviews. Although this sample size was considered small, it allowed the participants to voice their opinions and provided in-depth details; thus, an intensive analysis of each interview was conducted.

Sample Selection

The third step of the sampling process is sample selection. In a qualitative study, the research sample selection is purposeful (Patton, 2002). The sample in a qualitative study must be selected from the population that the researcher wants to understand or explore. Merriam (1998) referred to this type of sampling as purposive sampling or judgment sampling (Gay, Mills, &
Airsasian, 2006). In such studies, the investigator makes assumptions about the phenomena to be investigated to obtain greater insight (Merriam, 1998).

Kruger (1988) defined purposeful sampling as the intentional recruitment of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon that the researcher intends to investigate. The purposive selection of participants for a study provides in-depth information and promotes insight into the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). In contrast, random sampling does not provide deep and meaningful information about phenomena. Thus, to comprehend acculturation among Syrian refugee emerging adults in the United States, the researcher used purposeful selection to recruit participants.

**Description of the Research Site and Recruitment Procedures**

The sourcing sample is the fourth step of the sampling process. Once the sampling environment and sample size have been chosen and sample selection performed, the researcher must recruit participants from the real world (Robinson, 2014). Participant recruitment was conducted via advertising, which could be performed using many methods, such as print or face-to-face advertisements. Several studies indicated that face-to-face advertisement was beneficial for studies involving vulnerable populations because this approach builds trust and rapport with researchers (Abrams, 2010; & Robinson, 2014).

Ansar of Pittsburgh is a nonprofit organization located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This organization is one of the primary agencies that provides social services for refugees resettling in the Pittsburgh area. Ansar provides not only services and advocates for immigrants but also workshops to empower emerging immigrants to achieve their potential. Ansar plays a significant role in addressing emerging immigrants’ academic needs and career development. I volunteer at
this agency, and I met the participants at the Ansar of Pittsburgh offices in Carnegie and Duquesne, Pennsylvania. I contacted Dr. Wiam Yonis, who is the founder and director of Ansar, to obtain initial consent to recruit participants. Dr. Yonis received a copy of the research proposal, a copy of the informed consent in Arabic and English approved by the IRB of Duquesne University, and a list of the interview questions.

**Study Advertising**

I contacted Dr. Yonis to request a list of participants who fit the inclusion criteria. Dr. Yonis contacted the participants over the phone, explained the purpose of the study, and obtained their initial consent to participate. Dr. Yonis and I contacted the heads of the households to obtain their consent as well. Then, she provided a list of their cellphone numbers and their home addresses to facilitate communication.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted at the Ansar offices. Four participants agreed to meet in the office, and eight participants preferred to conduct the interviews at their homes to maintain confidentiality. I contacted the participants to schedule the interviews. The participants were informed about the purpose of the interview. Bailey (1996) recommended items to include in the research consent, including the purposes and procedures of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, the individuals’ right to withdraw from the study, and the procedures used to protect confidentiality.

**Informed Consent**

In this study, Ansar of Pittsburgh facilitated the signing of informed consent forms as a third party. The fear of signing legal documents appears to be a theme among refugees who have experienced complex trauma. Therefore, Barnett, Wise, Johnson-Greene, and Bucky (2007)
suggested that researchers protect their participants’ rights by involving a third party in the informed consent process. Additionally, Zion, Briskman, and Loff (2010) recommended contacting a third party, such as a health care provider or immigrant advocate, to obtain information about the refugees to avoid violating their rights during the research process. Moreover, Leaning (2001) noted that researchers should use individual documents with culturally appropriate, multilabel informed consent techniques, such as contacting community leaders and heads of household, to address this dilemma. Participants were informed about confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the research at any time. The interviews were audio recorded, and I explained the purpose of the audio recording and that the data would be stored in a safe place.

**Data Collection**

Qualitative researchers are the major instruments of data collection and analysis (Van Manen, 1990). I was the main researcher, and I conducted the interviews, provided field notes, and reflected on the process. Utilizing the professional skills that I developed in the counseling field and the experience that I obtained from volunteering with refugees in the Pittsburgh area, I was able to successfully interview the participants. I used phenomenological interviews and semistructured in-depth interviews to guide the data collection.

**Phenomenological Interviewing**

Van Manen (1990) referred to collected data as lived experience material. The phenomenological interview is a specific type of interview that examines lived experiences to obtain insights into and an understanding of a phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Phenomenological interviews aim to describe the meaning of the lived experiences shared by the
participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Moreover, interviews yield data more quickly than other methods and promote immediate follow-up and clarification from the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Interviews also provide nonverbal information by observing the individuals’ looks, facial expressions, and tones of voice (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Phenomenological interviewing requires time to build rapport with the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Seidman (2013) suggested the use of three in-depth interviews to address this issue. The first interview focuses on past experiences with the phenomenon, the second interview focuses on the present experience, and the third interview incorporates narratives from the previous interviews to focus on the individual’s lived experience.

**Semistructured In-depth Interview Format**

In a semistructured interview, the researcher must prepare a set of questions related to the phenomenon under study; however, the researcher is permitted to branch out from these main questions (Miles & Gilbert, 2005). In contrast, during a structured interview, the researcher uses a predetermined list of questions and is obligated to focus only on these questions; however, the unstructured interview involves minimal predetermination of the questions that should be asked (Miles & Gilbert, 2005).

Because of the flexible nature of semistructured interviews, these interviews have the best fit when a researcher aims to determine “why”, rather than “how many” or “how much” (Miles & Gilbert, 2005). Therefore, in the present research, semistructured interviews were utilized to obtain an in-depth understanding of acculturation among Syrian refugee emerging adults and to provide an opportunity to explore open-ended questions more freely. In the present study, each individual interview lasted between one and two hours, during which the participants...
were asked to share their lived experiences and to provide deep information regarding the meaning that they created from their experiences.

It has been suggested that researchers can obtain data in IPA studies from personal accounts and diaries. However, Smith and Osborn (2003) asserted that the best way to collect data for an IPA study is through semistructured interviews, allowing researchers and participants to actively engage in dialogue and allowing the researcher to modify questions based on the participants’ responses.

**Interview Guide**

To investigate the lived experiences of Syrian refugee emerging adults’ acculturation in the United States, it was essential to develop questions that prompted the participants to share their experiences. Notably, the interview questions were culturally sensitive. Recommendations indicated that the ideal interview should exceed ten questions to provide the participants with ample time to answer each question (Patton, 2002). The following guide was developed for this study.

1. Background information regarding age, religion, family situation, educational status, and number of years as a refugee.

2. The process of immigration, i.e., pre-, during, and post-immigration experiences.

3. What is the nature of the acculturation experiences of Syrian refugee emerging adults in the United States?

4. How do Syrian refugee emerging adults learn to acculturate?

5. What strategies have Syrian refugee emerging adults used to develop acculturation?
6. How do Syrian refugee emerging adults facilitate acculturation?

7. Why is acculturation important for Syrian refugee emerging adults in the United States?

8. How does acculturation impact Syrian refugee emerging adults in the United States?

9. What do Syrian refugee emerging adults need to promote acculturation in the United States?

Data Gathering Procedures

The phenomenological interview is a specific type of interview that examines lived experiences to develop insights into and understanding of phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Phenomenological interviewing aims to describe the meaning of the lived experiences shared by the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Moreover, interviews yield data more quickly than other methods and promote immediate follow-up and clarification from the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Interviews also provide nonverbal information by the observing of individuals’ looks, facial expressions, and voices (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

One concern in the data collection from men was my "femaleness". An interviewer’s visible characteristics, including race and gender, often affect interviews and respondents’ answers, especially to questions related to race and gender (Ellison, McFarland, & Krause, 2011; & Oyinlade & Losen, 2014). The qualitative literature has shown that interviewing relationships between different genders, classes, and ages can engender tensions that inhibit the full development of an effective interviewing relationship. Based on this concern, I initially planned to use a male research assistant, but I did not find the use of multiple interviewers in any exploratory qualitative study. As the cultural practice among Syrian refugee families dictates, parents were present with their emerging adults during the interviews.
The semistructured in-depth interview was recommended to be conducted for individuals or focus groups (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Therefore, I decided to conduct one session interview with each participant. Accordingly, I conducted one session interview in all cases. Each interview was expected to take from one to one and a half hours. Interviews lasted from an hour to two hours, with the average being nearly 78 minutes (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

The interviewee was given the chance to choose the language (Arabic vs. English) and the place and time that they felt were convenient for the interview. The interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants. In addition, I took extensive field notes of my impressions during the interviewing and pre-interviewing discussions with each participant.

All of these interview issues helped to make me cognizant of the following ideas in relation to the rigor of the interviewer. There is the interviewer as a conscious performer, actor, social interpreter and director. Berg (2009) identified the "ten commandments of interviewing": "not being cold, remembering purposes, being natural although some of our questions are remembered, paraphrasing a participant’s comments back to demonstrate attentive listening, thinking about appearance, interviewing in a comfortable environment, not being satisfied with monosyllabic answers such as yes or no, being respectful, and being cordial and appreciative" (p.134). Being aware of these qualities of the interviewer and practicing helped me to conduct smooth and effective interviews with ten participants individually and two with dyad settings. Of the twelve interviews, six interviews were conducted in the presence of a parent or other family member. The interviews were conducted in the Ansar of Pittsburgh offices in Carnegie, PA, and Duquesne, PA, and in the participants’ homes. The female participants (n=5) preferred to conduct the interviews at their homes because of cultural sensitivity. The preferred language that
the participant chose for the interviews was Arabic. The interviews were translated into English and transcribed using Atlas.ti, a software program for qualitative research analysis.

**Researcher as an Instrument**

The main instrument in qualitative studies is the researcher (Van Manen, 1990). I was the main researcher who conducted the interviews, provided field notes, and reflected on the process. Therefore, it is worth mentioning my qualifications and professional experiences, both of which benefited this study.

I have considerable experience working full time at a clinical mental health facility. My work has focused on individual and group therapy for clients with severe mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depressive disorder. In addition, I worked with the Counseling and Well-being Center at Duquesne University, where I met many clients who struggled to find their identities, in their relationships with their families and others, and in acculturating to a new culture. Significantly, this issue arose not only among students from diverse backgrounds but also among American students from different states. Therefore, I realized that identity and attempting to “fit in” were common issues among all emerging adults. These experiences increased my awareness of the need to advocate for underserved populations regardless of their racial identity, religious affiliation, or socioeconomic status. My main priority developed not only by helping these populations in clinical settings but also by publicly advocating for them and providing a voice for those who do not have one.

In addition, as a volunteer, I joined Ansar of Pittsburgh, which is a developing nonprofit organization that serves refugees from all over the world, especially from Syria and Iraq. The director of this organization sent an email through Duquesne University asking for volunteers
with clinical mental health experience because of their limitations in helping refugees with trauma experiences. My native language helped me to communicate with refugee clients who also speak Arabic. Since I was the only person providing mental health help and psychoeducation to this population, the leader of the organization and I planned to start a youth group and a women’s mental health support group and to assist mothers with their families. From working with families with refugee backgrounds, I learned that, in addition to coping with trauma symptoms, these families encounter considerable stress related to acculturating to their new homes. Therefore, the phenomenon of acculturation has been of particular interest to me since I began my doctoral program.

My counseling and Arabic language skills have opened the door for me to advocate for refugees and have empowered me to work with them one on one. Additionally, sharing mainstream Arab culture has built bridges of understanding and trust between the refugees and me. In addition, as an international student and a mother of school-age children, I understand the significant influence that acculturation has on relationships among family members. I met several families who have struggled to find a balance between their native culture and American culture.

My lived experiences with acculturation in the United States as an international student could present a potential bias. In 2011, I came to the US with my family to seek higher education. My English language skills were limited, and the school system was different from that in my home country. It was a challenging time for us as a family to ensure that our needs were met, such as an adequate and safe home, transportation, and international goods stores. Additionally, enrolling our children in the US academical system was another challenge for us. I found my husband and I changed our gender roles, with which we used to be able to solve any
obstacle that we countered immediately in our country. Our strategies empowered our problem-solving skills and aided us in achieving higher education. As an international student, I could relate to the emerging adult Syrian refugees who came to the US for better education, employment, and a brighter future for their children. My personal experience has enhanced my understanding and promoted my insight into the acculturation strategies used by diverse groups across a broad age range. Thus, I have dedicated myself to helping other international students, immigrants, and refugees balance their native cultures and American culture. I became attuned to the newcomers’ feelings of isolation, loneliness, and frustration. I understood the meaning of a parent that supports his or her school-age children to do well in school. I became a person who talks to newcomers about their anxiety, homesickness, and frustration. I was not only a counselor for newcomers but also an information resource. I answered newcomers’ questions related to the school systems and US regulations, which minimized acculturation stress that impacts mental health, academic achievement, and familial relationships. I was and will be willing to share all of my acculturation experiences and what I have learned through the years with newcomers because I once confronted the same challenges.

**Data Analysis Process**

The central purpose of qualitative data analyses is to sift, sort, and organize the massive amounts of data acquired during the data collection phase in such a way that the themes and interpretations that emerge from the process accurately address the original research questions. Qualitative data analysis begins while the data are gathered. In this section, the data analysis procedure is explained through several strategies, including interview translations from Arabic to English, cleaning the data, coding by utilizing Atlas.ti, and analyzing the data using IPA.
Interview Translation

The recorded interviewees were transcribed verbatim (all words, silences, laughter, coughs, and utterances). Translation requires more than changing words from one language to another. It aims to deliver the exact meaning of the words and the emotions underlying them. I translated the interviews for many reasons. First, because I am the research instrument, I provided exact translations of the interviews. I was able to ask follow-up questions to clarify the meaning of the informants’ answers. Additionally, I am a bilingual speaker, and I speak the Arabic language, in which the participants preferred to conduct the research. I was able to understand the slang and metaphors that carry specific meaning and are difficult to translate into a different language. Moreover, living in the US for several years has strengthened my English skills to be able to translate the interviews. Finally, the cultural understanding of both Arab and American cultures empowered me to facilitate the delivery of the meaning and emotion of the words and to explain to the participants many concepts that they struggled to understand. To maintain the validity of the translations and to prevent personal biases, two bilingual speakers reviewed the transcripts and translations. The transcripts were also reviewed for accuracy. When transcribing or hearing the recorded tapes and reading the field notes, I prepared memos. The transcripts were read and re-read several times to obtain an understanding of the story, and then I created a précis (short summary) (Creswell, 1998, 2005). While listening to the tapes, I examined whether all of the interview questions helped to reveal the story from the informant.

Caution was taken to carefully follow the flow of the story of each participant. I identified the epiphanies in these stories. Epiphanies are experienced like social dramas, as dramatic events with beginnings, middles, and endings. An epiphany connotes a turning point experience in one’s life. I prepared field notes/memos that addressed what happened in the
interviews, how I felt in the interviews, my perceptions of the informants, and whether I believed that there were issues that were not covered.

**Cleaning the Data**

The major task of analyzing qualitative interviews is data reduction because the amount of qualitative data is considerable. The audio recordings and transcripts were reviewed several times. During this phase, cleaning the data was necessary. All side talk or interactions with other persons during the interview were removed from the transcripts. Moreover, some participants changed the topic to discuss another topic and then returned to finish their story. Moreover, the heads of households, such as parents, husbands, and older brothers, shared their opinions about some of the questions and side talked with the interviewees and me. Welcoming the head of the household to be present at the interview was intentional to maintain trustworthy rapport between the participants and me. Hence, collecting the whole narrative form of the participant was important for providing clear and structured understandings of the interviews.

**Coding**

Coding in qualitative studies aims to generate names and labels for the phenomena that represent analytic thinking (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). First, open coding was utilized to intuitively identify key ideas that helped the researcher to identify patterns. The transcribed interviews were coded manually line by line. The initial open coding process created fifty-seven codes. Each open code was linked to another existing open code. The next step was the use of selective coding to cluster codes into groups and label them (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). All of the open codes were transferred into SimpleMind, software that illustrates the relationships between open codes (Appendix F). Moreover, the code manager in Atlas.ti was used to review
the word count to check for additional codes or categories. Another element that was utilized in the code cooccurrence table was generated by Atlas.ti. Furthermore, two peers were consulted to cluster the open codes to maintain the validity and control for personal biases. The third step was theoretical coding. During this phase, Atlas.ti was used to upload the transcripts and generate themes. Atlas.ti is qualitative research software that was used to manage, code, and analyze data. Using SimpleMind, the relationships between the open codes and selective codes became clear. Selective codes with the most relationship formed the foundation of the final theoretical coding. The following illustration presents the coding process (Table 1).

Table 1. Coding Process
Consistent with the research design, I used IPA as the primary technique to analyze the collected data. Smith and Osborn (2007) described the following four major research analysis stages with seven substeps.

1. Searching for Themes in the First Case: This step involves reading and rereading the transcripts and taking meaningful notes. The researcher transforms the initial notes into themes that incorporate more psychological terminology. The number of emerging themes reflects the richness of the data.

2. Connecting the Themes: During this step, the researcher makes sense of the connections among the themes that can be clustered or that emerge as superordinate concepts. The researcher then creates a table of the themes that identifies and names the clusters of themes that represent the superordinate themes.

3. Continuing the Analysis of Other Cases: During this step, the researcher transcribes the next case and identifies themes. The researcher has the following two options: a) using the themes and table from the first transcript to organize the subsequent analysis or b) working on the second transcript from scratch without utilizing the themes from the first transcript. The researcher then identifies patterns across the cases and constructs a final table of the superordinate themes.

4. Writing: During this final stage, the researcher translates the themes into a narrative account and reconstructs the final themes into meaningful statements that reflect the participants’ lived experiences.
Following is Table 2, which illustrates the IPA steps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major steps</th>
<th>Substeps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Searching for Themes in the First Case</td>
<td>Reading and rereading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initial note taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Developing Emergent Themes</td>
<td>Connecting the themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connecting themes and creating a table of themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Continuing the Analysis of Other Cases</td>
<td>Proceeding to the next case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Searching for patterns across cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Writing</td>
<td>Translating the themes into a narrative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2. IPA Steps*

During the coding process, I used Atlas.ti, a qualitative research software program. There were 56 margin notes that served as preliminary codes (Appendix B) on the 300 pages of transcripts. Then, this number was reduced to 47 comments as open codes (Appendix C). Subsequently, these codes were reduced by combining and recombining them, which resulted in 31 themes (Appendix D). During the final data reduction, 14 final themes were prepared (Appendix E). Then, these themes were organized under five clusters as major topics for presentation, namely predeparture experience, journey, destination experience, acculturation
experience, and strategies to acculturation. In the end, the analysis was reviewed by examining the facts that were obtained and asking what they meant to the participants and to me as a researcher.

**Ethical Considerations**

For counselors, the American Counseling Association code of ethics is the standard for all ethical considerations. The present research involved human subject interactions and was guided by the IRB of Duquesne University, which adhered to the Belmont Report on human subject ethical guidelines, including beneficence, respect for human dignity, and justice. Several potential ethical issues have been considered and addressed in the course of this study, including confidentiality, treatment of vulnerable populations, and data storage.

**Confidentiality**

The participants were informed of the conditionality of the information that they shared and of the American Counselor Association (ACA) conditions under which this confidentiality could be broken (i.e., risks of homicide, suicide, or child abuse). In contrast to group interviews, the use of individual interviews promotes privacy and confidentiality. The participants in the present study had a high level of sensitivity to signing documents and sharing demographic information.

The Institutional Review Board of Duquesne University was informed and provided approval of this study prior to the signing of informed consent. The first step was to contact the heads of households to obtain their consent to conduct the interviews. Although the participants were legally able to provide their consent, the heads of households were intentionally contacted due to cultural sensitivity. Dr. Yonis and I obtained the initial consent from the participants over
the phone and informed them about the purpose of the research. In meetings, I explained the purpose of the research, their right to withdrawal, and confidentiality. In addition to signing the informed consent form, verbal consent was recorded at the beginning of the interview. Moreover, to provide an additional level of confidentiality during the recorded interviews, the participants were asked to identify themselves using pseudonyms. Therefore, no documents exist that could be used to identify the participants.

**Treatment of Vulnerable Populations**

The research participants were informed of the purpose, procedures, and data collection and data protection procedures of this study. Moreover, the participants were informed of their rights to decline to participate and withdraw from this study at any time. Vulnerable populations include individuals who might face potential harm, manipulation, or deception from researchers because of their disadvantaged status (Rogers, 1990). Although the participants originated from difficult backgrounds, they were not asked about their traumatic experiences related to the war. However, they processed their experiences and construct meanings, which they considered healing from trauma. The interview questions focused on their present day-to-day efforts to acculturate in the United States. Thus, the participants were protected from being retraumatized using questions that focused on the present.

The participants were informed of the indirect benefits of participating in the present study. For example, the outcomes of this research might help clinicians who work with refugees to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of acculturation. In addition, this study paved the way for future efforts to create a guidebook for immigrant and refugee families raising their children in Western cultures.
Data Storage

The participants in this study were informed about the data storage strategy. Because the interviews were audio recorded, they were saved electronically in a password-protected file on a personal computer. The participants were notified that only the researcher has access to the audio recorded interviews. All of the identifying information was removed from the transcribed summaries, and the audio recorded interviews were translated and transcribed. These records will be saved for up to five years.

Considerations for Enhancing the Quality of the Research

Qualitative research adheres to standards of validity to maintain the credibility of the research. Creswell (2013) outlined criteria to ensure validity in qualitative research. Maxwell (2012) listed the following validity strategies: searching for alternative explanations, searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases, triangulation, soliciting feedback, participant checks, comparisons, and rich data.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is defined as evidence of the rigor of the study resulting from the dependability, credibility, and transferability of the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Several methods were utilized to enhance the trustworthiness of the present study’s findings. Through the analysis process, I engaged in debriefing and discussed the research with peers to receive accurate support, challenge the study assumptions, and evaluate the data interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Additionally, I consulted my dissertation committee members to obtain additional feedback that could strengthen the credibility of the research.
Credibility

The credibility of qualitative research aims to explore a problem or describe a pattern of a social group interaction (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The major goal of obtaining credibility in qualitative studies is to demonstrate that the inquiry is used appropriately and sufficiently to explain and describe the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Bracketing is identified as an essential step to ensure validity and quality (Creswell, 2013). To facilitate the bracketing of personal biases, I engaged in reflective activities and peer and committee consultation. Moreover, I continued reviewing previous studies to add validity to this study.

Transferability

Phenomenological studies focus on the uniqueness of a specific experience by distinguishing accurate details (Vagle, 2009). Marshall and Rossman (2016) reported that transferability occurs when research findings would be useful to other research in similar settings with similar research questions. Shenton (2004) indicated that the results can be applied to another setting depending on the detailed presentation of the interpretation. The amount of detail that is adequate for transferability is called qualitative research thick description (Creswell, 2013). Robinson (2014) introduced Yardley’s criteria for thick descriptions that emphasize elements considered to be guidelines for evaluating the validity of a study, including sensitivity to context, rigor, transparency, coherence, impact and importance. As a researcher, I used my counseling skills and demonstrated sensitivity during the interviews.

Dependability and Conformability

As previously noted, I obtained feedback from the participants regarding the accuracy of the data interpretation. Furthermore, I reviewed the field notes to collect additional information,
in addition to the transcribed interviews. This process, called triangulation, aims to use several different strategies to gather data (Patton, 2002).

Confirmability is a way for qualitative researchers to maintain objectivity and discuss whether the findings could be confirmed by another study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Confirmability emphasizes minimizing researcher bias. Several studies have asserted that researchers should separate their personal biases and interpret the actual accounts of the participants (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guna, 1985). To maintain self-awareness and to control personal biases, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested reflective journaling to document the research process. Therefore, I documented the process and reflected on the interviews by journaling. Validity and reliability must be measured in all studies. Phenomenological research depends on the research design and research tradition. Through several strategies, such as triangulation, semistructured in-depth interviews, debriefing with peers, consulting with my dissertation committee, and minimizing risks related to confidentiality, the trustworthiness of the present research was enhanced.

**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This research aimed to explore and understand Syrian refugee emerging adults’ acculturation behavior in the US. The primary research question focused on the lived experiences of Syrian refugee emerging adults related to learning and the acculturation process in the United States. To create meaning from the participants’ experiences, the phenomenal research approach was utilized from the constructivist point of view to bridge the gap in the existing literature.
Qualitative phenomenal inquiry was the most appropriate genre for the present investigation to seek relationships between variables and an in-depth comprehension related to acculturation.

Moreover, this chapter presented the sampling procedure, which involved determining the sample size, selecting the participants, and recruiting interviewees. Informed consent was obtained through three steps: a) I contacted the heads of the households and the participants for initial consent; b) I involved the founder of Ansar of Pittsburgh and the heads of households to build trust and rapport with the participants; and c) I explained the research procedure in detail using the Arabic language.

The data were collected through phenomenal, semistructured in-depth interviews with 12 emerging adult Syrian refugees who resettled in Pittsburgh, PA. I was the main instrument for the research for several reasons, such as my clinical mental health counseling background, communication and bilingual skills, and experience volunteering with Ansar of Pittsburgh, a nonprofit organization supporting newcomers. Additionally, my experience of being an international student in the US system and a mother of school-age children facilitated my understanding of the acculturation stressors confronted by all international students, immigrants, and refugees.

In this chapter, the data analysis process started with the interviews being translated from Arabic to English. I was able to translate the interviews and include the participants’ thoughts and feelings and the meanings of their lived experiences. There were three steps that indicated the process of coding. I used qualitative research software, such as Atlas.ti, to manage the open coding, selective coding, and theoretical coding.
Because the study aimed to highlight acculturation behaviors and to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, IPA (Smith, 1994) was utilized to analyze the data. IPA seeks understanding at the following two major levels: the research participants make sense of their experiences; and the researcher makes sense of the participants’ making sense of their experiences (Smith, 1994).

The final section in this chapter discussed ethical considerations that occurred in the qualitative studies, such as confidentiality, treatment of vulnerable populations, and data storage. Considerations for enhancing the quality of the research, such as trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability, were reported in the last section of this chapter.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presented and in-depth explanation of the major findings and themes that emerged from this investigation. The first section of this chapter focused on introducing the participants’ demographic characteristics, including their age, gender, marital status, number of individuals in the household, educational level, occupation, length of stay in the transit country, and length of resettlement in the US.

The second section of this chapter focused on the themes that emerged from this research. In total, 56 themes were derived from the informants’ experiences as open codes. The theoretical coding indicated that 14 themes emerged, and these themes were organized into five clusters. The first cluster was predeparture experience and included the following 3 themes: reason for migration, experience of traumatic events, and knowledge of the refugee and migration process. The second cluster was the journey and contained the following 3 themes: mode of travel to the refugee camp, life in the refugee camp, and traveling to the US.

The destination experience was the third cluster and included the following 5 themes: arrival at the US, interactions with different stakeholders, support and challenges, settling in Pittsburgh, and adjusting to the Syrian community. The fourth cluster was acculturation experience, which included one theme. According to this theme, acculturation and challenges were explained according to the bioecological model of human development at the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem levels. The fifth cluster named strategies used to enhance acculturation and involved the following 2 themes: interpersonal skills and community support.
Informant Profiles

This section presented descriptions of the informants’ demographic and other characteristics, which could aid in facilitating an understanding of the context that might have predisposed the informants to become refugees and may have affected their adjustment and acculturation process in the US. Please see the table in Appendix 1, which summarized the informants’ profiles.

Participant 1. Participant 1 is a 22-year-old single male with a 6th grade education. He used to work in Syria as a laborer. He escaped the war to Jordan and lived there for five years. He has lived in the US with his seven-member family for three years. He is the main provider for his family because he is the oldest son and his father has a physical disability. Participant 1’s ultimate goal is to obtain employment as an Information Technology (IT) programmer.

Participant 2. Participant 2 is a 22-year-old single male. He earned his high school diploma in Jordan after escaping the war in Syria with his family. Participant 2 lived in Jordan for 5 years and worked in the labor sector. He has lived in the US with his seven-member family for three years. He is the main provider for his family because he is the oldest son and his father experiences chronic pain. He enrolled in a community college to improve his English language skills, and he is enrolled in courses to become a physician assistant.

Participant 3. Participant 3 is a 23-year-old engaged female. She earned her high school diploma in Jordan after escaping the war in Syria with her family. She lived in Jordan for 5 years. Participant 3 lives with her parents and 5 siblings. She has lived in the US for three years. She plans to continue her education at a community college to improve her English language skills, and she is enrolled in courses to become a physician assistant.
Participant 4. Participant 4 is a 23-year-old married male with an elementary school education (6th grade). He escaped the war with his four siblings, and subsequently, his mother joined them in Jordan. He lived in Jordan for five years and worked in the labor sector. He has lived in the US for three years and recently moved to the Pittsburgh area. He plans to apply to a community college to strengthen his English language skills and work to support his family of nine, including his mother, siblings, wife, and two daughters. He is the main provider for his family because he is the oldest son and his father is deceased.

Participant 5. Participant 5 is a 25-year-old divorced male with an elementary school education (6th grade). He escaped the Syrian civil war to Lebanon and then Jordan with his nine-member family. He lived in Jordan for five years and worked in the labor sector. He has lived in the US for three years. He plans to apply to a community college to strengthen his English language skills.

Participant 6. Participant 6 is a 19-year-old single male. He is currently enrolled in high school in the US. He escaped the war with his mother and younger brother to Jordan and lived there for four years. He depends on his mother to provide for him and support him financially. His goal is to attend college and obtain a good job.

Participant 7. Participant 7 is an 18-year-old single male. He is currently enrolled in high school in the US. He escaped the war to Jordan with his family of eight. He lived in Jordan for four years, and he has lived in the US for three years. He does not work and depends on his older brother to provide for him.

Participant 8. Participant 8 is a 24-year-old separated female. She has never attended school. She escaped the war with her family after her husband’s sudden disappearance. She lived
in Jordan for four years and arrived at the US three years ago. She used to work in the food industry. She plans to attend English language classes to improve her language skills.

Participant 9. Participant 9 is a 25-year-old married female with three children. She has an elementary school education (6th grade). She met and married her husband in Jordan. She lived in Jordan for five years and arrived at the US three years ago. She used to work in the food industry, and she is searching for a housekeeping job. Her goal is to enroll in English language classes to improve her language skills.

Participant 10. Participant 10 is an 18-year-old single female. She is currently enrolled in high school in the US. She is younger than her two siblings and escaped the war with their parents to live in Jordan for five years. Her older brother provided for the whole family because he is the oldest son and her father was arrested and held in the Syrian regime’s jail. She has lived in the US for two years. Participant 10’s goal is to study Eastern languages.

Participant 11. Participant 11 is a 25-year-old single male. He earned his high school diploma in Syria. He escaped with his family of five to Jordan because of the war. He worked in the food industry in Jordan for five years and arrived at the US 3 years ago. He has chronic pain in his back and legs that hinder him from working in a job requiring him to frequently stand or move. He is enrolled in a community college.

Participant 12. Participant 12 is a 22-year-old single female. She was enrolled in a high school in the US but withdrew. She escaped with her five-member family to Turkey and lived there for five years; in Turkey, she worked in a tailor shop. She desires to return to high school, but her age is not appropriate. She has lived in the US for two years; in the US, she works in a
tailor shop. She is considered the main provider because her father has a physical disability, her sister was married in Europe, and her brother is too young to work.

Of the 12 participants, two participants are related. This relationship did not impact the participants’ confidentiality because they originate from a collective society that values familial relationships over confidentiality. In the present study, the participants were considered Caucasian refugees in the US due to the Syrian civil war. Of the individuals who agreed to participate, seven participants were male, and five participants were female.

Moreover, the participants were born and raised in Syria and shared the experience of the civil war in Syria. The participants had experienced the process of migration and lived in a third country, such as Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, or Egypt. The participants’ ages when they escaped the civil war in Syria ranged from 10 to 17 years, and the average length of time they lived in a transit country was 4.5 years.

Regarding education, seven of the twelve participants had formal education as follows: 2 participants held high school diplomas from a transit country, one participant held a high school diploma from Syria, 3 participants were enrolled in high school in the US, and 1 participant withdrew from high school in the US. Four participants were interested in enrolling in an English language program. The participants’ marital status varied as follows: seven participants were single, two participants were married, one participant was engaged, one participant was separated, and one participant was divorced. Eleven of the participants were Muslims and spoke Arabic as their first language, and one participant was Yazidi and spoke Kurdi and Arabic. The interviews were conducted in Arabic.
The participants’ socioeconomic status was considered to fall below the poverty line. Five participants were the main providers for their families, and these participants belonged to families with an average of 7 family members. Four participants worked in jobs, such as tailoring, restaurant positions, delivering pizza, and bagging fruit. Two participants were enrolled in school and did not work. Because the participants recently moved to Pittsburgh, five participants were searching for jobs on the labor market.

Participant 2 explained the struggle he experienced attempting to provide financially for a family of nine as follows: “I am the main provider for my family. I live with my parents and my 9 siblings. They can’t work because they are all younger than me”. Participant 8 reported that she quit her job because of racial discrimination as follows: “I worked in a fruit factory bagging fruit. I quit because the managers were racists”. Participant 1 had a good experience working with Arab-Americans that helped foster his self-esteem and motivated him to achieve more as follows: “I worked in an Egyptian restaurant. I was the cashier, and I took care of the kitchen. The manager was Arab-American; he was very happy that I took care of everything because he needed an Arabic speaker to take care of the restaurant”. Participant 11 had previously worked several jobs to support his family; however, he quit because of a physical condition and the low pay as follows: “I used to work in a chocolate factory, delivering pizza, and as a janitor in a school. I could not tolerate the physical pain, so I quit”. Appendix 1 presents the participants’ demographic information, including their age, gender, number of family members, marital status, language, religion, level of education, number of years in the US, and number of years in the transit countries.
Predeparture Experience

The first cluster that emerged in the present research was the predeparture experience. This cluster focused on the participants’ lived experiences before they fled from Syria. The themes under this cluster included reasons for migrating, experience of traumatic events, and knowledge of the refugee and migration process.

Reasons for Migration

The main reason for becoming refugees was seeking safety because of the political conflict in Syria. The armed conflict has accounted for the loss of thousands of lives and destroyed properties, including homes, schools, and hospitals. The Syrian conflict has accounted for the loss of thousands of lives, including those of children, women, and the elderly. The bombings have destroyed people’s houses, and neighborhoods have been demolished. Workers at medical facilities and doctors are targeted for assassination or arrest. Schools have been closed, and students have been forced to remain at home to avoid abduction. Additionally, schools have been repurposed as shelters for people who have lost their homes, and the shelters have been destroyed. The war has impacted the country’s financial status, which has led to major economic losses. This situation has driven families to leave their homeland and become refugees in other countries. This theme emerged among all participants who left their homes to seek basic humanitarian needs.

While in Syria, Participant 11 carried food, water and medical supplies into the city under fire to help people who lived without proper nutrition or medication for weeks and reported the following: “I was one of a group of emerging men who brought food, water, and medication to the area under the embargo. The embargo prevented anything from going in or out of the city.
The young men found a way to bring food and water to the families. People ate grass due to hunger”.

Participant 1 reported his traumatic experience with consistent bombings and life support limitations, including nutrition, shelter, and medical assistance. He brought people to doctors who operated from their homes or other secret locations to avoid assassination as follows: “The war has shown me the pain of other people. I have seen people without legs, and they needed help. I used to take them to doctors or brought medical help to them. The poverty rate has increased incredibly. I have seen people who have no money; they eat grass and from trash cans”.

Time was critical in incidents of migration, and the people usually had no time to prepare and pack their personal belongings. The refugees lose their personal belongings and official documents because they had to choose between protecting their lives or bringing their personal belongings, such as identification documents. Participant 5 reported that his friend attempted to escape to Europe on a fishing boat to save his life without thinking about the consequences as follows: “He took his wife and kids to the shore where they were going to meet other families. The dealer forced them to throw the bags they were holding into the sea just to bring more people on the boat”. The armed conflict was a major life-threatening event reported by the participants during the interview.

**Experience with Traumatic Events**

Traumatic events include near-death experiences that impact an individual’s mental health, physical health, financial status, and relationships with others. The continual bombings
experienced by all participants and their families was a major life-threatening and traumatizing event. Similarly, two participants mentioned being arrested and tortured in jail.

Participant 5 was arrested because he protested against the regime. He mentioned that he was tortured and witnessed many other emerging people tortured and killed. This experience was traumatizing and impacted his mental and physical well-being as follows: “I was arrested by the Syrian regime for 3 months because I was against the regime…I have seen a lot of killing and torture inside the jail. This experience changed my life and my way of thinking forever”.

Participant 11 mentioned the following regarding his experience of being arrested because he was born in an area of the city that held different a political point of view regarding the Syrian regime: “…I was arrested because I used to help the victims by leading them to safe homes…I was physically hit by the police officers when they discovered that my father was born in a neighborhood that was against the regime”.

All informants (n=12) fled their home country to escape life-threatening situations, including abductions, assassinations, and arrests. Additionally, the lack of medical care, such as hospitals, doctors, and medication, has resulted in the loss of thousands of lives, and many people were chronically ill without support. The civil conflict has physically, psychologically, and financially impacted thousands of Syrians. The participants described their lives before they escaped the war to live in another country.

Participant 1 reported a near-death experience when a bomb targeted his family’s home. “We lost everything in Syria. We were very close to losing my father as well. A bomb exploded in the room that he had left only two minutes before. He came to the basement with us to hide, and the bomb exploded and destroyed the other side of the house” (Participant 1).
The traumatizing events of the war impacted the participants’ physical and psychological well-being. Participant 10 lived in constant fear of death, which manifested in flashbacks and dreams about the war. “The war impacted all of us. I was terrified a lot. I could not sleep. I was fearful that somebody could shoot me at any second. The nightmares were also terrifying. Thus, we relocated within Syria from one city to another to escape the bombings and seek safety, but the war destroyed everywhere” (Participant 10).

People suffered from a lack of access to resources, such as food, electricity, gas, and medical supplies, and survived with the bare minimum. Participant 5 shared experiences similar to those reported by participant 4 who collected wood to make a fire for cooking as follows: “My family and I were under the bombings for three months. We stayed at home, and my mother only went out for food shopping” (Participant 4). Participant 5 added that maintaining a normal lifestyle and providing for his family were challenging because he could be arrested simply for being outside the house as follows: “It was a very difficult Ramadan for us...my mother used to collect wood to cook for the family...we did not have electricity or gas for cooking or heating”.

Knowledge of the Refugee and Migration Process

The United Nations supported the refugees during their journey to their final destination. The migration process was unfamiliar to the refugees. The application and background checking processes were unclear to the refugees. The refugees were unable to choose the country to which they would migrate and did not know what to expect during the trip to their host country. The fear of death and traumatizing events witnessed by the participants in Syria led them to value safety over an understanding of the process and expectations of migration.
Safety planning was the main priority among the participants. The participants initially planned to move to different locations within Syria for several months until the conflict was resolved. Participant 1 explained that many people thought that the armed conflict would stop in a short period of time. “People thought that this fight would end very soon within a couple of months and that they could go back to their homes. The war has lasted for seven years now, and people have started to lose hope” (Participant 1).

Although the first priority of the participants and their families was to reach a safe place, they did not plan for their migration journey. In many suburban communities, holding official documents, such as ID cards or passports, was not a concern. Four of the twelve participants had passports before the war, but the other participants did not have passports that could allow them to legally cross the border. This issue caused delays in admitting these participants to the host countries and the UN application. Participant 3 was anxious because her knowledge of the UN process of resettlement, the final destination, and when she was leaving was limited as follows: “…We did not get proper information about the place where were we going…I did not know anything about the US culture”.

The UN resettled the refugees according to the numbers that the host country could admit. Participant 7 had never thought about leaving his home, friends, and relatives, but when he reached the transit country and applied to the UN, he experienced new thoughts and feelings that he never had before the war. He was anxious about moving to a place that he knew nothing about and being separated from his extended family as follows: “I had never thought about leaving my town. When we moved to Jordan, I did not know what to expect. I did not imagine how my life was going to be in the US. Other friends told me that in the US, you have to go to school and find a good job to be able to live there”. The limited knowledge about the migration
process increased the participants’ anxiety, which was already high due to the traumatic events they experienced in Syria.

The Journey

The second cluster related to the participants’ migration journey, which began with the decision to cross the border of their home country and travel to their new homes in the US. This cluster included three themes, namely, mode of travel to the refugee camp, life in the refugee camp, and transition from the refugee camp to the US.

Mode of Travel to the Refugee Camp

The consequences of the civil war in Syria have led families to relocate within Syria by moving from one town to another in search for safety. Once the war began to impact all cities in Syria, some families decided to leave their homeland. These families took the minimum needed for basic life support and left everything else behind. The refugees crossed the borders of other countries by walking into the woods (north) and desert (south and east) or travelling by fishing boats into the Mediterranean Sea (west).

The participants in the present research reported that they walked with their families across the southern desert to reach Jordan or traveled through the woods in the northern region to reach Turkey. The refugees hid from the police on the borders who would have prevented them from crossing. The journey was unsafe because of sudden bombings or wild animal attacks at night. Some refugees chose to travel by fishing boats to escape the war, but some become lost or drowned at sea.

Participant 12 and many other families were rejected several times when they attempted to enter Turkey at the official checkpoints. Participant 12 reported walking along old roads in the
woods to avoid the checkpoints. “My family and I walked in the woods with other families to avoid entering Turkey by the main roads; we found another small road that let us into Turkey as undocumented refugees”.

Refugees do not choose where they go; instead, they agree to relocate to any country that promises to provide safety and support for their basic needs. The UN office for registration was located near the borders, and these locations were convenient for the refugees who needed to register themselves and their families to obtain appropriate help. Participant 4 explained the process of registering with the UN as follows:

“My siblings and I walked with other families from our village until we reached Jordan. We were caught by police officers, who told everybody that we should go back to Syria. People negotiated to convince the Jordanian police to let them enter. I stayed away from the crowd. Then, an American actress came to visit the area; her name was Angelina Jolie. She saw us standing in the distance, and she asked a police officer to bring us for an interview. I agreed right away. The press and the UN interviewed us with Angelina. She asked me about the situation in Syria, and I told her that she should ask about the situation here on the border. I told her that the border is closed and that we are not allowed to escape. She helped us register as refugees with the UN and enter the camp with my siblings”.

The process of obtaining background clearance through the UN required at least two years. Participant 12 shared the following stating that she waited with her family to be admitted to another country: “My father registered the whole family with the UN when we arrived in Turkey. Then, they called us, and we went to several interviews in Izmir and Istanbul…this process took two years until we got tickets to the US”. During registration, refugees must wait for days until they can enter the refugee camp. Many refugees flee their county without their
official documents, and many refugees never had passports. Additionally, refugees find that they have escaped the war only to encounter other struggles in the refugee camp.

**Life in the Refugee Camp**

Holding official documents and passports issued prior to the war helped the refugee document their entrance into the transit country and remain out of the refugee camp. Four participants did not experience living in a refugee camp because of their legal entrance to the transit country. One participant escaped to Turkey and lived in a city rather than a refugee camp. Seven participants did not hold official passports and had to stay at the Alzaatari refugee camp, which is located in northern Jordan. Currently, this camp is home to approximately 80,000 Syrian refugees because of its proximity to the Syrian-Jordanian border (UNHCR, 2018). This refugee camp is located in a desert characterized by extreme weather and limited life sustaining resources. The length of time the participants stayed at the refugee camp varied. Seven participants stayed at the refugee camp between two months and eighteen months, and then, they were able to leave the camp and live in a city because they had relatives who held official passports or a Jordanian ID card.

Although some refugees escaped to a transit country, in some cases, the refugees were arrested and returned to Syria. Participant 1 was frustrated by this situation as he felt that he had to leave his town but was not welcome in the transit country as follows: “If you were walking outside, police might arrest you and ‘throw you to Syria’. We lived in fear. You have to think a lot before you do anything wrong. I thought a lot about what my family would do if I got caught. How would they live?”.
The participants who lived at the Alzaatari refugee camp elaborated on several issues, such as the camp’s living conditions, their fear and the extreme weather. The limited supplies in Alzaatari and the extreme weather were factors that led the Syrian refugees to escape to the US and Europe. Participants 1 and 11 described the refugee camps that they resettled in after crossing the borders as follows:

“People in the refugee camp suffered from food and clean water deprivation; they slept on the streets. We stayed at the Alzaatari camp for three weeks. I saw horrible situations…The camps’ tents flew away on windy days, leaving children and women facing deadly cold weather. The bathrooms were one hour away from the camps…Older people and children had to walk to the bathrooms…the cold weather was absolute death” (Participant 1).

The refugee camp was overpopulated, which contributed to the food and medical supply limitations. Participant 11 reported that he was afraid that he would lose members of his family because of the harsh life as follows: “Living at the refugee camp was scary…the camp was full of people…They died because of the extreme weather and because they had no food or clean water”.

One of the major issues reported by 8 participants was racism in the transit country. The pain of feeling oppressed was a factor that drove people to move to another country. “In Jordan, we faced the same difficulty as ‘living in a war’. Racism was huge...because we did not have ID cards” (Participant 2). Gender-based racism (sexism) was reported by Participant 8, who shared that “Racism in Alzaatari camp was very aggressive. I was told that ‘Syrian women are cheap…you can get anyone for 1 Dinar (dollar)’…all Syrian women have heard this in Alzaatari”.

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Religion was another reason that the refugees became the target of discrimination. Participant 12 reported facing two levels of discrimination because of her minority status as a Kurdi young woman, namely, discrimination among Arabs when she lived in Syria and discrimination among Turkish society when she resettled as follows: “In Turkey, people never oppressed us because of our nationality as Syrian refugees. They discriminated against me because of my religion…I am Yazidi…we respect all religions; overall, we worship one God”.

Financial status was another issue in the refugee camps. Six interviewees (5 males and 1 female) were the main providers for their families, and limited occupational opportunities drove them to seek refuge in the US. Participant 11 mentioned that finding adequate occupation was difficult because of the legal status as a refugee as follows: “Working in Jordan was a nightmare for me…I worked as a delivery person for 2 years…I walked about 25 miles every day to deliver food because I was not allowed to work, drive, or buy a car in Jordan. I have physical pain now in my back and knees…I abused my body” (Participant 11).

Participant 2 elaborated that he was a target of racism and discrimination that was as harmful as the civil war in his country as follows: “In Jordan, we faced the same difficulty that we faced ‘living in a war’. Racism was huge in Jordan…because we did not have ID cards…I was the main provider for my family…I lived with my parents and my 9 siblings. They couldn't work because they were all younger than me…I learned that wherever I went in Jordan, I would be oppressed and humiliated. We felt loss, homesickness, and depression just as we did during the war”.

Moreover, the low pay and long hours contributed to the financial issues experienced by the refugees while living in the transit countries. Participant 11 stated that “I could not say ‘I
can’t’ or ‘I won’t’ to any kind of job because, officially, I should not have been working. I got a job with long hours (9 a.m. to 12 a.m.), and the minimum wage was approximately 200$/month; I accepted that to support my family”. Participant 12 reported the same experience in a different transit country where refugees receive minimum payment for jobs with long working hours as follows: “Living in Turkey was all about work. I used to work in three tailor shops to support my family, and I used to leave my home at 6 a.m. and return at 8 p.m. I needed many skills and focus to do the tasks, and I earned only 150 Lira ($28) per week”.

**Traveling to the US**

The emerging adult participants shared their experiences with registering with the UN for relocation to other countries. The process, which involved UN interviews and background investigations, lasted two years. After the process was completed, the UN contacted the refugees to participate in an orientation and receive their one-way tickets to the US. The participants described their experiences of attending the orientation before travelling to the US. Participant 3 elaborated that the orientation provided superficial information that increased her fear and anxiety as follows: “We did not get proper information about the place where were we going. During the orientation, the main focus of the lectures by the Jordanian organizations was housing, financial support, and education in the US…they told us more negative things than positive stuff. For instance, they talked about racism in the US, but they did not teach us how to deal with those situations…Additionally, they said that the housing conditions may be very, very bad and that our financial status would be impacted by our new lifestyle. They explained that we should expect to achieve financial stability within two years and adapt to the new environment within one year after arriving in the US. The organization focused on the negative aspects to minimize the shock when we arrived in the US”.

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Participant 11 reported that another issue encountered during the UN orientation was the assumption that the people in the orientation lacked cultural competencies, which made him feel humiliated and ashamed as follows: “The orientations that were provided by the UN did not discuss important information that we needed. They taught us about the importance of personal hygiene… I felt insulted and offended by that lecture… we are such clean people. We shower twice on summer days… we never go outside the house without being dressed up and looking nice”. After attending the orientation, the refugees received their one-way airplane tickets and prepared to travel.

The airplane journey from Jordan or Turkey to the US is long and can last longer than 14 hours or even several days if the travelers must stop along the way. Participant 10 remembered the fear of becoming lost and feeling worried about her new environment when she was on the airplane and at multiple stops before arriving in Pittsburgh with her family as follows: “It was a very stressful time… we were afraid of becoming lost in the airports or missing a flight. The trip lasted for three days because we went from Jordan to Turkey for one night, Chicago for one night, and then Pittsburgh. We were a group of families travelling together with a trip guide… but each family had to take a different airplane when we arrived in the US. We were lost in the Pittsburgh airport. We did not know how to find the person who was supposed to pick us up”. After their arrival at the US, the refugee families resettled in different cities.

**Destination Experience**

During their journey, a new phase of life emerged after the refugees arrived at the US. The refugees arrived in groups and resettled in different cities depending on the organizations that processed their admittance to the US. The following five themes related to the refugees’ experiences during and after their settlement in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania emerged: arrival in the
US, interaction with stakeholders, support and challenges, settling in Pittsburgh, and adjustment to the Syrian community.

**Arrival in the US**

The emerging adult Syrian refugees arrived at the US with their families. Case workers from the refugees’ organizations met the families at the airport, where pictures and figure prints were taken, and all documents were checked for security purposes. Several participants reported that they needed to stay for a night and take another airplane to arrive at their final destinations. The organizations prepared welcome gifts, nutritional support, and houses for the newcomers.

Houses were prepared to welcome the newcomers, but they were inappropriate for most families. Participant 4 reported that the lack of proper knowledge about the housing process caused anxiety and stress about the ability of his family to stay in a house as follows: “When we arrived in Chicago, an employee told us that the organization would pay the rent for our home for only 3 months”. Participant 5 added that the rent was very high in large cities, such as Chicago, compared to the financial support that he received as follows: “The organization paid the rent for a short time…the rental was $1800 without the added expenses of electricity, water, and gas. I was frustrated and wondered how I could support our large family”.

The construction of houses in the US differs from what the emerging adult participants were accustomed to in Syria. The homes in most middle eastern countries are concrete and have a stone foundation that promote safety and protection from the extreme weather. The newcomers reported that they felt unsafe because the houses were constructed with woods. Participant 10 described the following incident that caused her to feel retraumatized and scared: “We were afraid that anyone could break in because the door was not strong enough to protect us…Our
next door neighbor was killed in the house; we saw the police everywhere. I remember that my family and I were at home when we heard the shooting. We were terrified, and everyone got down on the floor. Another time I was so scared because a drunk neighbor aggressively knocked on our door after midnight, and I thought he was going to break in”.

During this phase of resettlement, the participants reported experiencing several different feelings, including culture shock, homesickness, anxiety, and depression. The lifestyle in the US differed from the lifestyle in the participants’ home country or transit countries. The participants felt challenged and anxious about having to learn many new skills to live in the US. Participant 1 was anxious and frustrated because of the language barrier and new sets of skills that had to be developed as follows: “Everything was new to us, including the culture and language. Everything was so difficult”. Similar feelings and thoughts were reported by Participant 2 who encountered difficulties communicating with others as follows: “When I came to the US, it was difficult for me to navigate stuff. I did not speak English at all, and I do not even read Arabic”.

The participants experienced homesickness, and the feeling of missing their old lives emerged after resettlement. It seems that the participants dissociated from reality because of their new environment. Participant 10 was stressed, felt empty, and felt as the world around her was similar to a dream as follows: “On the way to our new home, I looked around me and said, ‘Where am I?’ Everything is different…After one month, I felt that I missed my friends in Jordan; I did not know anybody here…The streets were so empty compared to Jordan. I thought that we were the only people in Pittsburgh”.

The emerging adult Syrian refugees started to stabilize their lives by attending school or work. The participants reported that they attended school to learn English for approximately 2 to 4 months. The course was sponsored by the organizations, and the refugees did not have to pay
to attend, although they had to determine whether they wanted to work or continue their education. The participants were enrolled in free English classes, but only for a short time, and these courses were not sufficient for several participants. Participant 3 mentioned that the quality of teaching varied among the schools depending on funding. “I did not feel I received appropriate English language classes. When I was in Georgia, I got 4 months free tuition at the school. Then, I went to an affordable school, but it was not that good compared to the old school” (Participant 3). Moreover, enrolling in the appropriate level was important for encouraging the newcomers to learn English. Participant 12 was frustrated by her English classes, which were not appropriate for her level as follows: “When we arrived in the US, I registered to attend a free English school. The teachers kept repeating everything, the same vocabulary. We spent one month on one lesson”.

The insufficiency of the English classes caused the emerging adults to drop out of the classes and work. Participant 1 chose to drop out of his English classes and work instead of focusing on his education as follows: “At the English school, they placed me in levels one and two, which were not my actual level. I was disappointed, so I withdrew and focused on my job”.

The English classes were important, but most emerging adult Syrian refugees withdrew from these courses to work longer hours to support their families. These longer hours allowed them to work more and improve their financial status. Participant 11 described the following regarding school, work and the future: “I could not go to the English school. The organization wanted us to work 40 hours/week and go to classes. I agreed to do so when I was in Jordan because I wanted to escape the horrible camp. The organization told us that if we did not work 40 hours/week, medical insurance would stop. It is very expensive to pay for it, and for me, I needed a lot of medical care. Then, I thought what would happen if I worked without going to
Participant 1 was also the main provider for his family. He was enrolled in the English classes and worked. However, the high life expenses demanded that he withdraw from the classes and work longer hours as follows: “I went to the English classes and worked at a restaurant. I was the cashier, and I took care of the kitchen. Then, I stopped going to school. I did not have enough time to study”. The participants experienced several challenges as they began the third phase of their migration to the US. The following section introduces the challenges encountered by the refugees and the strategies they used to minimize the impact of these acculturation challenges.

**Interactions with Different Stakeholders**

The refugees fled the war to seek safety and a better quality of life. The Syrian refugees who lived in refugee camps moved to the US to provide for the basic needs of their families, such as housing, food, education, and jobs. Another driving factor was the nature of Syrian society, which is collective, and people prefer to live near relatives and friends. The participants in the present research were located in Chicago, Atlanta, and Pittsburgh. The refugees reported feeling safer in the US than in their homeland, camp, or transit countries. Participant 11 shared that the government is responsible for establishing a good life for its people. “I see that most Western governments provide everything for their people, like education and jobs, and people make their own choices”.

Participant 2 described starting a new and safer life in the US as follows: “I started a new life when I moved to America with my family. I left my old life back in Jordan to begin a new
one here”. Safety was mentioned by several participants, including Participants 1 and Participant 2 as follows: “In Georgia, I did not experience racism. When you respect someone, they respect you back. You have all you need…like you can buy a car; you can get an ID card and a driver license. Those basics were not allowed for Syrian refugees in Jordan” (Participant 1). Moreover, the participants mentioned the importance of meeting basic needs, such as medication and good nutrition, as follows: “The food stamps that we received here in the US were very nice. We did not have that in Jordan”.

The organizations that support refugees provided assistance to the newcomers, including English language classes for four months and financial support. The refugees were responsible for finding a job because their financial aid ended after four months. The organizations resettled the refugees in large cities, such as Chicago and Atlanta, where the refugees were unable to pay the high rent and expensive bills. Then, the refugees relocated to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to obtain more affordable housing.

Support and Challenges

Refugees encounter challenges in host countries. These challenges arise due to cultural, political, and social differences between the host country and the native country. Learning the new norms of the host country increases stress and impacts mental health. All interviewees reported that they experienced challenges when they arrived at the US. The informants described the following four major challenges for which they received support: housing, nutrition, education, and employment. All participants shared this lived experience and included these challenges in their narratives.
**Housing Support**

Housing, specifically the availability of low-income housing supported by the state, was one of the factors that encouraged the Syrian refugees to move to the Pittsburgh area. Participant 1 moved to Pittsburgh because of housing assistance. He appreciated this assistance and asserted that the low-income housing assistance helped him manage his financial struggles as follows: “After two years in Georgia, my father decided to move to Buffalo. We rented an apartment for a month and a half. My father got sick there…life was difficult in Buffalo. Then, we heard about Pennsylvania from our neighbors who moved from Georgia to Pittsburgh” (Participant 1).

Participant 2 stated that housing impacted his family’s financial status and caused him to move from Georgia to Pittsburgh as follows: “We moved to Pittsburgh because Georgia is very expensive. You do not get Medicare if you are over 18 years old. You can work, but the living cost is very expensive…We could not afford it. In Pittsburgh, the support that we get for housing is incredible. Our financial status is better than it was in Georgia because of the affordable housing” (Participant 2). For a similar reason, Participant 5 moved from Chicago to Pittsburgh, where valuable housing support was provided to low-income individuals as follows: “...the apartment rental rate was $1800 without the added expenses of electricity, water, and gas. I was frustrated and wondered how I could support our big family”. Then, he moved with his family to the Pittsburgh area to obtain housing support.

**Nutritional Support**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is also known as the food stamp program. This program is a federal nutrition program that helps low-income families pay for healthy food, and this program was another factor that attracted the refugees to the Pittsburgh area.
area. Participant 11 declared that the food program allowed him to meet his family’s need for appropriate and healthy nutrition as follows: “We get a very good service…the food stamps are so good that we can buy many kinds of fruit that we were not able to buy even before the war in Syria. Here, we have everything” (Participant 11).

Living in an expensive area with a large family was a challenge for some participants. Participant 5 reported feeling anxious and working long hours to be able to afford the living expenses, which drove him to move to Pittsburgh to better manage his budget. “My worst fear in Chicago was paying the rent. It was very expensive. My life was limited to working to be able to pay the rent. The food stamps were very low compared to the expensive cost of living in Chicago” (Participant 5). Therefore, by moving to the Pittsburgh area, many participants were able to manage the housing cost and obtain satisfying nutritional support.

**Educational Support**

The Syrian refugees who participated in this study were interested in filling the gap in their education; thus, education was another driving factor that prompted the refugees to flee their homeland and the refugee camp. The Syrian refugee youths have lost several years of their education because of the war. Some other participants originated from suburban areas where working on the family’s land is valued more than education. However, this attitude changed over time as the refugee youths became young adults during the period of their resettlement in the US. Participant 5 was unable to pursue education back home because he lost his father at a young age and became the main provider for his family as follows: “I could not finish my education. I was not able to do so…I have to work to provide for the whole family”. However, he subsequently reported during the interview that he encouraged his younger siblings to pursue higher education because of the living challenges he confronted because of his lack of education.
A similar experience was reported by Participant 12 who dropped out of school to work and support her family as follows: “I did not finish the school year…I have to work because of our financial struggles…the rent was expensive. I withdraw from high school, and worked…I earned 7$/hour. I lost the opportunity to obtain a high school diploma. I regret this decision. Without education, you work more hours and harder jobs”.

Participant 2 was the older son in the family, and he cared for his sick parents and younger siblings. Participant 2 considered the positive side of the war experience allowing him to move to the US with his family to improve their lives. He thought that allowing all students to obtain a proper education was a benefit of the war as follows: “We experienced this loss and depression, and the war was the main reason…without the war, we would be living in our homeland, and we would not face any of these difficult situations…the benefit of this war was that our lives have changed…if we had stayed in Syria, my siblings would not have a good future. In my country, boys choose whether they want to work or finish their education. But here, all children must finish their education first… so, this is a positive benefit of the war” (Participant 2).

The high school aged refugees enrolled in the US educational system. English as second language classes were a part of the academic schedule. Participant 10 attended an ESL class to strengthen her English skills and learn the American accent to fit in school as follows: “I start learning English when I was in Jordan, but the English I learned was British English, and I discovered that my American classmates did not understand what I was saying. I tried to speak American English. I take ESL classes, and my teacher helps me fix my accent, but I still have a British English accent”. Participant 8 shared a similar experience with learning English to be able to work and make friends as follows: “I need [to learn] English first to be able to work and
make friends…You need to have strong English skills if you want to adapt well…the American lifestyle is different from what I am used to”.

**Employment Support**

The refugees moved to the Pittsburgh area to work and be able to attend school. Due to their long working hours, the emerging adult refugees were unable to manage both work and education. Participant 1 mentioned that moving to the Pittsburgh area enabled him to return to school because he did not have to work as much to be able to pay the rent and other utilities since he lived in a low-income building. “I stopped going to school for many reasons. I did not have enough time to study. The pay was low…I earned 7 dollars/hour, and we are a family of 7. Georgia provides minimal support to refugees. So, what I got from my job in Georgia went to housing, electricity, and internet bills” (Participant 1).

Working in a multicultural place enhanced the participants’ mental health and promoted their self-esteem. Participant 11 worked at a nonprofit organization to help other refugees. He felt understood and appreciated and received accommodations for his chronic pain and physical injury for his work as follows: “I am very happy with my manager at the refugees’ organization…she has similar thoughts and opinions like mine…otherwise, I would have been fired a long time ago for my chronic pain and could not support my family”.

**Settling in Pittsburgh**

Living in the US was challenging for the newcomers. The cultural differences between the US and Syria and the differences between the Syrian and American lifestyles contributed to the acculturation challenges experienced by the refugees. In the present study, the participants had lived in the US for approximately three years. Several participants had adapted after living in
other cities, such as Chicago and Atlanta, for two years, and they needed to readjust when they relocated to Pittsburgh.

Participant 1 lived in one city for two years after arriving in the US. The living expenses were high, which led his family to move to another town. However, the family did not adjust well due to the weather conditions, leading them to relocate to Pittsburgh. The multiple relocations he experienced influenced the participant's ability to adjust to the new place. “In Pittsburgh, life became easier, thank God. I am learning from my job and improved my English skills about 40%” (Participant 1).

Several organizations support refugees who resettle in Pittsburgh. However, Ansar of Pittsburgh is the only Islamic and Arab nonprofit organization that provides social support to Syrian refugees. Ansar of Pittsburgh helped the participants resettle in Pittsburgh. The team of volunteers aided the refugees before they moved into their homes by prepaying the lease and furnishing the homes. In addition, the volunteers were involved in the school enrolment process by completing forms for the new students. Moreover, Ansar provided workshops at the school district level regarding cultural awareness and refugee issues for the schools and refugee students. The volunteers assisted the newcomers in scheduling medical appointments and contacted health insurance companies as needed. These accommodations provided to the refugees eased their readjustment stress after moving to Pittsburgh.

The resettlement period divided the participants into the following two groups as related to this theme: informants who had lived in Pittsburgh and informants who recently moved to Pittsburgh. Three participants lived in Pittsburgh for two years (Participant 10, Participant 11, and Participant 12). Those participants attended school (Participant 10) or worked (Participant 11 and Participant 12). Their financial statues were adequate as follows: Participant 10 worked part
time at a restaurant and received support from her working mother; Participant 11 worked at a nonprofit organization; and Participant 12 worked at a tailor shop. Education and occupation were indicators of their resettlement in Pittsburgh.

Driving in Pittsburgh was another indicator that the participants actively resettled in Pittsburgh. Driving included passing the permit license test, which was administered in English and other languages, such as Arabic, and recognizing the signs and driving regulations. Although Participant 10 did not drive, she traveled to work via public transportation. Participant 11 drove his car to work to deliver furniture to the newcomers’ homes. Participant 12 indicated that she drove her father’s car to her work but not downtown Pittsburgh. She travels with her friends to a Syrian restaurant to avoid ordering in English in other restaurants as follows: “I have been downtown with my relatives…we went to a Syrian restaurant because I do not like to make mistakes if I order in English…”

The new arrivals (nine participants) moved from another state to Pittsburgh three months ago. During the time of the interviews, they were resettling their personal belongings and adjusting to their new neighborhoods. Education was the main priority for Participant 1 and Participant 3, who hold a high school diploma from Syria and Jordan. These participants were preparing to complete a standardized test to enroll in a community college. Participant 6 and Participant 7 are high school students, and the volunteers helped them become admitted to the school system.

Economic stability was another indicator for the new refugees resettling in Pittsburgh. Collectivist societies place more emphasis on the oldest son in a family supporting his sick parents and younger siblings. Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 4, and Participant 5 were the providers for their households and were searching for jobs. However, working was optional
for Participant 3, Participant 8, and Participant 9 because they were the female members of their families, and their father, husband, or older brother cared for the financial matters. Collectivist societies classify gender roles between men and women, and this behavior was demonstrated by all participants. Therefore, the male participants felt more anxious and responsible for finding work, while the female participants wanted to complete their education or address the internal issues in the family.

The newcomers to Pittsburgh started to manage their lives by replacing the driver licenses issued by other states with a license issued by the state of Pennsylvania. During this period, they applied to schools and community colleges and searched for jobs. Their resettlement could be predicted based on the previous group of refugees who lived in Pittsburgh for two years. The Syrian refugees who were used to life in Pittsburgh helped the newcomers adjust and introduced them to the community.

**Adjusting to the Syrian Community**

The Syrian community is considered collectivist due to the nature of the human relationships in the community. Collectivist societies are characterized by strong relationships with extended family members, friends, and neighbors, and these people are considered relatives. The study participants reported being connected to and living with their families. Separation from the community affects an individual’s well-being, and excluding an individual is considered punishment because of the interdependent relationships among the members of the community.

For the refugees, moving from one city to another with other relatives and friends was a factor in their relocation within the US. The participants reported that keeping their relationships...
with their relatives and friends was an important need for their overall well-being. Participant 8 mentioned that her family and neighbors experienced trauma in Syria, crossed the borders together, and moved to Pittsburgh to be near them as follows: “We have known our neighbors since we were in Syria. We escaped the war to Jordan together…We came to the US and lived in Chicago together…and when we moved to Pittsburgh, they moved with us and rented a house in the same complex where we rented our house” (Participant 8).

The participants reported that their families were rebuilding their connections and friendships with others to obtain a sense of belonging and attachment. Participant 1 reflected on his father’s experience when they moved to a small town as follows: “My father made friendships in Georgia. He used to host his friends and neighbors every night to play cards and spend time talking about random stuff. When we moved to Buffalo, no one knocked on our door…I felt my father got [depressed] a lot older in one month”. Thus, feeling isolated increased the sense of being lost and impacted the individuals’ depression, anxiety, and homesickness.

Integrating with the Syrian community in Pittsburgh hindered the older refugees from learning to interact with the American culture. Participant 1 and Participant 2 indicated that their parents preferred friends from their community due to the shared culture and ease of communication. Participant 2 attempted to encourage his parents to learn English in the case of an emergency. However, his parents preferred to interact only with Syrian families and depended on the younger members in the family for translation as follows: “my family adaptation is different…my parents do not speak English at all, and they do not want to learn…My father does not tolerate learning, and my mother organizes and runs the household”. The parents of Participant 1 had strong interdependent relationships with the Syrian community as follows: “my mother spends time with other ladies from the complex, and my father with his friends. The older
men like to do their daily stuff together…for example, going to the grocery store; they go together…Without Arab friends, my parents would not survive this… They are not used to this life”. Due to the nature of collectivist societies, cooperative and interdependent relationships emerged in the Syrian community, which helped the refugees acculturate in Pittsburgh.

**Acculturation**

Acculturation is the process of psychological and social interaction between a dominant culture and a minor culture. The results of the interaction between the two cultures varied among the refugees. The themes that emerged under this cluster are described using Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Human Development (2006), which proposes defining properties (process, person, context and time) that influence human development over time.

I found that the acculturation theme that emerged from the data is best described using this model. The following section illustrates the theme that emerged from the data along with Bronfenbrenner’s model as a framework for analyzing the acculturation process among the Syrian emerging adults. The themes and Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model, i.e., microsystem, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystem, and chronosystem levels, are demonstrated in Table 3.

**Acculturation Behavior and Experiences with Challenges at the Microsystem Level**

The traumatic experience of war impacts the mental health of individuals. The participants in the present study left Syria during their late childhood or adolescence. All participants reported that they witnessed the armed conflict and crossed the border during their late childhood or adolescence. The constant fear, lack of basic life support, and experience of grief and trauma impacted their physical and psychological well-being. The impact of the
traumatic events varied depending on the individuals’ chronological age and the cognitive processing skills used during the traumatic event.

Unprocessed trauma was evident among the participants. Participant 11 experienced flashbacks of an incident during work as he previously delivered food and water to people living in areas undergoing bombings. These traumatic experiences caused simple events, such as an emerging student asking for a snack, to escalate to great anger and flashbacks of the war. This microlevel mental health issue impacted Participant 11’s mesosystem (job and education) and exosystem (community).

“I used work at a Sunday school. I taught children religion, social skills and culture. The Sunday school did not provide lunch to the students. One day, a kid came to me and told me he was hungry. I know what ‘hungry’ means. I have been hungry for a long time. I was so angry and sad at the same time. I went to the principal’s office and screamed at her, ‘What is this religion that does not give a hungry kid some food!?’ I was very direct and angry. I got fired”.

All participants reported that they experienced homesickness at least once over time. Participant 1 was depressed and anxious about his future. He grieved for all that he had lost in Syria and felt homesick. His anxiety was derived from thinking about his future life when he was ready to start his own family. Participant 1’s psychological well-being (microsystem) was impacted by his familial responsibilities because he was the oldest son and the main provider for his family (mesosystem). His homesickness was related to his loss of people and personal belongings and the loss of his former self as he matured from late childhood and adolescence into a responsible emerging adult. Thus, unsatisfied needs from the previous developmental stage impacted his self-acceptance. His expression of wanting to be dead illustrated a desire to avoid the substantial responsibility that he carried.
“Losing loved ones makes me feel like I do not want to speak to anybody. I hold everything in my heart, and I do not like to appear weak or broken. I have worries as big as mountains. Sometimes, I pray that I will die, but I am afraid of dying before seeing my country again. It is my biggest fear now. I carry a lot on my shoulders, and I want to rest. The war has impacted us. I feel like I am 20 years older than my real age. Most young men get tired, a lot of them have lost hope, and a lot of them wish they had died in the war. Parents put pressure on their children to achieve more and have good jobs”.

**Acculturation Behavior and Experience with Challenges at the Mesosystem Level**

At this level, the challenges are interrelated and interactive with the individual challenges that form the microsystem and the individuals’ relationship with the external world (exosystem). Education and employment were common challenges mentioned by the emerging adult Syrian refugees. In the present study, the social status and background of the participants influenced their education and employment choices. Seven participants had obtained a high school diploma or were in high school at the time of the study. Those participants planned to enroll in higher education and obtain better jobs. The participants with minimal education (elementary school) were interested in learning English and seeking employment.

Participant 7 experienced difficulties in English and other classes. “In my school, all students were refugees. I did not have any American friends…I have difficulties in math. I do not like it”. The other participants planned to study English but had to withdraw from their courses to find a job. Participant 9 wanted to improve her English skills to obtain better employment. “I want to study English to work in an office; it is easier with better pay”.
Her English language proficiency caused frustration for Participant 10. English language proficiency was associated with communication and making friends at school. “I start learning English when I was in Jordan, but the English I learned was British English, and I discovered that my American classmates do not understand what I am saying. I tried to speak American English; I take ESL classes, and my teacher helps me fix my accent, but I still speak British English because I am used to it. I tried to be like an American while speaking and…have American friends.”

The participants in the present study are called the lost generation because they lost their opportunity for education due to the impact of the civil war in Syria. The participants who were enrolled in the educational system in their transit country attempted to fill the gaps in their education. Participant 3 earned her high school diploma in Jordan but felt frustrated that she did not obtain satisfactory scores on a standardized test (the SAT) or English language proficiency test.

“I got my high school diploma in Jordan. I planned to enroll in college to become a physician’s assistant. I have been in the US for three years, and my education has not improved. The standardized tests for university are very difficult. They do not consider that English is my second language. I had an English test that contained 80 questions, and I was supposed to finish it in 30 minutes. You need to try about five times to get lucky and get an acceptable score. I got frustrated. I remember the first time taking this test. I was an A student in Jordan; I failed the test here”.

Most participants worked at jobs in which English or other professional skills were not required. For Participants 8 and 11, working in this sector of the labor market impacted their physical and psychological well-being. Participant 8 experienced racism at the factory where she
used to work, causing her to experience anger and frustration as follows: “I learned some English for 3 months at the organization’s school. Then, I bagged fruit…I quit because the managers were racists. They know that I am from Syria. They gave me that look like I am nothing. The way they spoke and the way they interacted with us was humiliating; they were not American. They were Mexicans”.

Participant 11 was physically injured, which prevented him from finding a job in this sector of the labor market. Instead, he worked at a refugee organization as a facilitator for newcomers and delivered furniture to their houses as follows: “I used to work in a chocolate factory, delivered pizza, and worked as a school janitor…I could not tolerate the physical pain, so I quit. I learned English by interacting with others. At the refugee organization, I facilitate signing home rental contracts and take refugees to medical appointments. Now, I am very happy with my job. I do not need to move a lot, and my manager is nice”.

**Acculturation Behavior and Experience with Challenges at the Exosystem Level**

Challenges at the exosystem level influence the microsystem and mesosystem levels. In this study, the challenges at this level were related to the environment in which the participants lived. The lack of safety and available services in the neighborhood where the participants lived affected their mental health. Participant 1 described the difference between what his relatives thought about living in the US and the actual living conditions.

“A lot of people overseas think that when they come to the US, they will find a castle, a car, and money. We came and found nothing. People think of the American dream; they do not believe me when I tell them the dream is not true. The organization brought us to this poor area to avoid a culture shock. I liked this because if we had resettled in an area like downtown, we
would not have survived… it is expensive and difficult to adjust. The poor area encouraged me to work harder and believe that nothing is impossible. The area was not safe, but if you do not make trouble, no one will come after you. Most of the Muslim families are busy working or in school to avoid conflict”.

Living in a poor neighborhood impacted the family dynamics and individuals’ mental health. Participant 2 had previously lived in a poor neighborhood that was unsafe, but he and his younger brother processed the experience differently. Participant 2, who was the oldest son in the family and the main provider, reported the following: “it was not safe to live in that area…other minority groups caused issues with the Syrian refugees. For example, they might ask you to give them cigarettes. They might harm you if you did not give them. My father did not like living in that complex…My younger brother used to come home at 12 a.m. every night after hanging out with his friends. He preferred to hang out with his friends rather than stay home with us. He did not like to stay at home like us…If he was home, he got into trouble”.

Living in a poor neighborhood increased the likelihood of being the victim of a crime, and their limited English language skills impacted the participants’ financial status and safety. Participant 5 reported being robbed but could not explain what happened to the police because of English language limitations as follows: “A gang stole my cellphone…I could not say anything to the police officer because I do not speak English. I waited for two hours for an Arab-American officer to take a report of the incident. I could have died”.

Participant 10 and her family were retraumatized when they heard shots from a neighbor’s home as follows: “The man next door was killed in the house. We saw the police everywhere…I remember that my family and I were at home when we heard the shooting. We were terrified, and everyone got down on the floor to avoid bullets”.

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Acculturation Behavior and Experience with Challenges at the Macrosystem Level

The macrosystem consists of the societal schema of a specific culture, its attitudes toward different nationalities and its governing political systems. Racism and bullying are examples of macrosystem challenges that impact individual mental health (microsystem), education and employment (mesosystem), and community (exosystem). Racism and bulling aim to oppress and segregate individuals according to their gender, religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Most refugees have different cultures, ethnicities, and religions, which increases the likelihood that they will encounter racism and bullying.

The absence of cultural awareness at the workplace could be viewed as racism. Participant 7 experienced racism at her workplace that impacted her financial status and overall well-being as follows: “I bagged fruit. The managers were racists. They knew that I am from Syria. They gave me that look like I am nothing. The way they spoke and the way they interacted with us was humiliating. I received a different treatment from the managers compared to the other Mexican workers. Because I am a refugee, they did not respect me; they gave me more work than everybody else. I felt like I was a servant when they gave orders to do stuff. This is the reason I quit the job. Now, I am staying home doing nothing”.

Participant 2 was the target of verbal aggression from a customer during his work shift. He was new to the area and was not accustomed to driving in snowy weather as follows: “I work in pizza delivery. I was out to deliver an order…I could not find the address on the GPS…so, the food got cold. Then, I asked a neighbor about the location, and I could not drive because snow was blocking the alley. I did not feel comfortable driving. The customer did not want to pay me and told me that I was stupid because I was late. I asked him why he said I was stupid. I told him
not to pay for the food because I could not drive faster due to the snow. He understood the situation and apologized for this”.

US laws and regulations were new to the emerging adult refugees, and this mainly impacted their microsystem (individual mental health and familial relationship) but also affected other systems. Laws about intimate violence and children’s rights were new to the study participants. The lack of cultural awareness and the approach to teaching newcomers about US laws influenced the refugees’ acculturation into American society and caused trust issues. Participant 4 described what happened to his friend and his friend’s wife when she attended a group about women’s rights hosted by the refugee organization.

“I had a negative experience with the refugee organization groups. There was a men’s group and a women’s group every week. My friend and his wife were refugees…The organization encouraged his wife to divorce him. They discussed women’s rights, like you have the right to divorce your husband, and you can find a boyfriend easily. The leader was American, and she was non-Muslim. She taught the women about American culture. The wife decided to dress like an American; she took off her head scarf and wore a short-sleeve shirt. She wanted to be like Americans because America is the land of freedom”.

Laws and regulations impacted the refugees’ acculturation and their familial relationships. Participant 5 had personal experience with intimate domestic violence and US law due to his marriage to an emerging adult female refugee. He mistrusted the organization because it helped his wife write a report about what happened and introduced it at court.

“I got married to a Syrian woman in Chicago. She was the daughter of a respected family. She wanted to have a large wedding and take off her head scarf, and she was stubborn. She went
to court and claimed that I sexually and physically abused her; she told the judge that I locked
her up without food for 4 days. I found an Arab-American lawyer who agreed to defend me. The
lawyer understood our culture and explained everything to the court. She received help writing
the report from a woman at the organization. The lawyer requested that she be physically
checked. My wife refused to do any tests because she lied and did not have any proof. I was
married to her for only 8 days. My record was cleared. The organization did not educate people
about the good stuff; they taught stuff that destroys families. They do not know about our
traditions and culture. They do not help refugee families”.

**Acculturation Behavior and Experience with Challenges at the Chronosystem Level**

Bronfenbrenner’s fifth level of the bioecological systems model is the chronosystem. The
chronosystem defines the longitudinal perspective of the elements within the system, such as
external changes (i.e., the timing of losing a parent in the Syrian civil war) and psychological
changes that occur as individuals age. Moreover, the chronosystem encompasses changes in and
the development of a person’s characteristics and environment that impact individual
development.

Bronfenbrenner’s chronosystem time embraces two dimensions. The first dimension is
the internal development that occurs during child development, which involves physical and
psychological development. These internal changes were addressed by the Syrian emerging
adults. The informants arrived at the US as teenagers or emerging adults after spending their
previous developmental stages in a refugee camp. The lack of human need resources impacted
their physical development and mental health. The long-term exposure to the chemical weapons
impacted their overall health and influenced their normal development. The trauma experiences
affected the refugees’ brains and nervous system development, which could change individuals’
personalities and cognitive abilities. Furthermore, the informants’ withdrawal from school at an early age impacted their ability to develop academic skills, such as reading, writing, and mental math.

The second dimension is the external development related to the events that impacted the informants’ development. All participants lived under fire and witnessed the civil war. The war caused losses for all Syrians. For instance, all participants reported that they lost significant persons, homes, schools, and their old self. In addition to the war, moving to a transitional country caused them to loss their socioeconomical status and suddenly become poor. Moreover, the age of the participants ranged between 18 and 25, and thus, the participants are called “the lost generation”. The participants became the lost generation because they lost many years of education, and some participants did not receive any education.

After resettling in the US, the informants declared that they matured and became emerging adults. By this time, the participants became more responsible for supporting their family financially, caring for medical appointments for their sick or injured parents and following up on their younger siblings’ school progress. Additionally, the participants needed to enroll in English classes, register for college, and find work. Resettlement in the US increased the emerging adults’ stress to satisfy all needs and responsibilities. Therefore, the internal and external dimensions impacted the informants.

Their socioeconomic status was impacted by the civil war in Syria, moving to the transitional country, and resettling in the US. The informants used to live in their towns and run the family business or work on their family’s land. They did not need to cope with job stressors or unsatisfying payments from the profits of the whole family, including women who do not
work. All informants reported that they lost their family businesses because of the consistent bombings, which impacted their socioeconomical status and forced them to leave.

During their late childhood and early adolescence, the informants escaped the war to a transitional country with their family. The impact of the war left many people with permanent disabilities, which rendered the informants responsible for the family’s financial support. Participant 2 described that he start working when he was a teenager to care for his sick father and younger siblings as follows: “I came to Jordan at the age of 14…I did not study…I just worked in a water purification company…[with a low voice and head down]. In Jordan, you had no other choice but to work at a young age…My father was there, but he couldn't work because of a visual disability”. During their resettlement in the transit country, the informants were not allowed to function as they used to by working and providing for their family, which caused frustration and depression within the families. Therefore, the loss of their economic security forced the families to mobilize their human resources, including teenagers, who had to be responsible within and outside the home and work collaboratively toward the common goal of keeping the family together.

Passing the time in their resettlement in the US, the refugees had to adjust to US work regulations to be able to work legally. As the US requires a license or official approval of skills, the informants’ lack of English language proficiency impacted the test scores needed to prove their skills. The other informants demonstrated frustration with the regulations, minimum payments, stressful managers, and workplace racism as evident in the reflections provided by Participant 2, Participant 8, Participant 9, and Participant 11. This obstacle occurred simultaneously with adolescent and young adult development stress. Assuming responsibility for
the family and addressing developmental milestones enhanced the informants’ problem-solving skills and initiative and empowered a cooperative life style.

The family structure of the Syrian refugees was impacted by the time spent during their resettlement in the US. The Syrian families illustrated collectivist societies’ values and traditions; for example, the nuclear family was attached to the extended family, relatives, and neighbors. In the present research, all informants used to live with their extended families of several generations. Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 10, and Participant 11 described that they left their extended family in Syria or a transitional country. Moreover, their extended families were displaced in a different host country, such as a country in Europe or Canada.

This issue was the result of the arbitrary resettlement of Syrian refugees. Participant 1 described that his father felt depressed because his was unable to see his siblings who were resettled in Europe as follows: “…my father misses his brothers. He is afraid to die before he sees them…” He added “…in Syria… my father lost everything, family, friends, and his mother”. Participant 5 believed that he could have lost his family in the war and went back to Syria after he escaped to a transitional country as follows: “I escaped to Lebanon…I stayed there for a month…then, I decided to go back to Syria to live with my uncle, but my mother wanted me to go with her to Jordan”. All interviewees felt that it was impossible to live without their extended family; however, they were forced to leave to protect their lives. Over time, the informants and their families developed a sense of belonging and attachment to their new neighbors and friends to fill the gap of missing their extended families and neighborhood, which is considered a problem-solving protective factor that promoted their acculturation in the US.

Table 3 illustrates the themes according to Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model.
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<tr>
<th>Tenets of the Theory</th>
<th>Related Themes</th>
<th>Lived Experience</th>
<th>Protective Factors</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Reason for migration</td>
<td>Experience of armed conflict</td>
<td>Family support, resilience, and prayer</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experience with traumatic events</td>
<td>Absence of food, health care and school services</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Knowledge of the refugee process</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mesosystem</strong></td>
<td>Mode of travel to refugee camps</td>
<td>Lack of financial resources for the family</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Life at refugee camps</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Parents facing unemployment</td>
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<td><strong>Exosystem</strong></td>
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<td>Living in poor neighborhoods lacking safety and resources impact individuals’ mental health, educational level, and employment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Interactions with stakeholders</td>
<td>Experiencing challenges with ESL free-tuition classes, which impacted their employment and financial status</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Support (housing, nutrition, education and employment)</td>
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<td>Adjusting to the Syrian community</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3 Themes and Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model

**Strategies Used to Enhance Acculturation Behavior**

The emerging adult Syrian refugees confronted challenges after they resettled in the US, and the major challenges experienced were related to individual mental health, familial
responsibilities, education, employment, and US laws and regulations. To minimize the impact of these challenges, the participants adopted behavioral strategies to promote their acculturation, and the three major strategies used were as follows:

1. Assimilation, integration, and rejection (separation);

2. Interpersonal skills, including resilience, maintaining a positive attitude, engaging in self-learning, and improving social skills; and

3. Community support, including support from family, neighbors, friends, teachers, coworkers, and community volunteers.

In this research, marginalization is the fourth strategy of acculturation that occurs when an immigrant refuses to interact with the dominant culture and native community. Marginalization was eliminated from this research because in contrast to other strategies of assimilation, integration, and separation, marginalization does not require problem-solving skills and increases complexity at several levels during the acculturation process. Therefore, the present research focused on assimilation, integration, and rejection as problem-solving skills that foster acculturation among emerging adult Syrian refugees.

**Acculturation Strategies**

The acculturation strategies reflect the methods used by the emerging adult Syrian refugees to interact with the American culture. The main interaction strategies were assimilation, integration, and rejection (separation). The following section explains these strategies as problem-solving skills used to promote acculturation among newcomers and provides examples of how the strategies were utilized by using quotations from the participants’ narratives.
Assimilation

Assimilation is described as a “melting pot” in which individuals connect with the dominant culture and lose their cultural identity (Berry, 1997). Individuals who assimilate have a positive relationship with the dominant society and feel ashamed of their cultural identity. Newcomers use assimilation to resolve issues, and in the present research, the participants employed the strategy of assimilation.

Assimilation occurred when a refugee wanted to be a part of the majority, which receives privileges. It seems that age influenced this strategy as the younger participants were more willing to assimilate at school to blend in and develop friendships with other people. Participant 10 wanted to improve her English skills to make friends at school as follows: “I tried to speak American English; I take ESL classes, and my teacher helps me fix my accent, but I still speak British English because I am used to it. I tried to speak like an American and…to have American friends”. Moreover, the younger refugees adapted faster and became the communication nodes between their family and the outside world, which strengthened their personality and boosted their egos that they used to be followers in their cultures. Participant 3 reflected on this process that led the young refugees to assimilate with their American peers as follows: “children are encouraged to voice their opinion…They participate in the family decision making…I have not seen shy or avoidant children here so far; instead, they became very strong [personalities]”.

Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 6 and Participant 12 used assimilation to learn about how people live in the US from their American friends. Participant 2 described the meaning of friendships as friends providing aid and support as needed as follows: “…I do not like to make friends with Arabs. I like American friends. They want to help me…[My] Arab friends do not want you to be better than them…do not want to help you”. Participant 12 added
that when she was in high school, she was classified in a category with non-English speakers, which impacted her learning and practicing process as follows: “…high school was very diverse, but the students were divided into two groups: American and everybody else, including refugees, Mexicans, and Africans…I did not want to be friends with people who were not American because their English was not good…their speaking was not clear”.

A similar thought was reported by Participant 3, who became friends with Americans to improve his English speaking skills as follows: “…I always tell my parents and others that they need to make friends with Americans if they want to improve their language skills…”.

Participant 6 believed that he needed to adapt to be able to live in the US as follows: “all youths should feel that this is our home, like Syria…My American friend comes to visit…she respects our religion and is modest. I like to let them know about our culture”.

Assimilation involves learning about the lifestyle of the dominant culture. Assimilation emerged among several participants’ families, including Participant 2 and Participant 7. Participant 2 noted that his younger brother adapted a new lifestyle compared to that of the other family members as follows: “…my brother (18) is in high school…He works, but he keeps the money in his pocket. I tell him that he needs to share the money with the family, but he refuses...[looks down]”.

Participant 11 valued work to promote economic stability as follows: “…‘Adaptation’ is my life theme. I always adapt whenever I go…I have never asked anyone to change for me. You have to adapt with wrong stuff to protect myself; you have to adapt to an unhumanitarian job to provide for your family”. Participant 7 stated that fostering acculturation is important for fostering knowledge and tolerance between the dominant society and the refugees as follows: “…we [Syrian young adults] need to learn how to adapt to know different types of people…to
become friends with good people and to avoid bad people…My brother and I visited a church; I like to learn about other cultures”. Thus, the informants in the present research viewed assimilation as a strategy to learn English, value work, adapt a new lifestyle, make friends, and foster knowledge.

Integration

Integration occurs when individuals maintain their culture of origin and accept contact with the new culture. Integration has been viewed positively in previous studies because the individuals keep their heritage culture and learn a new set of skills from the dominant culture. Integration minimizes the impact of acculturation on individuals’ mental health because it reduces the stress and guilt associated with connecting with the dominant society. Compared with the younger participants, the older participants seemed to use integration to minimize the challenges they encountered after resettling in the US, which required them to have a specific set of interpersonal and communication skills.

Participant 3 stated that she preferred to integrate with others in American society. She depended on her personal strengths, level of maturity, and social skills to balance the two cultures. Therefore, integration allowed her to learn from other people about their culture and educate others about her culture as follows: “My friend lives in a different state, and she told me that she experienced racism because of the way she dresses. She used to be fully covered, and now, she wears casual clothes. She told me that I needed to change the way I dress as a young Muslim woman in the US. If people struggle with their faith and identity, they will lose their identity as Arab Muslims. I do not think that I will dress like an American when I go to college. Instead, I will build good relationships with my classmates and let them know who I am. I will openly discuss and answer all their questions”.
Participant 11 stated that integrating with others helped him accept people from different cultures, develop his interpersonal skills, and give back to the community as follows: “You can meet people and be open and accepting of all people to learn from them. I learned English by interacting with others and using my personality. This country did not treat me like my country did. I want to give back to this country.”

Integration promoted better decision making among the newcomers. Participant 7 and Participant 9 mentioned that integration aided individuals in making healthy choices. Integration helped Participant 7 make good judgments in developing friendships as follows: “We need to learn how to adapt to different types of people, make friends with good people and avoid bad people. My brother and I visited a church; I like to learn about other cultures”. Moreover, Participant 9 believed that she had to integrate with the US culture to educate herself to be able to promote good parenting skills and help her children have a better life as follows: “…I want to improve my adaptation because my youngest baby was born in America…She is American…I want to learn more about the American life to help my kids with school and find a good job”.

Participant 10 viewed integration as a way to have successful accomplishments as follows: “adaptation is important for developing yourself in a positive way, like learning new stuff…discovering places…adapting to the good lifestyle of American society. I have heard from a lot of people that they want to make random friends who could cause trouble…not everybody is trustworthy…young adult refugees should focus on their future and not become frustrated by educational difficulties. For me, I am focusing on going to college because it is going to help me get a good job”.

Employment was a reason that led the emerging adults to utilize integration to interact with coworkers. Participant 11 stated that he has to integrate to promote economic stability as
follows: “I am not afraid of workplace racism, and I do not want to isolate myself…If I do not help myself and my family, who is going to do so? No one will come to help you if you do not help yourself”.

Participant 9 noted integration differences between men and women refugees. She believed that male refugees adapt faster than female refugees because the gender roles assigned lighter responsibilities at the home and more responsibilities outside the home to explore the surroundings as follows: “Young adult men learn how to adapt by learning English and meeting new people outside the family…Men adapt easier and faster than women…and they go out and meet new people”. Thus, integration is linked to educational and occupational success, which is indicative of life accomplishments, and augments problem-solving and decision-making skills.

**Separation (rejection)**

Separation (rejection) refers to self-imposed withdrawal from the larger society and the maintenance of the inherited culture. Individuals who use the separation strategy have a good relationship with their own people and avoid interacting with the dominant culture. Separation has been viewed negatively in previous refugee studies because individuals avoid involvement with the dominant culture. This strategy emerged among the informants in the present research.

The emerging adult Syrian refugees escaped the civil war during their early developmental stages (late childhood and adolescence). They resettled in transitional counties for several years and adapted to the new environment. By moving to the US, the participants coped with two layers of grief, which involved missing the homeland country and missing the transitional county. Separation from the dominant culture was used as a coping skill to address homesickness. Participant 10 lived in a transition country for five years, and she became attached
to her friends as any school-aged child. She avoided making friends when she came to the US at the age of 14 years. “[head down and a low voice]…I was the last person to adapt compared to my older siblings…I miss my old friends in Jordan [looked out the window]; I get depressed when I think about it”.

The refugees, who were considered a minority in the homeland country, countered a different style of separation. For instance, Participant 12 was Kurdi, and she believed that rejecting both Arab and American society could ensure that she did not offend anybody by asking about their cultural background. “I do not have friends, not Syrians, not Americans… I spend my weekends at home; I go shopping and talk to my relatives over the phone. I also do not have friends at the tailor shop where I work…I sometimes speak to other coworkers, like three Arab women, but our relationship is only in the shop. I do not like to talk too much because if you ask people anything, they are going to ask you…I am worried that they may get offended by my questions. They do not understand that asking questions is a way to introduce yourself and make friends”. Thus, she chose to interact with her minor community and avoid the Arab and American cultures.

Separation occurred when the emerging adult refugees evaluated their friendships. Several participants indicated that they live in low-income neighborhoods where they have been exposed to people engaged in drug-related and dangerous behavior. The informants chose to be isolated from this community because it affects them negatively. Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 8, Participant 9, and Participant 12 shared similar narratives of being invited to engage in misconduct behaviors, such as drugs. However, they were not involved in these behaviors because they had strong relationships with their families and the community, which
provided support to the emerging adults. Therefore, separation was a healthy choice in such situations.

Separation occurred when the emerging adult refugees did not have strong English language skills or communication skills. Many older refugees avoided interacting with people from different cultures and felt more comfortable spending time with their own people. Participant 1 mentioned this when describing his own and his parents’ acculturation strategies as follows: “My mother spends times with Arab ladies from the complex, and my father with his friends. The older men like to do their daily stuff together…you know… our culture and tradition; we are about 8 Syrian families in the same complex…The area that we settled in is filled with Syrians. I advised my parents that they needed to learn English…Mother speaks with American neighbors sometimes…Ten Arabic sentences and one English word...they understand her! [laugh]. I cannot be strong like my mother; my English sentences should be perfect. Our neighbors are an American family, and I learned English from them. Language is an important skill wherever you go”.

Participant 2 outlined that the older refugees did not want to learn how to adapt in the US; instead, they asked their sons and daughters to facilitate and translate everything as follows: “My family’s adaptation has been different from my adaptation. My parents do not speak English at all, and they do not want to learn. My father does not tolerate learning, and my mother spends the day organizing and running the household. My younger siblings speak English very well, especially my sisters; they speak English very well, translate everything for my parents and read their mail for them because my sisters go to school here”.

Participant 3 noted that the parents depended on their children to translate and speak for them, which strengthened the child’s language skills and confidence as follows: “Refugee
families depend on their school-aged children to help them out. This impacts the child by strengthening the child’s sense of self-worth and self-esteem because the parents depend on him/her for help. All families used to underestimate their children back home, like ‘my son is young, and he will not understand’. But now, children are encouraged to voice their opinion and participate in family decision making. I have not seen shy or avoidant children here so far; rather, they became very strong because their families depend on them”. Separation was a strategy used among the refugees, especially among the informants’ parents. The age of the individual was the main indication of the acculturation strategy. Although separation among older refugees has been viewed negatively in previous studies, it impacted the younger refugees positively by strengthening their personality, communication skills, and leadership skills.

**Interpersonal Skills**

Interpersonal skills represent a set of abilities that enable an individual to interact positively and work effectively with others. Acculturation among the emerging adult Syrian refugees was associated with their interpersonal skills. The informants presented positive interpersonal skills that aided them in strengthening their acculturation. In the present research, the participants expressed that their interpersonal skills, particularly their resilience, positive attitude, self-learning skills, and social skills, empowered them after they resettled in the US.

**Resilience**

Resilience is defined as an ordinary process involving basic human adaptation to the events that occur during an individual’s life (Masten, 2001). Resilience is a personality trait that facilitates protection against mental health issues resulting from exposure to trauma, such as mass violence and life-threatening events (Edward & Warelow, 2005). In the present study, all
informants were exposed to traumatic events because of the civil war and lost significant people, homes, education, and socioeconomic status. Mental health issues were experienced by the informants and their families. However, the participants appeared to be resilient and considered themselves survivors.

Resilience was a theme reported by all participants, and each participant expressed a different meaning of resilience. Resilience refers to the ability to hope for a brighter future and hope the war stops soon. Participant 1 was optimistic and hoped to return to Syria after the war ends to rebuild his country and help his people. He found a way to strengthen his resilience by helping others in the community as follows: “…accepting reality; when Syrians escaped the war, they thought that it is going to be for a month or two while the conflict was resolved. They spent approximately 6 years in neighboring countries, Europe and the US. Unlike them, I have hope…even if I wait 50 years…I will go back home to help my country and my people. I like to be optimistic; we will go back home. I always remind others that tomorrow will be better. I like to help people. Although I do not speak perfect English, I go with others to the post office, the Department of Transportation to get their driver’s license, and call the internet company”.

Resilience refers to economic stability and the ability to provide for the family. This point of view was outlined by several informants, including Participant 2, Participant 4, Participant 5, Participant 11, and Participant 12. The participants were eager to learn English to obtain better jobs to support their families. They encouraged themselves to be on their feet because they have responsibilities for creating good future for all of them. Participant 11 stated that the Syrian refugees need to learn and work for a better future as follows: “Young adults need to adapt…meaning that they have to work and achieve stable lives…work for a better life…”.

Moreover, resilience refers to accomplishing and seeking higher education to attain higher
paying occupations. Participant 1, Participant 3, and Participant 12 were in the process of college admission; Participant 6, Participant 7, and Participant 10 attended high school and looked forward to enrolling in college. Thus, resilience was a positive personality trait that was a protective factor from the traumatic events to which the emerging adults were exposed during their early life.

**Positive Attitude**

Having a positive attitude is a state of mind in which an individual can envision favorable results by being willing to attempt new things and holding the belief that everything will be all right. A positive attitude was associated with resilience according to several incidents experienced by the informants. Have a positive attitude refers to positive thinking and the ability to transform automatic negative thoughts into positive and proactive thoughts.

A positive attitude was demonstrated when an informant encountered difficulty that could hinder progress. For instance, the impact of trauma during premigration was controlled by being positive about the future. Participant 11 compared his previous life and current life and stated that living in Syria was impossible for all people because of the severe impact of the war. However, he held a positive attitude regarding his life in the US as follows: “…Syrian people had a hard time adapting in their home countries…They fought to get everything…this country [US] did not treat me like my country did…I want to give back to this country”.

Another example of holding a positive attitude was demonstrated by the informants’ hard and continuous work to accomplish their goals. Participant 3 completed a standardized test to enroll in college. The test required her to use strategies that she did not learn in the transit country where she earned her high school diploma as follows: “When I took the first test, I
thought I would have as much time as I needed to finish the test. Then, I discovered that the time was up. I begged the tester to give me five more minutes, and she gave me two. I chose any answers, and she took the paper. It was unfair because there were no materials to review before the test. I did not know that time was important. So, I took the time to carefully answer the questions. I failed the test. I cried and lost hope. I am not going to accomplish my goals. Whenever I move one step forward, I move ten steps backward. But, I told myself that I need to try more, and maybe I will get lucky and get a good score. The test was difficult for me; I failed it, and I got frustrated and sad. I thought I am a loser; I will never be able to do it. Then, I thought ‘What’s next? Why am I beating myself up?’ I like to learn, and my dream is to get higher education; so, this negative talk will only frustrate me more. The next morning, I convinced myself that I am a strong woman, I will pass this test, and I will keep trying until I pass”. Thus, the interviewee learned test-taking strategies and chose to try again rather than quit.

Nonjudgmental acceptance by people from different cultures facilitated acculturation among the emerging adults. Participant 3 was willing to speak to a classmate about her culture, which impacted her relationship with others. “A student from my old school asked me about my head scarf. She thought that I wore it because I was cold. I tried to explain my religious beliefs. I was uncertain about whether I should answer her question because maybe another emerging woman would feel offended. Another situation I experienced was shaking hands. My American friend’s husband wanted to hug me and my mother. I told her that we do not shake hands or hug. I also explained my religious beliefs”.
Self-learning

Self-learning is a modern style of learning in which an individual directs their learning progress. Self-learning has been shown to be an effective knowledge acquisition technique over a short period. In this technological age, self-learning is convenient because people can learn from Internet websites about any topic. The theme of self-learning was reported by several informants in the present study. Self-learning was considered a problem-solving skill in which individuals strengthen their ability to identify obstacles, generate solutions, and evaluate the most adequate solutions for solving the problem.

Furthermore, self-learning strengthens personality traits by providing a new set of skills. During self-learning, learners improve their management skills, including time management, stress management, internal motivation, goal setting, and self-evaluation. Self-learning depends on one’s motivation to learn, which was associated with resilience and a positive attitude among the emerging adult Syrian refugees.

The emerging adult refugees valued learning, completing higher education, and interacting with other international cultures. Participant 10 was enthusiastic to learn several languages that are currently needed on the market for international trading as follows:

“…I am interested in Eastern cultures like my sister…my friends are open-minded; they like to learn the Korean and Chinese languages…I have learned several words, but the Chinese characters are difficult for me to pronounce….so, I found that Korean is easier. I watch TV shows in Korean to learn how to pronounce the words”. Another example was provided by Participant 1 who learned English by interacting with friends and vocabulary self-learning as follows: “…I tried to memorize about 400 to 500 words in English by writing them down in a
notebook and reviewed them all the time…I knew that if I did not depend on myself, my family and I would ‘get lost’; they depend on me. I had to work harder at that time to help my family and myself”.

The informants used self-learning as a strategy to minimize the impact of the US educational system and pedagogy compared to the systems and pedagogies of their native and transit countries. Participant 3 developed a strategy to improve her test scores by utilizing the trial-and-error learning style, which is considered a fundamental problem-solving skill. Trial-and-error learning is characterized by repeated, varied attempts by an individual until he or she achieves success. “In my second attempt to take the standardized test, I learned that timing is a big component to get a good score. I developed a strategy where I focused on answering 15 questions to guarantee a passing score and chose random answers for the rest of the test. My score slightly improved compared to the first time”. Self-learning empowered the informants to take the initiative and strengthen their skills, which supported their acculturation progress.

Social Skills

Social skills represent the competencies that people use during their interactions with other people. Social skills refer to the ability to communicate verbally and nonverbally with other people. It is human nature to live in a group and interact with that group. People utilize social skills to develop friendships, relationships, and connections.

In the present investigation, the informants were equipped with social skills that aided them in increasing their overall life satisfaction and minimizing homesickness. Participant 5 used his social skills to bridge the gap between his culture and the US culture by inviting American friends to try traditional Syrian food as follows: “…we used to invite American teachers and
employees from the organization to eat traditional food at our home…My mother cooked, and they loved the food…We were also invited by a teacher, and we took food with us as well”.

Social skills were valuable while exploring their new homes and practicing the new language. Participant 11 learned and socialized at his job helping others at the refugee organization as follows: “In the refugee organization, I learned English by interacting with others…I translate and facilitate the signing of home rental contracts…take refugees to medical appointments. I learn from this experience…I am not perfect, but I do what I can do”.

Communication skills reflect the ability to transmit verbal and nonverbal information effectively and efficiently to other people. Participant 12 focused on improving her verbal communication skills to be able to articulate her thoughts clearly without being misunderstood. “I speak minimal English, and speaking is everything when communicating with others...You need to let people know what you mean through clear communication. If you defend yourself physically, you will think that you solved one issue, but actually, you put yourself in more trouble. You also need to practice communicating in English to avoid offending anybody by saying something offensive…”. Thus, communication and social skills were considered protective factors against being misunderstood, which could lead to complex issues.

Social skills and personality traits were the effective solutions for issues encountered by the emerging adult refugees. Participant 3 appreciated the minimal level of English she practiced at school and valued her nonverbal communication skills as follows: “…I am a very social person…I do not like to avoid people…I like to talk…I know a lot of friends in Georgia from my school from Vietnam, Korea, and China…and an American friend, she was very kind; we go places together, she has become a friend of my family…the minimal English I have from Jordan
helped me communicate with her…I felt anxious at the beginning until I developed more skills. Sometimes, during a conversation, I forget the word that I want to say, but I keep trying a lot”.

Moreover, social skills aided the informants advance their economic status. This strategy was described by several participants who used their connections to find jobs and navigate resources. The informants relocated to the Pittsburgh area when their connections informed them about the resources provided by the state of Pennsylvania, such as low-income housing, medical insurance and nutritional support. Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 4, Participant 5, Participant 8, and Participant 9 recently moved to Pittsburgh form another state by contacting individuals from the community and their friends who helped them resettle in the Pittsburgh area.

Community Support

Community support provides personal, social, and emotional aid to refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers. Collectivist societies, such as the Syrian community, emphasize the role of social support in individuals’ overall well-being. In the present study, community support represented the help the emerging adult refugees received from others in the community, and such support was received from community volunteers, teachers, coworkers, family, neighbors, and friends.

Support from Community Volunteers

Meeting new people who were ready to help the emerging adult refugees promoted the participants’ psychological well-being and acculturation. The local community organizations welcomed the refugees to resettle in the area. Ansa of Pittsburgh was one of those organizations that aided the refugees in Pittsburgh. With a team of volunteers, Ansar was able to provide
housing support, arrange medical appointments, facilitate the students’ enrolment in schools and colleges, and provide legal consultations. Moreover, Ansar established the following two personal growth groups: the youths group and the women group. In the youth group, young adult refugees learned to strengthen their personalities by practicing public speaking, which impacted the individuals’ self-esteem and motivated them to integrate into society. The women group aimed to provide a safe environment for refugee women to build a new circle of support, share daily challenges, and learn a craft that could be developed into a career.

The community volunteers positively impacted the emerging adult Syrian refugees’ acculturation and psychological well-being. Participant 1 noted that the volunteers helped the Syrian community manage their stress and feel positive about speaking with a person from the dominant society as follows: “…American volunteers visited the complex…They arranged events for the kids…They brought gifts and toys [smile]. This reduced our anxiety about meeting American people...this reduced the fear and anxiety in our hearts when we met American people…unlike when we first came to the US”.

Moreover, the volunteers provided support to the new arrivals to Pittsburgh. Participant 4 and Participant 5 described that the community volunteers facilitated home leasing and helped them obtain furniture for their homes. The volunteers brought the furniture during the interview. Moreover, they helped the informants transfer their driver’s license that was issued from another state to the state of Pennsylvania. Participant 6 and Participant 7 received help with completing the school form and obtaining free lunch. Participant 9 received help with applying to a low-income daycare to enroll her daughter. Participant 10 stated that the organization help her adjust faster: “…An employee from the organization showed us how to take the bus and where to buy
stuff…She helped us book doctors’ appointments for vaccines and helped me enroll in school. The organization also has helped us when we went to social services and received our ID cards”.

The emerging adult Syrian refugees appreciated the help they received from the volunteers and decided to give back to the community. Participant 11 has been in Pittsburgh for more than two years and joined Ansar to work with the volunteers. He became able to facilitate medical appointments, the leasing process, and furniture delivery. He also helped other refugees become involved in the community by providing directions to the mosques in the area and the international market. Newcomers consider him an older brother who is ready to help any family obtain what they need.

Support from Teachers

The teacher-student relationship was another resource for acculturation. The teachers educated the students about the content of the academic materials, welcomed the newcomers, and answered questions. A teacher’s role is significant in promoting acculturation among refugee students. The teachers provided a comforting and stable environment for the students to grow and additional help to fill the educational gap that resulted from escaping the war. Furthermore, the schools provided ESL classes for the refugee students to practice with other non-English speakers.

The collaborative work between the school system and the refugee organization bridged the gap in the understanding of the Syrian culture and the refugees’ traumatic experiences. The Ansar of Pittsburgh provided workshops for the schools on cultural awareness and a preview of Syrian issues to foster understanding and tolerance with nontraditional behavior. The workshops
encouraged the teachers to ask questions about the Syrian culture and nurtured an in-depth understanding of the traumatic background.

Bridging the gap between schools and refugees assisted the teachers in adjusting the way used to deliver information. Participant 2 stated the following regarding the teaching style: “…teachers should have special skills and ways to teach us…like simplifying information. My teachers at the English language school accepted us and welcomed everybody…They also let us practice English and corrected our mistakes…This helped me to have a strong relationship with my teachers…”.

Teachers play a significant role in introducing the culture to newcomers. By welcoming and answering questions that were avoided, the teachers advanced the refugee students’ knowledge and nurtured their personality growth. Participant 5 discussed that the teacher from the ESL program boosted his self-esteem and elevated cultural awareness when she visited Participant 5 and his family as follows: “…We used to invite American teachers and employees from the organization to eat traditional food at our home…my mother cooked, and they loved the food…We were also invited by a teacher, and we took food with us as well”.

Maintaining good relationships with friends was another strategy used by the participants to facilitate acculturation. Participant 2 received assistance with school enrolment and legal consultation from a friend. “A friend of my family helped me…She is Arab-American, and she has been in the US for more than 25 years. She helped me enroll in English classes…and I practice speaking with her. Until now, whatever I have needed, she has been there to help me…She also tells me if I am doing something wrong. Like…like…I wanted to make a fake high school diploma from Jordan to get a GED. She advised me that the school would know in two or
three years that my diploma was not real and that I may get caught. She protected me from doing something wrong”.

Support from Coworkers

Another strategy that fostered acculturation was maintaining good relationships with coworkers at the workplace. Collaborative relationships among coworkers create a healthy atmosphere that promotes productivity. Participant 1 had a good relationship with his employees who helped him acculturate and practice English as follows: “I used to not be confident when I spoke English…I was worried that I would make mistakes or forget something…I became friends with my manager on a construction job who was a Spanish speaker who had been in the US for 18 years. He encouraged me to speak English and not to overthink it…Through practice, I improved my English…He helped me practice and speak well”.

Furthermore, the workplace contributed by fostering self-esteem, assertiveness, and tolerance among the refugees. This experience was described by the working informants, including Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 4, and Participant 5. Participant 2 stated that he asserted himself when a misunderstanding occurred during his shift as follows: “…I work in pizza delivery…I was out delivering an order…The customer told me that I am stupid because the address he provided was not shown in my GPS…So, the food got cold…I told him why do you say that I am stupid? He said that I was late and that the food is cold. I told him not to pay for the food because I could not walk in the snow…He apologized for this”.

In addition, a professional relationship with the manager contributed to financial stability because it reduced the likelihood that an individual quits the job. Participant 11 had an understanding relationship with the manager, which reduced workplace stress and increased
productivity as follows: “Now, I am very happy with my manager at the refugee organization. She has very similar thoughts; otherwise, I would have been fired a long time ago”.

The male and female refugees’ work experiences were perceived differently. Among the female refugees, Participants 8 and 9 did not tolerate workplace stress or interacting with different people and perceived racism as follows: “…the way that they treated me made me hesitate to become friends with them [at work]…I received a different treatment from the managers compared to the other Mexican workers because I am a refugee...[did not] No respect; they gave me more work than the others; they gave me orders [appeared angry]. This reason made me quit the job...Now, I am staying home doing nothing [looked away]”. The female emerging adult Syrian refugees assumed home responsibilities and depended on their families for financial support.

Support from Family

The familial relationship is interdependent in collective societies. The parents provide support for their children and rely on their children to support them as they grow older. The family dynamics in collective societies depend on respect and support. In collective cultures, families depend on the older son to provide for the parents and younger siblings, especially if the parents are sick and cannot work. The family has to provide housing and a good relationship with the provider. The collaborative relationship between the family and the worker informants was noted by several participants, including Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 4, Participant 5, Participant 11, and Participant 12. Thus, the families provided psychological support for the participants, including connection, love, respect, comfort, and other needs, such as cooking, cleaning, and housing.
Participant 12 was the main provider for her family and relied on her family to comfort her anxiety and encourage her in life. She stated that she enjoyed spending time with her parents who provided unconditional acceptance as follows: “I have a good relationship with my parents. My mother is my friend; we play together and go places together. I think parents acculturate in a certain way, and young adults have their own way. For example, when we came here, my father took care of everything, like school registration and all the paper work. My parents also took me to a medical appointment when I was sick. Now, that I have turned 22, I am responsible for filling out any documents”.

Collective societies are characterized by strong relationships among neighbors, who are considered extended family. The informants reported having strong relationships with their neighbors, who supported them when they arrived in the US; for example, Participant 1 described the following: “…our neighbor is an American family; they helped us a lot. It was hard to believe. They helped me enroll in school. They helped us with everything. Whatever we asked, they helped us, like going to the grocery store. They took us places to have leisure time”.

One characteristic of neighbors is the habit of visiting one another at any time. Participant 3 depended on her neighbors to maintain her mental health. “…I do not feel homesick because our neighbors come to our house daily…This building is full of Syrian families, and we are like a big family. We go to their houses, and they come to us. Living in Buffalo was very difficult for us; we did not have friends there, and it was very cold”.

Appendix G illustrates the strategies used by the emerging adult Syrian refugees to minimize the impact of the challenges they encountered in the US.
CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter aimed to present the findings and highlighted the themes that emerged in the present study. The informants’ demographic information and other characteristics, including their age, gender, marital status, members in the household, occupation, and number of years in the transitional country and the US, were outlined. Then, the findings were grouped under five major clusters. The predeparture experience focused on understanding the informants lives’ before they fled Syria. The themes developed in this cluster were related to the reason for migration, experiencing traumatic events during the war, and limitation of knowledge regarding the refugee and migration process.

The second cluster was related to the journey of escaping the war. The informants stated the mode of travel to the refugee camp and their lived experiences of crossing the border. Moreover, the participants described life in refugee camps, such as Alzaatari, which was challenging and traumatizing for many participants. The informants waited for two years in the transit country for security and background check to be able to travel to the US or another host country.

The destination experience was the third cluster, which described a new start for the informants. The participants reflected on their thoughts and feelings when they arrived at the US and deliberated on their interaction with several stakeholders. The participants described the support and challenges they encountered during the acculturation process, such as housing, nutritional support, education support, and employment support. Moreover, the informants shed light on their experience of resettling in Pittsburgh, where they moved for the affordable housing programs, and adjusting to the Syrian community.
Acculturation was the fourth cluster that emerged in the present research. The themes in this cluster were organized by utilizing Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Human Development (2006). Acculturation and the challenges experienced at the microsystem level included traumatic memories, homesickness, and grief. The mesosystem, which was the second level, included issues related to education, ESL classes, and employment. The third level of challenges was the exosystem, which focused on the impact of the environment on an individual. For instance, living in a poor neighborhood influenced the family dynamics and individual mental health. Additionally, the macrosystem level of challenges were related to the political system, bulling, and racism. The chronosystem was the last level of the bioecological model and included the internal and external changes that occurred over time.

The fifth cluster involved the informants’ strategies to enhance acculturation. This cluster illustrated that there were three main strategies used to augment the informants’ acculturation. First, the acculturation strategies embracing assimilation, integration, and rejection were utilized interactively among the emerging adult Syrian refugees. The second strategy used to nurture acculturation relied on the participants’ interpersonal skills, such as resilience, maintaining a positive attitude, engaging in self-learning, and improving social skills. The third strategy used to reinforce the informants’ acculturation was community support, which was received from community volunteers, teachers, coworkers, friends, family, and neighbors. In the following fifth chapter of this research, I discuss my findings.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The conflict in Syria, which began in 2011, has caused widespread displacement, with millions of Syrian refugees fleeing, mainly to neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan. The US has welcomed 33,000 Syrian refugees for resettlement in several states. The Migration Policy Institute has resettled Syrian refugees in 36 states, including California, Texas, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. The Syrian refugee emerging adults have experienced trauma related to the civil war, the transition to neighboring countries, and challenges during resettlement in the US. This population has been a significant source of labor in many Western countries because of the falling fertility rate and aging population. The acculturation of the emerging adult Syrian refugees required further exploration because they have had to confront several issues, such as mental health problems, developmental stressors, educational challenges, employment difficulties, and familial responsibilities.

An exploration of any aspect of Syrian refugee emerging adult must include a discussion of acculturation. This research aimed to fill this gap by investigating the experience of Syrian refugee emerging adults who live in Pittsburgh, the city welcoming the most Syrian refugees compared to other cities in the state of Pennsylvania. Several organizations have helped the refugees with their basic needs, including housing, employment, and English as a Second Language classes (ESL). However, these programs did not provide acculturation workshops for Syrian refugee emerging adults. The purpose of this study was to illuminate the lived experience of the acculturation process among the emerging adult Syrian refugees who settled in Pittsburgh, PA, USA.
Guiding Questions

Consistent with the above statement of the problem, the following research questions were established to guide this study. The primary research question was the following: what are the lived and living experiences of Syrian refugee emerging adults related to learning and the acculturation process in the United States?

The secondary research questions were the following:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of Syrian refugee emerging adults?
2. What are the major push-and-pull factors leading emerging adults to become refugees?
3. How do Syrian refugee emerging adults experience life during their travel to, arrival in and stay in the US?
4. What strategies do Syrian refugee emerging adults use to develop acculturation behavior?
5. How are these emerging adults’ daily activities shaped and impacted by their level of acculturation?
6. How do Syrian refugee emerging adults evaluate the support they receive from the system and society to adjust and acculturate in the US?

Discussion of the Findings

Participants’ Profiles and the Push-Pull Factors Leading Emerging Adults to Become Refugees

Participant characteristics seemed closely related to the push-pull forces for refugees, vulnerability to traumatic events, and adjustment to the sociocultural context of the destination. The common push force for migration among all participants was to escape the life-threatening
situation caused by the civil war. The civil war took thousands of lives and destroyed homes, hospitals, and schools. Participants and their families were constantly bombed and experienced traumatic events, such as being arrested and tortured in jails. Traumatic events caused several psychological issues for participants. This finding was consistent with previous studies that focused on the impact of wars on refugee mental health, such as posttraumatic stress disorder and major depressive disorder. In addition, anxiety, somatic symptoms, and dissociative disorders have been found (Steel et al., 2009; Patil, Maripuu, Hadley, & Sellen, 2015). Living under constant life-threatening events and expecting to die caused trauma symptoms among participants.

Informants were in their late childhood or early adolescence when they fled from one city or one town to another. However, no place was safe. The war impacted their basic needs, such as nutrition and medical supplies. They migrated because the war caused a significant economic crisis that pushed people out of the country. Schools and hospitals were targets of bombing, and medical staff were assassinated. People lost their homes, jobs, and loved ones and migrated to an “unknown” place. Therefore, dealing with traumatic events and multiple losses affected the refugees’ physical and psychological development.

According to Ericson’s psychosocial developmental theory (1985), informants encountered several challenges meeting the developmental milestone of their ages. Their identity development was impacted by the armed conflict, causing participants to explore and anticipate death instead of planning for the future. Moreover, the civil war impacted participants’ abilities to resolve conflict, considered a primary virtue of the developmental stage. Furthermore, this stage was not nurtured during the migration phase when informants were separated from their extended families, neighbors, and friends, which impacted their relationships and social
interactions with other people in the refugee camp (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001).

Ericson (1985) emphasized ego identity as a component of the sense of self. Informants were confused about their identities because of the lack of stability in their lives caused by leaving their homes to go to the refugee camps (Berry & Sam, 1997; Williams & Berry, 1991). Their roles and activities were inhibited to maintain safety, which hindered their progress and developmental need. Lack of reinforcement and encouragement from the parents was demonstrated among informants. However, it was appropriate and considered a protective factor from participating in the war.

Intimacy was the next step of Ericson’s psychosocial developmental theory (1985) that highlighted the need to develop emotional connections. Individuals who overcome relationship conflicts can develop long-lasting psychosocial skills. Among informants, the chronosystem of how they changed and developed over time was significant to understand, as was the impact of the traumatizing environment (exosystem and macrosystem) on their psychosocial development (microsystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

According to Ericson (1985), informants lost several significant people and social connections with relatives and friends, which contributed to informants’ depression and homesickness (Knappert, Kornau, and Figengul, 2018; Laubscher, 2012). Informants’ backgrounds, collective in nature, were a protective factor, in which participants were connected to the Syrian community in Pittsburgh to fill the emptiness of grieving and to seek emotionally intimate relationships with others.
As indicated in the profile section, many participants had less education and were from rural areas. Their educational levels ranged from elementary to high school, and the average was the 9th grade. Their ages ranged from 18 to 25, and the average was 22 years old. Eight of 12 were employed before they migrated to the US. Participants were the main providers for families with whom they lived, including parents, siblings, spouses, and their children.

Related to informants’ profiles were their limited education and their inability to speak English before they left, creating language and skill gaps. Their prior knowledge about the migration process ranged from none to too little. Their instinctual reaction for safety was the only driving force guiding their journey. Preparations such as planning which route to take were not part of their response to the crisis they faced; most participants did not share perspectives about their expectations in an asylum country, a refugee camp or their destination.

One interconnected participant profile issue was the challenges related to the transition and the journey of becoming refugees. Most participants were young and had not been engaged in serious work independently. As they were under the care of adults, they were less informed of the process of migration. The nature of the collective society was a factor contributing to the limited knowledge of the migration process. In collectivist societies, the head of the household—such as a grandparent, a parent, or an older sibling—makes decisions, and other family members follow the leader because they view them as the most knowledgeable and wisest person. Therefore, emerging adult Syrian refugees may not have had sufficient knowledge of migration because they escaped in late childhood and adolescence. This finding was consistent with LeFebvre and Franke (2013), who showed that in collective societies, the group makes decisions for individuals, and external intervention is not welcome.
Safety and Exposure of Traumatic Events: During the Journey and Resettlement

Along the continuum of their migration, participants were affected by possible trauma at three levels. The first level was in Syria, their country of origin, which precipitated their flight. Experiences in Syria pushing participants to leave their country include conflict and political unrest (being tortured, receiving threats, being arrested), and lack of resources for survival (no food, school for children, health center, etc.). Regarding individuals who experience traumatic events such as war and torture, the literature indicates psychological distress and PTSD are more relevant among refugees (Marshall, Schell, & Miles, 2009; Norois, Perils, Ibanez, & Murphy, 2001).

These traumatic events caused various psychological issues for informants. This finding was consistent with previous studies focusing on the impact of wars on refugees’ mental health, such as posttraumatic stress disorder and major depressive disorder as well as anxiety, somatic symptoms, and dissociative disorders (Steel et al., 2009; Patil, Maripuu, Hadley, & Sellen, 2015). Living with constant life-threatening events and expecting to die caused trauma symptoms among participants.

The second traumatic experience was the escape journey of immigration, which was filled with egregious events. Informants disclosed they were exposed to severe travel conditions such as walking for several days to a neighboring country such as Jordan, Lebanon, or Turkey; lacking adequate food and water; and experiencing extreme weather conditions. The roads to these countries were not safe, and participants were targets for bombs or arrest by the police. Most participants had never thought about leaving their hometowns. Therefore, they did not have official documents or passports to legally cross the borders. On the route as well as in the neighboring country, they were exposed to high levels of danger and possible imprisonment.
Sadly, many participants did not even identify themselves as victims; they blamed themselves for immorality in making a survival decision, which they were obligated to make under extreme duress.

Poor living conditions on the refugee camp were also found to be an eventful experience on the route. Participants were confronted with poor living conditions in the refugee camp. The lack of basic life needs, such as shelter, nutrition, and medication, was significant. Additionally, the Al Zaatari refugee camp was located in the northern Jordan desert and experienced extreme weather conditions. Consistent fears of being caught by the police and employment issues were faced by participants during their transit period. Moreover, refugees in the camp experienced overpopulation, the fear of an uncertain future and a lack of privacy. These poor living conditions affected individuals’ overall well-being. This finding was supported by a study on mental health issues among refugees in Rwandan and Burundese refugee camps (De Jong, Scholte, Koeter, & Hart, 2001; Mollica, Donelan, & Tor, 1993; & Lee et al. 2001).

Third, the settlement or relocation process was typified by a plethora of shocking events, including retraumatization by an intimidating legal system, social seclusion, and cultural shock. This finding was supported by a study investigating mental health issues among refugees after they resettled (Kimayer et al., 2011). Lack of knowledge regarding the final destination and the language barrier increased stress among participants. Moreover, informants needed to find jobs shortly after they arrived to support their families and gain dignity (Porter & Haslam, 2003; Barnik, Hurst, & Eby, 2018). Although organizations hosting the refugees in the US provided housing, medical support, nutritional support, and ESL classes for three months, refugees required additional awareness on acculturation that could be used as anxiety coping skill and to promote mental health (Strijik, van Meijel, & Gamel, 2011).
The loss of family identity and community culture was profound for people whose sense of well-being and pride are founded on these markers. Another destination context provoking trauma was the difficulty adjusting to an unfamiliar school and employment system, a new language and unknown and often isolating social structures. All these experiences at different stages of their migration led informants to experience mental health issues, including PTSD, depression, and adjustment disorders (Lindencorona, Ekblad, & Hoff, 2008; Scheweitzer, Brough, Vromans, & Asic-Kobe, 2010; Schwitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006).

**Acculturation Behavior of Emerging Adult Syrian Refugees**

Acculturation is the result of the interaction between different cultures. It is the psychological and social change occurring among people from a minority culture who interact with a dominant culture. Strategies of acculturation were introduced by Berry (1997). These strategies are assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Berry noted that assimilation occurred when an individual from a minority culture assimilated into the dominant culture and had a negative view of his/her native culture. Rejection (separation) led to the opposite: an individual interacted with the native culture and avoided the dominant culture. An immigrant is considered integrated when both the dominant and the native culture are maintained. Finally, an immigrant is considered marginalized when the individual avoids both the native and dominant cultures.

Previous studies have viewed acculturation as stages or strategies separated from each other. The present research found the acculturation strategies among the sample involved dynamic acculturation. This finding was not supported by previous studies considering dynamic acculturation a new strategy that required further assessment. The dynamic acculturation presented in this research could be defined as a flexible, changeable, and balanced strategy that...
can utilize the strategies of assimilation, integration, and rejection after an evaluation of the situation.

Dynamic acculturation is characterized by constant progress and active change, promoting positive personality growth among refugees and immigrants. Dynamic acculturation provides a wider set of strategies for an individual to utilize. Unlike previous studies suggesting that an immigrant use one rigid acculturation strategy, dynamic acculturation encourages an individual to evaluate the situation and choose the response before acting.

Acculturation strategies differ among different age groups. Participants’ parents seemed to utilize separation due to difficulties learning a new language at older ages. Participants’ younger siblings tended to assimilate with their peers at school, learn the language faster, and take leadership positions in the family. The emerging adult participants, aged between 18 and 25, demonstrated dynamic acculturation compared to their parents and younger siblings.

Some of the findings of this study were consistent with previous studies, as presented in the proceeding section. Three new findings have been presented (dynamic acculturation, interpersonal skills, and community support) that differ from our everyday thinking and the literature. First, participants' resilience and their coping ability could bridge the gap between the Syrian community and the US society, which included the interaction of participants' cultural backgrounds, dealing with traumatic experience, and adopting to the American culture, which I describe as dynamic acculturation.

Dynamic acculturation depicts the process of how an individual or a group endures physical, emotional or cultural adoption; reacts to such conditions with a sense of helpful and reciprocally valuable relationships; and shows the ability to integrate their cultural practice,
accept and learn to change to gain mastery over the majority culture. The acculturation behavior in this study’s participants found ways to not fit into the existing acculturation stage and level framework (Berry, 1997; Berry and Sam 1997; & Dona & Berry, 1994). Hence, this study focused on presenting and discussing the process of acculturation—dynamic acculturation—rather than the acculturation type and level.

**Dynamic Acculturation (Assimilation and Integration)**

Assimilation to the dominant culture has been viewed negatively. Immigrants at this stage are considered westernized individuals who have lost their native identities. Assimilation may cause intergenerational familial distress. In assimilation, refugees meld their characteristics into the dominant culture, which reflects the superiority of the dominant culture. However, assimilation was not viewed negatively in the present research.

Informants in the present study reported they wanted to learn English and pursue higher education. Additionally, their ways of dressing in their home country were different from those in the US, especially among females. Participants found that a balanced strategy helped them maintain their identity and allowed them to assimilate into US culture. Instead of wearing darker clothes, they wore brighter colors. They may wear darker colors in their community and brighter colors at school. Language and food preferences were also discussed by participants in the interviews. They spoke Arabic and were passionate to learn English to be able to work and to achieve higher education. The strategy they used was a combination of assimilation and integration.
**Dynamic Acculturation (Assimilation and Rejection)**

Rejection (separation) refers to a withdrawal from the dominant culture and a maintenance of the native culture. Individuals who use the separation strategy have a good relationship with their own people and avoid interacting with the dominant culture. Rejection has been viewed as negatively impacting immigrants’ mental health and the acculturation process. Rejecting interaction with the dominant culture influences personal growth, financial status, and educational achievement. The opposite of rejection is assimilation into the dominant society.

In the present research, assimilation and rejection were utilized by participants at the same time. Participants learned from their American friends a healthy lifestyle and the English language; these friends had good occupations and pursued their goals. They also rejected interactions with friends who may have affected them negatively, such as joining gangs or becoming involved in substance abuse or other illegal behaviors. Therefore, participants maintained assimilation by embracing a positive lifestyle and rejecting a negative lifestyle. Rejection and assimilation were thus used dynamically among informants.

**Dynamic Acculturation (Integration and Rejection)**

Integration is reported to be the most positive and acceptable acculturation strategy across immigration studies. Integration occurs when the individual maintains a positive relationship with the native culture as well as with the dominant culture. Integrating with the dominant society provides more opportunities for personal, occupational, and educational development. Rejection has the opposite impact of integration because of the nature of avoidance among refugees and immigrants.
In the present research, participants utilized both strategies at the same time. Participants maintained dynamic acculturation by maintaining a positive relationship with the dominant and native cultures (integration), maintaining a good relationship with family and friends and avoiding involvement in dangerous or illegal situations (rejection). Participants showed a tendency to analyze the situation in a unique way, to evaluate which strategy to utilize at certain times, and then to act depending on the results of their evaluation.

Dynamic acculturation is considered a problem-solving skill to reduce the acculturation stress that occurs when a refugee or immigrant must choose one culture over another. Adopting more than one acculturation strategy and problem-solving skills requires higher cognitive functioning skills—such as analyzing, evaluating, communication, flexibility, and emotional regulation—to make an effective decision. Therefore, participants who utilized dynamic acculturation were better able to solve their problems creatively and reduce the stress of migration.

Participants’ positive attitudes promoted the strategy of dynamic acculturation. Dynamic acculturation can be viewed as a result of the resilience they developed after the traumatic events in their home country and the refugee camp. Below, I discuss the interpersonal skills associated with dynamic acculturation informants used to minimize the challenges of living in the US.

Table 4 illustrates the concept of dynamic acculturation.
Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills are abilities enabling an individual to interact positively and work effectively with others. Participants in the present study adapted a set of personal traits to facilitate their dynamic acculturation in the US. The first personality trait was resilience, which protects an individual against mental health issues (Goodman, Vesely, Letiecq, & Cleaveland, 2017). The definition of resilience was similar to dynamic acculturation; both are changeable, flexible, and monitor progress. Moreover, dynamic acculturation and resilience promote mental health and psychological well-being among newcomers. Additionally, dynamic acculturation and resilience were similar in their use of high cognitive functions, such as attention, analyzing, evaluating, learning, and emotional regulation (Masten & Obradovic, 2008).
However, dynamic acculturation and resilience differ. Resilience occurs within the individual, while dynamic acculturation occurs among an individual, a native culture, and a dominant culture. Furthermore, they differ based on the reason they appear: resilience is a result of a processed traumatic event (Goodman, 2013; Lenette, Brough, & Cox, 2012), whereas dynamic acculturation is a result of migration for various reasons not that are not necessarily traumatic. For instance, migrating to find a better job or to seek higher education may not involve traumatic events.

Maintaining a positive attitude has been linked to resilience and dynamic acculturation. It requires the ability to shift negative automatic thoughts to make them positive and predictable. The ability to shift thoughts is a high cognitive function that requires thought monitoring, which is a meta-cognitive process, or thinking about the thinking process. A positive attitude produces positive feelings and behaviors, such as dynamic acculturation. Participants in the present study reported being optimistic and resilient about living in the US. They were determined to pursue higher education and to find good employment to support their families.

Participants’ self-learning skills were also interrelated with dynamic acculturation. Informants wanted to obtain a proper education, including ESL or college education, to be able to acculturate in the US. Education is a powerful tool that could reconstruct informants’ lives by enhancing their identities and building resilience (El Jack, 2010). Although the US educational system and pedagogy differs from that in their native and transit countries, participants demonstrated hard work and a variety of skills to memorize English words and learn the language, which was considered a gateway to more opportunities.

Social skills were associated with dynamic acculturation, resilience, and positive attitudes. The major social skill was the ability to communicate with people from the refugee’s
community as well as American society regardless of language differences. Communication skills are a major factor for achieving self-sufficiency in the US, as indicated by a previous study that highlighted the significance of communication skills for employment among Indochinese refugees (Strand, 1984).

Participants exhibited strong social and communication skills, which facilitated their dynamic acculturation. Although participants felt embarrassed about their English language limitations, they reported having American friends who helped them strengthen their speaking skills and exposed them to American culture. They also utilized their nonverbal communication skills and welcomed people into their lives. Therefore, they maintained positive relationships within their native community as well as within American culture.

Community Support

The third finding of the present research was that community support considerably helped emerging adult Syrian refugees acculturate in the US. Community support was also related to social skills and resilience. Informants maintained strong, positive, and interdependent relationships with their families. They provided financial support, and their families provided psychological support and physical care for the informants. Moreover, the nature of the collectivist community respected neighbors and considered them extended relatives. This finding was supported by previous studies on the significant role of family support as a protective factor and a main resource for emotional support (Nam, Kim, De Vylder, & Song, 2016; Schweitzer, Greeslade, & Kagee, 2006; Sossou, Craig, Ogren, & Schnak, 2008).

Furthermore, participants fostered their acculturation by interacting with people outside of their families and communities—such as teachers, school friends, coworkers, and
volunteers—who facilitated safe exposure to the dominant society and reduced participants’ anxiety when talking to people from the dominant society. Seeking community support was discussed in a previous study that highlighted the significance of community support for refugees (Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherex, 2009). Informants were resilient and held a positive attitude toward life in the US. They were eager to give back to the community by volunteering for the Ansar to aid newcomers in areas related to housing, furniture, school enrolment, shopping, and medical appointments.

Limitations of the Study

In the present qualitative study, twelve informants who were emerging adult Syrians aged 18 to 25 were interviewed to gain an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences as refugees. The major findings indicated that informants developed a dynamic acculturation process, in which they used assimilation, integration, and separation simultaneously after analyzing and evaluating the situation. Moreover, this research found that informants’ interpersonal skills and use of community support facilitated the dynamic acculturation process. In terms of qualitative research, the limitations that possibly affected the present study were generalizability and participant trust concerns.

Generalizability

The main concern in the present research was the lack of generalizability. This study aimed to investigate acculturation strategies among emerging adult Syrian refugees in the US. The study sample was purposely selected, and the number of participants was small because the main purpose was to promote an in-depth understanding of acculturation among this sample. For transformability, a researcher may apply the concept of this study to other populations, such as
international students, immigrants, and refugees from other cultural backgrounds. This study has value for future research on understanding dynamic acculturation as a new concept based on the analysis of the findings.

**Participant Trust Concerns**

Interacting with a vulnerable population such as refugees may have affected the study. Gaining participants’ trust was accomplished through several steps. First, the founder of the Ansar of Pittsburgh contacted participants to explain the topic of the interview and introduced the researcher as a volunteer in the organization. Participants gave their initial consent to be interviewed for research purposes. Then, the head of the household—such as a parent, husband or older brother—was contacted to obtain another level of consent. Finally, the participants were informed again about the purpose of the research and the nature of the interview. Female participants’ trust was gained by interacting with the entire family, especially the head of the household, before interviewing them.

Another factor that increased informants’ trust was my ability to speak Arabic. As an Arabic speaker, I could understand and connect with informants during the interview. Additionally, I speak fluent Arabic with a Syrian accent because I was born and raised in Syria, and my family previously worked in the Saudi Arabian embassies in Damascus, Syria. The personal acculturation with the Syrian culture I developed during my early life stages enhanced my multicultural understanding, and I became sensitive toward other cultures. Because genuine rapport was developed with informants and confidentiality was assured, trust was not a concern in this research.
Implications for Further Research

The findings of the present study have implications for potential positive understanding at the individual, the organizational and the community levels. The results of this study indicated that managing acculturation stressors and challenges using dynamic acculturation was beneficial for maintaining psychological well-being. Dynamic acculturation provided a wide range of problem-solving skills that helped refugees and immigrants to live in the dominant culture. Counselors should not consider acculturation strategies by viewing them as good-bad or positive-negative strategies. Dynamic acculturation promoted involvement with the native and dominant culture after evaluating the situation. Multicultural understanding was beneficial to understanding refugees’ challenges and strategies.

Moreover, the findings of this research indicated that the refugees came from a collectivist society that values personal relationships with the larger group. Counselors should focus on counseling or advocacy projects providing social and community support. Community support played a significant role for emerging adult refugees in maintaining their mental health and dynamic acculturation. Emerging adult refugees need support groups focusing on acculturation, law and regulation, parenting in Western culture, learning English and pursuing a higher education.

Research Recommendations

Recommendations for Counselors

- Mental health counseling for refugees must be improved to develop multicultural tools and interventions that rely less on the medical models of psychotherapy.
• The family must be involved in the counseling process, and the community must be involved in programs promoting dynamic acculturation.

• Counselors should work collaboratively with interpreters to provide an in-depth understanding of the acculturation challenges and strategies.

• Counselors should also advocate for refugees by providing career counseling as well as law and regulation workshops to facilitate financial stability and help refugees learn new skills.

• Support groups for refugees should be developed, which can be led by peers who have been in the US for a longer time and have the requisite knowledge and personality traits to lead the group.

**Recommendations for Researchers**

• Trustworthy and genuine relationships must be built with refugees and immigrants to maintain the reliability of the research.

• Researchers should consider refugees’ cultural backgrounds with regard to greeting others, talking to female participants, and maintaining confidentiality.

• The family or another trustworthy person should be involved as a third party when signing informed consent forms to promote better understanding of the research purposes.

**Contribution to the Professional Literature**

The findings of the present study highlighted the significance of acculturation among refugees and immigrants. Additionally, it underlined the need for further assessments and empirical studies focusing on dynamic acculturation. This research provided several themes that
could be developed to create a training program for newcomers focusing on mental health issues, education, employment, law and regulations, and dynamic acculturation. A future experimental study is recommended to develop a training program for refugees and immigrants and measure dynamic acculturation before and after the training.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the findings of the present research and linked them to previous studies in the field of mental health counseling and migration. The major finding was related to dynamic acculturation, which occurred when refugees strategically utilized all acculturation strategies—assimilation, integration, and separation—depending on the situation. Dynamic acculturation was associated with resilience and holding positive attitudes toward living in the US and refugees’ futures. Dynamic acculturation was viewed as an advanced problem-solving skill for which an individual utilized cognitive functions, such as analyzing, evaluating, connecting, and decision-making. Moreover, this chapter highlighted the significant role of personality traits such as resilience, holding a positive attitude, and self-learning in developing dynamic acculturation among refugees.

Additionally, this chapter emphasized community support, including the roles of family, friends, teachers, coworkers, and community volunteers in promoting dynamic acculturation, as a strategy to overcome the challenges confronted by refugees. The limitation of this study is its generalizability because of the nature of purposeful sample qualitative research and the small number of interviewees compared to quantitative studies. Finally, this chapter provided implications and recommendations that can be utilized by counselors and researchers when working with refugees.
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APPENDIX

Appendix A

The following table illustrates the participants demographic information including age, gender, number of family, marital status, language and religion, level of education, number of years in the US, and number of years in transit countries.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>age</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th>#family</th>
<th>Marital</th>
<th>Lang/Religion</th>
<th>education</th>
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Appendix C

Open Codes

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### Appendix D

#### Regrouping Codes

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Appendix E

Theoretical codes

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| **Predeparture Experience**   | • Reason for migration  
                              | • Experience of traumatic events  
                              | • Knowledge of the refugee process |
| **The Journey**               | • Mode of travel to the refugee camps  
                              | • Life in the refugee camp  
                              | • Traveling to the US |
| **Destination Experience**    | • Arrival in the US  
                              | • Interactions with stakeholders  
                              | • Support (housing, nutrition,  
                              | education, & employment)  
                              | • Settling in Pittsburgh  
                              | • Adjusting to the Syrian community |
| **Acculturation**             | • Acculturation strategies |
| **Strategies to Develop Acculturation** | • Interpersonal skills  
                              | • Community support |
Appendix F

SimpleMind Coding
Appendix G  Major Themes Frequency

The following table illustrated the strategies the informants used to minimize the impact of the challenges they encountered in the US.

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