

# **A Journey to Achieve Belonging: Vietnamese Refugees' Stories of Resettlement and Long-term Adaptation to Canada**

**by**

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B.Sc., University of British Columbia, 2005

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## Abstract

There is a lack of literature surrounding long-term resettlement and adaptation experiences of Vietnamese refugees that arrived in Canada between 1979 and 1989. This study asks, “What do the stories of Vietnamese refugees reveal about their experiences of adapting to the Canadian host culture? Using narrative inquiry, seven participants were interviewed about their pre-migratory, initial, and long-term settlement. This research sought to understand challenges of settlement in the context of locale. Thematic analysis revealed this group made meaning of their experiences of adaptation by engaging in actions to achieve *belonging* within the Canadian host culture. Bhatia’s dialogical model of acculturation is used to explain Vietnamese refugees’ process of acculturation. Establishing trust and validating Vietnamese refugees’ resilience and individual coping strategies are essential to work with this group. Counselling implications include understanding Vietnamese help-seeking, collaboration with settlement workers, providing education on counselling services, and facilitating their connection to the host locale.

**Keywords:** Vietnamese refugees; adaptation and acculturation; resettlement locale; narrative inquiry; counselling; coping strategies

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents – thank you for demonstrating to me what unconditional love is. In addition, I dedicate this work to all Vietnamese refugees who courageously risked their lives to pursue freedom for themselves and for their family. While I mourn for those who lost their lives during their journey, I hope those who survived have been able to create meaningful lives for themselves in their new locale. I hope you are healthy, happy, and thriving.

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## **List of Acronyms**

LUC	Large Urban Centres
RRP	Refugee Resettlement Project
RST	Rural/Small Town

# **Chapter 1.**

## **Introduction**

“Hope is important because it can make the present moment less difficult to bear. If we believe that tomorrow will be better, we can bear a hardship today.” Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh’s (1992, p. 41) quote beautifully captures the powerful force motivating Vietnamese people to escape Vietnamese communism in the 1980s by leaving the only homeland they have known in order to pursue freedom in a new place that is unknown to them. For these Vietnamese refugees, hope was present in their decision-making to ‘escape’ Vietnam, throughout their journey helping them to survive, and it continued to linger to help them endure their struggles of adapting to their new locale. Hope was this force of nature that gave my parents the courage to engage in this same action; to give up the things they know today in belief that they are doing it for a better tomorrow, for their family, and for their children.

### **1.1. My Personal Narrative**

It was August 6, 1988 – I was six years old and my younger sister was four years old – when my parents took us and we escaped Vietnam. It was a very dangerous time, as they had tried unsuccessfully three times earlier and this final time my mother was eight months pregnant with my second sister. That day, my father was waiting in the ocean with his fishing boat, pretending to be fishing with a few other people. My mother and my aunt departed with us at different times and from different locations to secretly meet at a farming field by the rivers. We would wait until nighttime when a smaller boat would arrive quietly – they did not use a motor because it would be noisy and attract the attention of communist soldiers that were patrolling nearby – to pick us up and take us out to my father’s boat. By the time we met up with my

father on his boat, approximately 100 people had arrived from different locations; many of them included people who arrived unexpectedly and did not contribute their own money to this trip. My parents knew that this many people would attract attention and surely cause them to be caught. Feeling torn, my father threatened to turn the boat in to the communist police to deter the unexpected passengers. This necessary action caused many of them to become scared, as they got back onto their paddleboats and went home. Even though this action reduced the number to 70 people, it was still considered too many people for a small fishing boat, regardless; we left for the ocean using only a compass and approximate directions from people who have successfully escaped Vietnam months and years earlier. My parents' goal was to go to Malaysia or Indonesia and seek refuge there. On that day, we became refugees without a country.

We were in the middle of the Pacific Ocean for five or six days. The winds were strong and the waves kept pushing our boat away from the planned route. Everyone was scared and feeling uncertain about his or her future, as the food source quickly became scarce with each passing day. Then one day a huge storm came and many people became terrified that at any point the fishing boat would flip over and we would all die in the open sea. Finally on the sixth day, our boat encountered a Thai fishing boat. We were afraid to entrust their help because we have heard stories of Thai pirates using this opportunity to rape Vietnamese women and kill the men and children. Fortunately, they provided us water, gasoline and directions to Malaysia. We arrived at the refugee camp in Pulau Bi Dong in Malaysia on the seventh day and my mother gave birth to her third daughter a few days later.

According to my parents, life at the refugee camp was terrible, but tolerable. We received some clothes, food, and shelter to stay in; eight to ten people were assigned to sleep side by side in a nine by eleven square foot room, the size of a small bedroom. We were given rationed food (e.g., we received 150 grams of rice per person per day). Sometimes we were lucky to get eggs and canned fish. Our family stayed at the camp for ten months before we were moved to the main center and waited for the High Commissioner to interview our family and match us with a country willing to sponsor us. Our family interviewed twice for the United States and were rejected both times. When we interviewed for Canada, the government thought our

family was too large and our English skills were poor and declined our sponsorship. When it appeared that our luck has depleted, one Canadian interviewer was still interested in helping us obtained sponsorship because she had observed how hard my parents were trying; my father volunteered in the camp's clinic, while my aunt volunteered at the camp's school teaching the refugee children. This interviewer recognized the sense of hope and determination in my family, so she went back to Canada and made arrangements with a Catholic Church in Truro, Nova Scotia, to sponsor our family. My parents were extremely relieved and grateful when we were accepted, and two months after our acceptance letter, we arrived in Canada on April 2, 1990.

It has been approximately 25 years ago that we left Vietnam. As I got older, the memories of these events have become fleeting, appearing as discreet photographic snapshots whenever my family talks about our journey. Sometimes, these memories appear to me in my dreams as hazy images, but I often feel the intense emotions of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty that are attached to them. Perhaps I am fortunate not to recollect these events as clearly as my parents still do, because when I hear their stories, I cannot help but feel the intensity of their emotions; I can feel their desperation for our family's survival, their sadness of having to leave their home country, their fear of getting caught, and their hope for freedom.

While these memories have become fleeting, I can still clearly remember our family's struggles to adapt to our new locale in Nova Scotia, our relocation to British Columbia to be closer to our relatives, and my parents' continuous struggle to obtain low paying temporary jobs in our current small town which we now call home. With four young girls to raise and a family left behind in Vietnam to support, they accepted whatever minimum wage jobs they could find with their limited English skills, such as picking salal, washing dishes in restaurants, and peeling shrimps in a canning factory. Being the oldest child, I grew up quickly; I helped my parents by taking care of my younger sisters, especially with schoolwork, and I served as a translator between them and the school, the doctors, and the English speaking world my parents needed to find a way to belong to. It was only ten years ago that my parents were struck by luck again and encountered an opportunity to purchase a restaurant and finally obtain

steady employment. Neither of them had any restaurant experience, but they worked very hard and after a few years of encountering challenges, their business started doing well. At a time when many parents of my Canadian friends were planning on retirement, my parents were finally able to obtain a steady income.

My parents chose to raise my siblings and me with traditional Vietnamese values. Growing up in Canada, it was always a struggle for me to merge two different cultural worlds, the Canadian culture that I had to function in on a daily basis (e.g., attending school) and the Vietnamese world that I would be part of before and after I arrived home from school. For example, my parents were strict with how they raised my siblings and me. I was encouraged to limit interactions with my Canadian peers outside of school in order to focus on homework. During the first five years, my mother stayed home to take care of us, but after a few years, she entered the work force because one income from my father working was not enough for our family to live on.

When my mother went back to work, I had to grow up quickly, possibly more than I should have. Being the oldest of my siblings, I was under high expectation to be a role model for my younger sisters; I had to do well in school and take care of my sisters while my parents were at work. I became the liaison between my parents and my schools. Along the way, I took charge of my own education from elementary school to post-secondary school, and I used my own experiences to guide my younger siblings through their own education. I did this while maintaining *hieu*, known as filial piety, demonstrating unconditional love, care, and respect for my parents. I love my family and I believe I have made many sacrifices to be a good daughter and a good sister. I am extremely grateful for the freedom that I have gained from the risks and sacrifices that my parents have made to come to Canada, but I also know it came at great costs to my parents. I am happy with how my life has turned out, but often I am uncertain if my parents ever felt as settled with their lives in Canada, as I do with mine.

## **1.2. Rationale for the Study**

I believe the impact of the traumatic journey and the adaptation process continues to reverberate to this day; despite the effects being stronger in my



childhood, I continue to see the lingering traces of our refugee journey on my parents to this day. The most difficult part is witnessing them wondering if their lives could have turned out differently. My parents have worked hard their entire life and now, they are tired physically and emotionally, and it does not seem to be slowing down any time soon. I feel this contagious sadness when I hear my parents compare their lives to their siblings and to other Vietnamese refugees that arrived in different locales (e.g., the United States, other areas of Canada); they wondered how their lives turned out so differently. Also, my parents continue to wonder if there could have been more opportunities – for example, to go to school, to find better work, or to be more socially connected to the community – if they had been sponsored by the United States.

Looking back, I had also always wondered if our family's experience was unique, because similarly to my parents, I had only heard of success stories about other Vietnamese people – this enigma of Vietnamese people succeeding in the “American Dream.” My parents cannot be the only Vietnamese refugees that are still participating in this catch up game. There must be other Vietnamese people who also have experienced similar struggles with the English language. This nagging thought of trying to discover if my parents' experience is so unique caused me to ask some questions. Where were these people who like my parents experienced struggles and difficulties in their own pursuit of hope? And why have we not heard their stories? My first attempt to understand this daunting question was when I interviewed my mother five years ago for a psychology class on adulthood and aging. It was an eye opening experience, as the process allowed me to see her as a person who had dreams for her own life outside of her role as a mother and as a wife. Through her narrative, I began to scratch the surface of understanding the actions and the negotiations that she and Vietnamese refugees had to take in order to survive after Vietnam became a communist state. The experience of interviewing and listening to my mother's story left me with more questions than answers. Do other Vietnamese refugees experience similar struggles and sadness? Is it a cultural norm to keep these emotions and in essence, their stories to themselves? Is it shameful to not have achieved success? Perhaps there are many other Vietnamese people who are like us, who are trying to make meaning of their experience in Canada as their stories are yet waiting to be heard.

When I entered the Counselling Psychology graduate program, I found myself in a position to conduct a research study on this very topic, one that aims to explore a deeper understanding of how Vietnamese refugees who arrived in the 1980s, have adapted to their locale, how they have engaged with the Canadian culture, and how they have made meaning of their lives in Canada. Through this study, I hope to give voice to these individuals by sharing their stories, validating their experiences, and contributing to the paucity of research that exists on Vietnamese refugees' journey of resettlement and long-term adaptation to Canada.

### **1.3. Background**

**Vietnamese people's history in Canada.** Currently, Canadians of Vietnamese origin make up the fifth largest non-European ethnic group in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006). A review of the history of Vietnamese Canadians shows that Vietnamese immigration to Canada is fairly recent. The first recorded arrivals date back to the 1950s when a few individuals received grants from the Roman Catholic Church to pursue their studies in Canadian universities (Multicultural Canada, 2013). By 1974, approximately 1,500 Vietnamese, consisting of students, graduates, and their children were living in Canada (Multicultural Canada, 2013). They had been admitted into Canada on student visas or specified training skills (Fine-Meyer, 2002). Most spoke French and had settled in Quebec (Fine-Meyer, 2002).

**Vietnamese refugee immigration experience.** After the Vietnam War ended and the United States of America (U.S.A.) withdrew its military and economic support from South Vietnam, North Vietnam finally captured South Vietnam on April 30, 1975 (Do, 1999). This political coup sparked the onset of an international Vietnamese refugee crisis that started in 1979 and continued for a decade where, "( . . . ) many Vietnamese have tried to escape the political oppression, the major social, political, and economic reforms instituted by the authoritarian communist government of North Vietnam" (Do, 1999, p. 27). It was Vietnamese immigration to Canada between 1979 and 1981, a period that marked the largest single influx of refugees in Canadian

history, when hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese people (coined the “boat-people”<sup>1</sup>) fled Vietnam and sought asylum in Canada as refugees<sup>2</sup> (Fine-Myer, 2002). During that time, a plethora of research has been conducted in the United States about Vietnamese immigrant adaptation and acculturation<sup>3</sup> (Shapiro, Douglas, de la Rocha, Radecki, Vu, & Dinh, 1999), whereas, few studies have occurred in Canada (Beiser, 1999; Gellis, 2003; Montgomery, 1991).

While the studies originating in the U.S.A. can illuminate a general understanding of the acculturation process and the needs of Vietnamese immigrants’ resettlement to an industrialized country, they cannot reveal the unique characteristics of this group’s adaptation experiences in various communities across Canada. In addition, the initial surge of research that was conducted in the 1980s used mainly quantitative methodological designs (Beiser, 1999). The amount of research dwindled five to ten years after the Vietnamese refugees arrived in Canada, and many researchers did not pursue the long-term experiences of the resettlement process on this group. The few longitudinal studies that examined the psychological, economic, and social adaptation of the Vietnamese refugee population consisted of Beiser’s (1999) Refugee Resettlement Project (RRP) and the government investigation lead by the Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees (1988). These studies attempted to document the successes and failures of this group to adapt to Canada and to develop policy practice from their research findings (Beiser, 1999).

**Gaps in the literature.** While the previous longitudinal studies incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches for data collection, the researchers often approached their studies from a reductionist stance; the studies

<sup>1</sup> The ‘boat people’ terminology was developed because the majority of these refugees escaped Vietnam in cheap, poorly constructed boats and wooden vessels that often cannot withstand the natural forces of the ocean (Do, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> North Vietnam defeated and captured South Vietnam in April 1975. The changes in social conditions, economic problems, and dogmatism of the Communist regime left many South Vietnamese persecuted and marginalized with little hope for their children’s future in Vietnam (Multicultural Canada, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> For this study, the word “Vietnamese immigrants” will be used interchangeably with the word “Vietnamese refugees”.

often reflect a dichotomous, predefined evaluation of the Vietnamese resettlement process. As well, the research available did not explore how resettlement locale (e.g., urban cities and rural/small town communities) and its associated characteristics facilitated this group's experience of adaptation, neglecting to explore the critical influences of context. The Vietnamese refugees arrived in Canada after experiencing generations of trauma and political chaos, yet my review of the existing literature indicates that there is a lack of knowledge that attempted to explore how they coped in their new country and whether counselling and/or other emotional support were provided after their arrival in Canada. As a result, there appears to be a lack of literature that delve into these individuals' unique and subjective experiences – the personal, emotional and cultural experiences – of adjusting to and navigating the landscape of the Canadian host culture and coping with the challenges that arose as they try to create a life for themselves in Canada.

#### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

I hope the knowledge gained from this study will contribute to the counselling field by suggesting implications for delivering cross-culturally sensitive informed assessment and counselling practices for working with future refugee immigrants who emigrate from politically conflicted countries. Informed by my own practice of working with my clients from a strength-based approach, I hope to identify the strengths that many Vietnamese refugees possess. The stories obtained from the research participants can inform counselling professionals about how this group copes with dislocation and what practices they utilized to work through their struggles (e.g., depression, anxiety, grief, and so on) as they move forward during their adaptation. The stories I am planning to hear and present offer a unique perspective to the counselling profession, as in the past, Asian immigrants' own strategies may have been underappreciated, as they are often culturally bounded and do not align with the Western mental health framework (Purnell, 2008).

Also importantly, I sought to gain insight into this group's perspectives of their experience; to understand what they felt was important for the helping professions who work with issues of immigration and adaptation. Through analyses of the participants'

narratives, I hope to propose some suggestions for how counsellors can play a positive role in the adjustment process, provide support, and promote healthy adaptation of future immigrants to the Canadian host culture, and thus, mitigate the development of psychological and mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety.

Currently, Canada admits over 200,000 immigrants every year into the country as part of its long-term immigration policy to admit new settlers at a rate of 1% of its existing population (Beiser, 2006). A better understanding of Vietnamese refugee immigrants' long-term adaptation can also be used to provide recommendations for how Canadian host communities can better support healthy adjustment of future immigrants of different ethnic origins. Doing this will enhance immigrant settlement while protecting Canada's economic investment.

### **1.5. Research Question**

Using a qualitative design of narrative inquiry, I explored Vietnamese refugees' experience using the following research question: What do the stories of Vietnamese refugees reveal about their experiences of adapting to the Canadian host culture? Within this overarching question there were three sub-questions that I strove to delve deeper through the participants' narratives about their resettlement experiences, which are as follow: 1) What stories do they tell of their efforts to overcome the challenges they faced within the context of their resettlement location, such as within rural/small towns and within urban/metropolitan cities? 2) What hopes did they bring in their journey to Canada and how did they reconcile these hopes with the struggles they faced after resettlement? 3) Having been here for two to three decades, how do they make meaning of their lives in Canada?

### **1.6. Narrative Inquiry**

This study seeks to understand the long-term resettlement experiences of Vietnamese refugees that arrived in Canada between 1979 and 1989, and to

understand the struggles and challenges they faced within their resettlement locales. I am interested in exploring how these individuals tell their stories and subsequently, make sense of their experiences of adapting to the Canadian host culture. Narrative inquiry is an ideal qualitative approach to investigate the above research questions because this methodological approach will allow me to access a rich understanding of the narrator's identity, lifestyle, cultural, and social world from the narrator's stories to yield unique and rich data that cannot be obtained from quantitative methods (Riessman, 2008). Additionally, I will employ *narrative analysis*, with a specific focus on *thematic analysis* to analyse my participants' narratives (Riessman, 1993; Riessman, 2008).

**Researcher position.** Before I proceed with the outline of this paper, I want to address an important question raised by Riessman (1993): "Who determines what narrative means?" (p. 25). Here, she asks researchers to reflect on how they represent experiences in the research process and in their written reports. In this study, the narrative text displayed for analysis will contain only the participants' words, but my voice will be reflected in them, as my questions elicited participants' stories, and my interpretation based on the way the talk is represented. For example, the details and depth of the stories provided by the participants during the interviews were influenced by the when and where I chose to probe deeper, eliciting for richer details. As well, my voice can be heard because it is me who will be taking their stories, deconstructing them, and generating themes from their stories. Specifically, I will focus on the narratives that help me to address my research questions.

However, it will be the narrator that has the first word and sometimes, the final word, in determining what the narrative means (Riessman, 1993). This will be seen through the evolution of this study: from the interview, to the transcription process, to the preparation of the narrative text, and finally, to the interpretations that emerge from the analysis. In the beginning of the interview, it is the narrator who has the first word, as the narrator chooses what contents of his or her experience to share and this leads the researcher to follow him/her down that trail, resulting in the formation of the co-construction of the participant's narrative. Determining the meaning of what the narrative means shift more to the choices made by the researcher during the analysis

and interpretation process. In the end, the participant's words will be used to support the concepts and themes developed by the researcher.

## **1.7. Organization of This Paper**

In chapter two, I review the current literature relevant to this study with regards to the theoretical models of immigrant acculturation, pre-migratory stressors, challenges encountered by Vietnamese refugees during adaptation to their resettlement locales, impact of resettlement stressors and protector factors on mental health, and the role of resettlement location on adaptation. In chapter three, I explain and detail the methodology I used to address my research question. In chapter four, I illustrate the findings that emerged from my study. Finally, in Chapter five, I discuss theoretical interpretations derived from the data, counselling implications, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Literature Review**

For many immigrants, moving from a familiar milieu to a foreign culture regardless of the reason for migration can invoke, “complex, diverse, and multifaceted experiences of [cultural and] psychosocial adjustment” (Ishiyama & Westwood, 1992, p. 50). Despite differences in how groups and individuals adapt cross-culturally, scholars studying Vietnamese immigrants’ journey of adaptation and resettlement have observed similar stressors that jeopardize psychological maladjustment. Specific to this group of refugees, the literature suggested that these stressors often involve a combination of pre-migration and post-migration stresses (Beiser, 1999; Do, 1999; Multicultural Canada, 2013). The following is a summary of pertinent literature findings, discussing these influential factors on Vietnamese immigrants’ cross-cultural adaptation and acculturation to Canada.

#### **2.1. Acculturation and society of settlement**

The concept of acculturation has a long history and it has been used to understand how immigrants change and adjust following their entry and settlement into receiving societies. According to Berry (2005), acculturation is defined as, “the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (p. 698). At the group level, this involves changes in social structures and institutions and in cultural practices. At the individual level, it involves changes in a person’s behavioural repertoire. In addition, there are large variations in how people engage in the acculturation process. These variations have been defined as one of four acculturation strategies, which are summarized below (Berry, 2005).



**Assimilation.** Individuals seek daily interaction with other cultures and do not wish to maintain their culture of origin.

**Separation.** In contrast to assimilation, individuals place high significance on holding onto their heritage culture and want to avoid interacting with the host culture.

**Integration.** The individual is interested in both maintaining one's heritage culture while seeking to participate in the larger society.

**Marginalization.** The individual feels that there is little possibility and interest in maintaining cultural heritage and little interest in relating with the host culture. Both are often precipitated by enforced cultural loss and exclusions or discriminations, respectively.

This model of acculturation is based on the assumption that immigrants have the freedom to choose how they want to acculturate, and reality does not often reflect this (Bhatia, 2002). Ideally, immigrants are encouraged to adopt a bicultural mode in the face of change (e.g., integration) where they retain their culture of origin identity while incorporating elements of the host culture. This strategy increases their success compared to those who assimilate completely to the host culture or those who reject the host culture and retreat to their familiar culture (Beiser, 1999; Berry, 2005). The integration approach coincides with Canada's Multiculturalism Act whose policy promotes cultural retention together with participation in the larger society (Beiser; Government of Canada, 1988). However, integration can only be 'freely' chosen and successfully pursued by immigrants when the host society is open to cultural diversity (Berry, 2005). Thus, this process requires acceptance by both groups to promote the rights of both groups to live as culturally diverse people (Berry, 2005; Sue & Sue, 1990). In relating to Vietnamese immigrants, using integration strategies would require them to strike a sensitive balance between their wish to retain their culture of origin values, practices and skills, and meeting the host culture's expectations to acculturate and adopt norms of the host society (Beiser, 1999). To reciprocate, the host society must be prepared to adapt national institutions, such as education, health, and labour, to better meet all groups living under the pluralistic society (Berry, 2005).

The society of settlement can play a critical role in promoting integration strategies used by immigrants during their acculturation (Berry, 2005). For example, within a host country, different societies and its citizens have different orientations towards immigration and pluralism. Societies that have been built by immigrations over the centuries tend to be more accepting of cultural pluralism and are likely to have immigration policies implemented at the institutional levels to provide a positive experience of settlement, such as providing culturally sensitive health care, multicultural curricula in schools, and community social support (Berry, 2005). However, it must be noted that where pluralism is accepted, there are variations in the level of relative acceptance of specific cultural, racial, and religious groups (Berry & Kalin, 1995, as cited in Berry, 2005). Currently, little is discussed in the literature regarding the process of acculturation and strategies that Vietnamese immigrants employed following migration to Canada, and this study hopes to glean some insight into this process. Additionally, this study will examine this process through the lens of resettlement locale.

## **2.2. Pre-migration Stress**

It is common that Vietnamese Immigrants spent a few years in one of the refugee camps located throughout Southeast Asia, such as Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines, prior to their resettlement in Canada (Do, 1999). Before their arrival in these refugee camps, they have often endured various traumas, such as imprisonment, re-education camps, and/or pirate attacks during their hurried, clandestine departures from Vietnam. A few studies suggest that Vietnamese immigrants who have endured previous traumatic experiences are at a higher risk to develop depression, anxiety, and panic attacks than their counterparts who came directly from Vietnam to Canada as part of the 'first wave'<sup>4</sup> (Cao, 2007; Hinton, Safren, & Pollack, 2006; Multicultural Canada, 2013). However, longitudinal studies found that

<sup>4</sup> Vietnamese immigration to Canada between 1975-1978 is called the 'first wave'. They are mainly urban middle class Vietnamese individuals who chose to resettle in Canada because they already had relatives living in Canada or possessed professional skills deemed appealing by Canadian immigration authorities (Multicultural Canada, 2013).

the effects of pre-migration trauma can diminish over time during resettlement with appropriate support (Beiser, 1999; Beiser, 2006). Due to the traumatic pre-migratory journey that many Vietnamese refugees endured, the mental health and social services sectors expected an overwhelming demand for health services upon arrival of the Vietnamese immigrants (Beiser, 1999). The rationale was if their trauma was addressed immediately, the risk of this group developing long-term mental health illnesses could be reduced and possibly, prevented (Beiser, 1999). However, this demand never materialized and there is a gap in the current literature to explain for this. From this lack of information, we can assume that there is still a lack of understanding about what resources Vietnamese immigrants actually accessed in their community during their resettlement and how it benefitted them. Also, it remains unknown whether their ability to access appropriate resources differed depending on the location of resettlement (e.g., urban vs. rural resettlement).

### **2.3. Impact of Resettlement Stressors on Mental Health**

Post-migration stress often involves unemployment and/or under-employment, experiences of discrimination, language dysfluency, separation from family, and inability to cope with cultural differences (Beiser, 2006; Berry, 2005; Birman & Tran, 2008; Gellis, 2003; Montgomery, 1991; Shapiro et al., 1999). All of these variables can interact to adversely affect the mental health of Vietnamese immigrants (Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees, 1988)<sup>5</sup>.

**Unemployment/Underemployment.** According to Statistics Canada (2006), approximately 62% of adults of Vietnamese origin were employed in 2001, the same figure as for all Canadian adults. From this report it would appear that after two decades of living in Canada, Vietnamese Canadians are equally likely to be employed as other Canadians. Closer examination of this data shows a significant disparity in

<sup>5</sup> The term 'mental health' can be associated with both mental disorder and positive mental health. In regards to this population, it can cover a wide variety of phenomenon, such as serious disorders that require people to be hospitalized to everyday struggles/difficulties that interfere with their ability to work and live effectively.

the current socioeconomic status of Vietnamese adults compared to other Canadian adults. For example, the average income of Canadians of Vietnamese origin is \$7,000 lower than the national average of \$30,000 (Statistics Canada, 2006). Also, when comparing occupations, 25% of all employees of Vietnamese origin were employed in manufacturing jobs compared to 8% of the total Canadian work force, additionally only 6% of the Vietnamese work force held management positions compared with 10% of all Canadian workers (Statistics Canada, 2006).

While Statistic Canada (2006) did not provide an explanation to support their reports, the findings in the literature on the topic of immigrants and socioeconomic status suggest that the explanation depends on a host of variables, such as the attributes of immigrants, the economic climate at the time of arrival, and racial discrimination in the labour market (Kinnon, 1999). For Vietnamese refugees who arrived in Canada during the 1980s, the economic climate that they arrived in played a critical role in their ability to find employment and their socioeconomic status for many years to come. For example, Vietnamese immigrants who arrived before 1980 were able to transfer their employment skills and find well-paid professional, managerial, or other skilled jobs (Kinnon, 1999). In contrast, Vietnamese refugees that immigrated during the 'second wave'<sup>6</sup> – they constituted the majority of the Vietnamese Canadians – arrived in the midst of an economic recession in Canada and with little preparation for transition into the Canadian labour force, this group faced additional challenges when trying to find employment after their arrival (Multicultural Canada, 2013). This unforeseen circumstance contributed to a higher rate of unemployment amongst this group than normal for any immigrant group, and this affected their short and long-term ability to gain meaningful employment, and, in consequence, affected their average income earning and their ability to obtain the socioeconomic status that is equivalent to previous immigrants and non-immigrants.

<sup>6</sup> Vietnamese refugee immigration to Canada between 1979-1991 is called the Second wave, and is divided into two sub-waves: 1) the mass amount of 'boat people' arrived between 1979-1981, and 2) the 'continuous flow' with steady immigration from Vietnam that took place between 1982-1991 (Multicultural Canada, 2013).

A small number of Vietnamese immigrants did manage to find work during the first few years, but they were often under-employed, underpaid, and had limited opportunities for advancement (Beiser, 1999; Montero, 1979). In many cases, their work experiences in Vietnam were not considered transferrable to the skills required in the Canadian market. In addition, Vietnamese immigrants lacked the skills, training, and preparation that would have enabled them to have equal opportunities as other Canadian citizens to obtain higher paying jobs. Facing a struggling economy where they are competing with Canadian citizens for work, feeling pressure to repay the government and/or private sponsor organizations, and wanting to help their family back in their home country, many Vietnamese immigrants accepted jobs for which they may have been overqualified for such as, manufacturing jobs in urban locations and farming work in rural/small communities. In addition, without being able to demonstrate a command of the host language, Vietnamese immigrants may have been overlooked as qualified candidates for the same job that a native English speaker possessing the same skills may not be (Beiser, 1999).

Unemployment is a stressor for everyone, whether the individual is a newcomer or native-born (Beiser & Hou, 2006). However, current literature suggests that Vietnamese immigrants face an additional obstacle that may keep them in a negative, circular relationship between unemployment and mental health; unemployment is a strong predictor for depression among Vietnamese immigrants and depression can compromise their ability to hold onto a job (Beiser, 1999). The Refugee Resettlement Project (RRP) study proposed that during the first few years, unemployed refugees sought comfort in knowing that many other Vietnamese refugees were also facing employment struggles (Beiser & Hou, 2006). Many also tried to cope with the frustrations of knowing that personal fulfillment might never be possible, by hanging onto the hope that their sacrifice will provide a better future for their children. However, as the years pass, these individuals were no longer comforted by this belief. By the end of ten years, unemployed individuals began to internalize their situation as evidence of personal shortcoming and their failure to uphold their obligations to their family and to the larger community, increasing their risk of developing depression (Beiser & Hou, 2006).

According to Beiser (1999), how the host society provides assistance to the immigrant/refugee individuals after they have arrived can alter the slippery slope to depression and unemployment. Sherrell's (2003) study with Kosovar refugees proposed that the host communities in both urban and rural/small town communities should anticipate and have programs in place to address the critical barriers that prevent immigrants from obtaining employment. These barriers include difficulties with English acquisition, unfamiliarity with Canadian job-finding skills, absence of networks in obtaining employment, lack of skills training for Canadian jobs, and for a number of individuals the non-recognition of their professional credentials (e.g., teaching certification that they received in their home country is not recognized in British Columbia) (Sherrell, 2003). In order to provide programs that offer comprehensive resettlement assistance, the host communities are dependent on receiving adequate funding from the federal government. During the 1980s, the funding distributed by the government was not only insufficient to address these barriers, it was distributed unequally to different provinces across Canada with British Columbia receiving one of the lowest amounts (Sherrell, Preniqi, & Hyndman, 2004). As a result, for many Vietnamese immigrants that resettled in British Columbia, they were dependent on their private sponsors and their host communities to assist them. This study hopes to gain insight into the following: (a) the types of occupation available based on location of resettlement (e.g. urban vs. rural) and, (b) the differences in assistance that these individuals received in urban locations compared to rural/small town locations with respect to searching for employment.

**Separation of the family.** According to previous research on Vietnamese immigrant adaptation, the immigration process disrupted the extended family network that existed amongst many families in Vietnam (Do, 1999). Despite extended family members' extraordinary efforts to leave Vietnam together, they were often denied the chance to resettle together in the same location in the receiving country (Do, 1999). Through a disperse settlement policy called regionalization the federal government sought to spread new immigrant population throughout the country, which included

smaller cities (Sherrell et al., 2004)<sup>7</sup>. This led to a process of breaking up the Vietnamese extended families and resettling them according to the immigration agency's ability to match refugees with appropriate sponsors, as the sponsoring group would be financially responsible for meeting the needs of the refugees for up to one year (Beiser, 1999; Do, 1999)<sup>8</sup>. Only the immediate family members were allowed to stay together as a family unit to be sponsored. Single individuals, grandparents, and other family members who were not part of the immediate family were separated. Also, social networks that were formed during their stay in refugee camps were disrupted once sponsorships were allocated (Do, 1999).

From an economic perspective, separating the extended family was considered a compromise and the most feasible method of relocating Vietnamese immigrants across different parts of Canada; however, it often came at a high cost to their own adaptation process (Do, 1999). This separation deprived the Vietnamese people of their primary source of emotional, social, and psychological support, which were generated from shared culture, language, customs, and experiences (Beiser, 1999; Do, 1999). Once they were separated from their extended families and ethnic-like enclaves, many Vietnamese immigrants became isolated in their new host culture, as they depended on sponsors who did not speak their language, understand their customs, or celebrate their culture, for support (Do, 1999). As well, for those who left family members behind, they were in a situation of 'double jeopardy'; they were bereft of important sources of support during a difficult time and they continued to worry about the welfare of the family that was left behind in Vietnam. This can increase the stress of resettlement leading to mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression

<sup>7</sup> Regionalization is a federal government strategy of resettling immigrants across the receiving country with "the idea that all parts of the country benefit from the skills and other assets that new immigrants bring with them" (Sherrell et al., 2004, p. 6). As well, this strategy serves other purposes, such as distributing the financial impact that this large group of refugees can have across all provinces, to increase their integration into the host communities, and to prevent the development of ethnic ghettos (Do, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> The 1976 Immigration Act contained a unique provision that allowed for the private sponsorship of refugees to be utilized during the Boat People crisis. The policy stated that charities, non-profit organizations, or a group of five individual adult citizens could sponsor a refugee family by providing them with a place to stay, assisting them in finding employment, or enrolling them in studies (Knowles, 1997).

(Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees, 1988).

In the current literature, there is no specific information regarding the differences in the experiences of Vietnamese refugees who resettled in an urban versus rural location with respect to access to social support. However, past research conducted by Sherrell (2003) with Kosovar refugees in British Columbia can shed some insight into this area. According to Sherrell, the resettlement of 905 Kosovar refugees in smaller British Columbian cities demonstrated that the policy of regionalization could still be utilized without having to separate the extended family. Kosovar refugees who came to British Columbia in May 1999 were grouped together with as many extended family members as possible and resettled to the same host community (Sherrell, 2003). The settlement of Kosovar refugees is unique to British Columbia, as it was the first time, since the resettlement of Vietnamese refugees in the 1980s, that a large number of government-assisted refugees had been resettled to smaller cities outside the Lower Mainland. In Sherrell's (2003) study, she investigated whether the settlement of Kosovar refugees in small cities was deemed successful. Sherrell found that most Kosovars were satisfied with their location and new lives in the small cities, and as long as they could find employment, the majority intended to stay in their original host cities because their entire family was close by. This settlement strategy enhanced the resettlement process because it enabled family members to provide social and emotional support to one another, reduce feelings of isolation, and rebuild networks that have been disrupted during migration (Sherrell, 2003). By encouraging the strategy of settling extended families in one location, the government was increasing the retention of immigrants in the original host city, and at the same time, utilizing the regionalization policy.

**Cultural differences.** Being unfamiliar with the host's socio-cultural customs can often result in cultural conflicts, interfering with successful adaptation. According to Berry and Annis (as cited in Ishiyama, 1995), a common form of cultural conflict arises when immigrants discover that the way they usually respond to a familiar situation in their home country is not viewed as appropriate or acceptable in the host country. In addition, they must learn an entirely new set of socially acceptable rules to



deal with the same situation. As a result, the transition period of resettlement is often frustrating and socially and culturally invalidating for many Vietnamese immigrants as they attempt to build new lives for themselves under a new set of social customs, norms and communication styles (Ishiyama, 1995).

**Experiences of discrimination.** According to the Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees (1998), migration can be a stressful experience for both the host society as well as for newcomers. Because adaption for newcomers can be stressful, especially when policy and institutional support are not provided, the host society may cope by becoming hostile, leading to acts of discrimination against Vietnamese immigrants (Beiser, 1999). One in three Canadians of Vietnamese origin reported that they experienced discrimination in the first five years or since they arrived in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006). A majority of those who had experienced discrimination reported that they felt it was often based on their race/skin colour, religion, language, or accent, and a significant number of individuals claim that this discrimination took place at work or when they were applying for a job or a promotion (Statistics Canada, 2006). An example of overt discrimination can be connected back to an assumption that all immigrants prefer an integration mode of adaptation. It was common for Vietnamese immigrants, who were initially settled in urban cities or had relocated to urban cities in order to make connections with and live amongst their ethnic-like enclaves, to be criticized by their Canadian peers for not interacting more within the larger society and for speaking their own language among their enclaves rather than speaking English (Beiser, 1999). A review of the literature revealed little information on whether there were any differences in the experiences of those who were resettled in an urban compared to rural location with respect to experiences of discrimination and how they chose to cope when faced with various forms of discriminations.

**Time frame for 'at-risk' period.** The RRP conducted by Beiser (1999) surveyed the level of depression developed among a sample of Vietnamese refugees who arrived in Canada between 1979 and 1981. The survey showed that the refugees who have been in Canada ten to twelve months had higher levels of depression than refugees who had arrived earlier or later (Beiser, 1999). This study suggests that

there is a time frame during which Vietnamese refugees are at high risk for developing mental health issues as they face obstacles during the resettlement period (Beiser, 1999). For example, individuals who are alienated from the majority culture, cannot speak the host language or find employment, and who, at the same time, are deprived from their customary source of social support, will feel that they do not belong anywhere and their risk of developing emotional and mental disorders is much greater than the natives born in the host country (Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees, 1988; Purnell, 2008).

## **2.4. Impact of Protective Factors on Mental Health**

Migration is a condition of risk for developing mental disorders; however, this risk is not a destiny. A review of the literature also yields that Vietnamese refugees who possess personal and social resources were buffered against the risk of developing mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety (Beiser, 1999; Birman & Tran, 2008). Personal resources include possessing the ability to speak the host language; social resources include having intimate relationships, having accessibility to ethnic-like enclaves, and integrating with the host society (Beiser, 1999).

**Language fluency.** A review of the field of cross-cultural studies reveals an implicit assumption with regards to language fluency: immigrants adapt more successfully to their host country if they possess the ability to speak the host language (Beiser & Hou, 2001; Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees, 1988; Do, 1999). Possessing the ability to speak English proficiently and fluently can protect an individual's mental health by facilitating social contact, reducing dependency on others, and increasing the repertoire of the individual's coping strategies (Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees, 1988). While waiting to be sponsored, the education Vietnamese immigrants received in the refugee camps was primarily survival or basic conversational English and not formal education (Do, 1999). As a result, it was natural for them to encounter obstacles when they were forced to communicate in the host language (e.g., English or French, depending on the geographical regions when they

first arrived). In addition, their children were also affected when they were confronted with an education system that placed them in grade levels according to their age with little to no support in place (e.g., unavailability of an ESL program), and this caused them to fall behind in their formal education (Do, 1999). According to Do (1999), many Vietnamese youths became discouraged when they realized they were behind their peers in the academic setting and without help to catch up they often dropped out of school.

A further examination of the literature revealed that research on the impact of language fluency on immigrants has produced contradictory results: some studies found evidence for mental health salience of linguistic ability (Beiser & Hou, 2001; Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees, 1988), while other studies have minimized the effect of this relationship. A publication by Beiser and Hou (2001) helped to clarify the literature's discrepancy by explaining that language fluency can serve as a protective factor during resettlement when this factor is considered within the context of the length of time that Vietnamese immigrants have been in Canada. For example, it increases employability and safeguards against isolation and depression. Hinton, Tiet, Tran, and Chesney (1997) explained that linguistic ability would have minimal effects on Vietnamese immigrants in the early stages of resettlement (e.g., living in Canada for one year or less). Following 10 to 24 months after arrival in the host culture, the immigrants' mental health risks start to increase (Beiser & Hou, 2001) and towards the end of the first decade in Canada, possessing English fluency becomes a significant predictor for mental health problems, particularly for Vietnamese refugee women (Beiser, 1999; Beiser & Hou, 2001). For example, poor English skills may decrease their employability, which in turn, will increase the individual's risk for developing mental health issues.

**Availability of ethnic-like enclave.** In addition to personal resources, possessing social resources, such as being in an intimate relationship and having access to a nearby Vietnamese community, can help Vietnamese immigrants to adapt better to the Canadian host culture. The process of secondary migration pattern adopted by the majority of Vietnamese immigrants in the United States during the 1980s underscored the significant impact that family and community can have in the

daily lives of Vietnamese people (Do, 1999). Many of the Vietnamese refugees who were sponsored to the United States did not remain in the original place of their resettlement (Do, 1999). After living a period of time with their sponsors and following initial attempts to adjust to their new host society, they began to relocate to a urban locations with a warmer climate and a pre-existing Vietnamese community in order to be closer to family and/or to be surrounded by an ethnic enclave that shared their language and cultural values (Do, 1999). The 1990 United States Census data shows that 73% of Vietnamese immigrants continued to reside in the following seven states, representing mainly urban communities, following their secondary migration: California, Texas, Washington, Virginia, Louisiana, Florida, and Pennsylvania (Do, 1999).

This group's affinity to be connected to a familiar social support network is a strong motivator that will override any of the United States' dispersion policies. The combination of initial refugee resettlement, secondary migration, and continued influx of Vietnamese refugees and immigrants since 1975 enabled Vietnamese Americans to establish communities in urban areas throughout the United States, with the largest number and population being in California (Do, 1999). These established enclaves serve as a reminder of their home country. For example, within these enclaves they can find ethnic supermarkets that provide specialty food (e.g., spices, fish sauces, canned fruits, sauces, dried goods, and so on) not available in a local grocery store; herbal medicines tied to their cultural beliefs of healing; and entertainment, arts, and literature in their native language, which they cannot find in rural/small towns (Do, 1999; Purnell, 2008).

Similar to their counterparts in the United States, by 2001, 69% of the Vietnamese Canadians were living in the metropolitan areas of Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver or Calgary (Statistics Canada, 2006). The process of secondary migration that took place in the United States may be used to understand the same process that occurred in Canada. Research in the literature suggests that it is a survival coping strategy for immigrants to turn to an ethnic-like community for social support (Do, 1999; Sherrell, 2003). This helps to ease a stressful part of the resettlement process because ethnic-like community serves as a substitute for their extended families.

However, for this strategy to be effective, it needs to be balanced by having access to social programs offered by the original host society to help integrate new settlers. For example, in the study with Kosovar refugees, Sherrell (2003) found that if the host communities in small British Columbian cities, such as Vernon, could provide the Kosovars with the adequate language and training skills to obtain 'meaningful' employment to support their families, the Kosovars were less likely to consider secondary migration to larger cities in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario. Otherwise, the short-term advantages of reconnecting with an ethnic-like enclave can promote separation of ethno-cultural communities rather than promoting successful integration and building a new multicultural mosaic (Beiser, 1999).

## **2.5. Location of resettlement**

Up until 2001, many Vietnamese immigrants chose to settle in rural/small towns (RST)<sup>9</sup> upon arriving in Canada, but between 2001 and 2006 this preference shifted towards settling in the nation's large urban centres (LUC)<sup>10</sup> (Montgomery, 1991; Statistics Canada, 2009). Current research on immigrant resettlement in Canada shows a paucity of research focused on understanding the impact of resettlement locale on successful acculturation, thus providing little explanation for this significant shift in secondary migration (Montgomery, 1996). A study conducted in Canada by Montgomery (1991) suggested that Vietnamese immigrants who resettled in small towns were more satisfied (in terms of subjective adaptation) and enjoyed a higher standard of living compared to those residing in urban, metropolitan cities. However, his findings were insufficient to explain how resettlement locale interacts with the

<sup>9</sup> According to Statistics Canada, rural and small town (RST) are defined as areas located outside the Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) and have a population density less than 100, 000 people (Statistics Canada, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Also known as a larger urban centre (LUC) are referred to as CMAs where the city's total population is approximately 100, 000 people or more with 50, 000 people living in the urban core (Statistics Canada, 2009).

resettlement challenges and protective factors to influence their adaptation process to Canada.

Arriving in Canada under 'refugee' status, the Vietnamese refugees were dependent on the compassion and generosity of their sponsors and on the receiving host society. This meant that they had no choice and thus, no voice, in choosing their resettlement location. Preparing refugees in advance of their arrival is often not possible because it is not a feasible and a constructive use of immigration resources. Yet, by not exploring how the role of resettlement locale interacts to influence Vietnamese refugees' experience of adaptation, immigration studies continue to ignore an important part of this group's resettlement experience. Consequently, this study sought to explore the role of resettlement location (e.g., urban vs. rural community spaces) and their associated characteristics with respect to successful adaptation following migration. This knowledge can be critical in developing effective resettlement supports for future Vietnamese immigrants and possibly, for other immigrants, to British Columbia.

## Chapter 3.

### Research Methods and Design

#### 3.1. Narrative Theory

**Constructivism.** Narrative inquiry is a relatively new qualitative methodology that is rooted in social constructionist and post-structuralist epistemologies (Clandinin, 2013; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Constructivism posits that knowledge is derived from meanings and interpretations that are constructed through the interplay of experience, interaction, and context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It advocates relativist ontology, transactional/subjectivist epistemology, and a hermeneutic, dialectic methodology (Denzin & Lincoln). From a constructivist viewpoint, relativism means that there are always multiple realities and 'truths'; how we obtain knowledge of our understanding of a phenomenon can change depending on the context and culture being studied. Adopting a transactional and subjectivist epistemological stance, constructivists assert that we construct interpretations of our experiences through shared understandings, interactions, language, and so forth with others around us (Denzin & Lincoln). Therefore, interpretation is inevitable during the research process, from participants' storied interpretation of their own reality to the researcher's interpretation of that story through listening, transcribing, and analysing the text (Riessman, 1993). The narrative text produced in this study is the result of what the participants and researcher have co-constructed within the particular context of the interview and interactions that occurred.

**Narrative.** Across different disciplines, the term *narrative* has many different meanings and is also used in various approaches with scholars and practitioners disagreeing on the origin and the precise definition (Riessman & Speedy, 2007); yet, Salmon (as cited in Riessman, 2008) states that a majority agrees that a core criterion

of narrative is *contingency*. Outside of this commonality, the narrative concept is operationalized differently on a continuum across different disciplines (Riessman, 2008). Within the field of psychology and sociology, narrative refers to, “anything that uses . . . stories as data, narrative or story as representational form, narrative as content analysis, narrative as structure, and so forth” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 11). As well, personal narratives may entail lengthy sections of talk, consisting of extended accounts of lives within the context of co-construction between researcher and participant, and are developed over the course of single or multiple interviews or therapeutic conversations (Riessman, 2008). This definition becomes more complex when we consider that narratives are, “texts at several levels that overlap: stories told by research participants which are themselves interpretive, interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a story about stories), and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant’s and investigator’s narratives” (Riessman, 2008, p.6).

### **3.2. Narrative in Research**

However the term “narrative” is defined in the field of narrative inquiry, it is often used interchangeably with the word “story” (Lieblich et al., 1998). By nature, people are storytellers. We have been telling stories to each other for countless millennia; from campfires to dinner table conversations to radio and television media, we have listened as others have told us stories. These life stories often involve humans interacting with one another, and qualitative research is a process not far removed from this commonality. It is almost impossible to conduct qualitative research without listening to people’s stories, as telling stories and composing a narrative is a primary opportunity for people to share their experiences and make meaning out of this process (Lieblich et al., 1998). Along with meaning making, the process of narrating enables individuals and groups to construct identities, a critical effect on social interaction that other modes of communication do not have (Riessman, 2008). As well, a story often requires considerable efforts to connect events and ideas, and then is organized and evaluated to impose a meaningful pattern for a specific audience (Riessman, 2008). According to Salmon (as cited in Riessman, 2008), without this



narrative shaping, a story can appear random and disconnected. Personal continuity is then established when the narrative provides temporal organization by connecting the beginning, middle, and end of the story (Lieblich et al., 1998). Consequently, narrative research, a qualitative methodology of life-story research, is well suited to assist research participants to engage in the practice of story telling and to make meaning through the co-construction of their narratives (Riessman, 2008).

Additionally, narrative research is any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials (Lieblich et al., 1998). It allows researchers to access a rich understanding of the narrator's identity, lifestyle, cultural, and social world from the narrator's stories, and this can yield unique and rich data that cannot be obtained from quantitative methods, such as experiments, questionnaires or observations (Riessman, 2008). Following the constructivist paradigm, as the researcher, I cannot profess that I am accessing the actual events in the participants' lives; at the same time, I cannot proclaim that I will be able to take an objective stance and prevent my worldview from influencing how I hear the participant's stories and how I interpret the narrative text. I used reflexivity throughout the study to anticipate and address any potential biases that may arise. This does not mean that objectivity will be obtained, as this is not the goal of narrative research, instead, reflexivity can add questions and thoughtful engagements with narrative text that will enrich the process of data interpretation.

A life story co-constructed from a research interview is considered a 'narrative truth' that may be closely linked to, but does not necessarily reflect 'historical truth' because it is one instance of *the* life story. Just as identity is fluid, the life story can develop and change through time (Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 2008). People often revise and edit their past to align with their identities in the present (Riessman, 2008). Thus, any narrative obtained from research must be considered with the context of time, the narrator's memory, and environment where the narrative is being constructed (Riessman, 2008). Similarly, the narratives produced from this study are also affected by the following context: the aim of the research study and the interview questions, the relationship between the researcher and the participant, the researcher's interpretation after several readings as part of the analysis, and the audience who later receives the story and may interpret it differently than the

researcher. The end goal in this study is not to obtain ‘the truth’ from the participants’ narratives; life stories are subjective in a similar way to one’s self-identity. However, through studying and interpreting the narratives of participants in this study, I hope to access a deeper understanding of their resettlement experience, identity development, and their process of interpreting the meaning of these experiences.

### **3.3. Narrative Analysis**

The methodological approach I employed in the analysis of my participants’ narratives is *narrative analysis*, with a specific focus on *thematic analysis* (Riessman, 1993; Riessman, 2008). Narrative analysis is one approach within the broad field of narrative inquiry and consists of, “a family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form” (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). There are several critical characteristics that make this narrative approach necessary for this study. First, it is a holistic approach that will allow me to sensitively access the participants’ life stories (e.g., feelings, thoughts, and experiences) in order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena and give voice to the participants’ experiences of resettlement in Canada (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lieblich et al., 1998). Second, this approach allows the participants’ experiences to be analyzed and compared (for similarities and differences) among groups of Vietnamese immigrants who resettled within different resettlement locations, and allow for their narratives to be analyzed within the context of the larger societal influences. Through narrative analysis, I hope to validate the idea that the successes and struggles these individuals experience are not isolated from the culture in which they find themselves newly immersed in, as well as, from the culture they bring with them to their host society. Lastly, narrative analysis is best suited to be employed by studies that have a small number of participants, as the quantity of data gathered from life stories is often quite large (Lieblich et al., 1998).

Narrative analysis posits that we do not give voices to our participants, as we do not have direct access to the participant’s experience (Riessman, 1993). Rather, we record their voices and we make interpretations through the narrative analysis from our own theoretical lens and methodological approach. While I cannot give voice to my participants, my intention to use narrative analysis is purposeful in that I will shed

light on the silent experiences of immigrants that are often overshadowed by the success stories of other immigrants whose stories are selected for newspaper reports or government reports and are seen to support Canada's immigration policies and specific resettlement programs. Participants in this study are often individuals who would be labeled as 'unsuccessful' because they had not met the Refugee Resettlement Project's criteria of 'success' after living here for over ten years. For example, they are not able to obtain steady employment, they have not acquired language fluency - they cannot speak to another without the help of family, friend, or translator - and their general health has declined during the resettlement in Canada. Despite their best efforts, a few of the participants in this study often faced many levels of obstacles that prevented them from meeting these criteria. For example, the majority of Vietnamese refugees were new immigrants to Canada with little or non-existent education and formal training, and as a result, they consistently found themselves at a disadvantage when they attempted to enter the work force. With limited access to family, to ethnic community, and to the host society, a newly arrived immigrant's path to 'success' could appear further away and would take longer to achieve. Narrative analysis is a valuable research method here, as researchers can catalyze on this approach to open up a conversation about the complex contextual environments that immigrants often face and have to overcome in their adaptation and resettlement in order to reach the same level of playing field as individuals who were born and raised in Canada. As well, it becomes important to present the reality of these experiences as having occurred, and may still be occurring, in our communities across Canada, as it honours the lived experiences of these individuals. Thus, a narrative analysis approach can offer the stories of these participants and show their inner reality to the outside world, the reading audience (Riessman, 2008).

Riessman (2008) proposed four different approaches to conduct narrative analysis; they consist of thematic analysis, structural analysis, dialogic/performance analysis, and visual analysis. For this study, I will be reading, analysing, and interpreting the narrative text using *thematic analysis*. Thematic analysis is most appropriate to address the research questions being investigated because it examines a phenomenon shared by a group of people (Lieblich et al., 1998, Riessman, 2008). In this case, I am seeking to understand the long-term resettlement experiences of a

specific group of Vietnamese immigrants that sought refugee asylum in Canada between 1979 and 1989. This approach can be used to interpret a wide range of narrative texts (e.g., oral, written, and visual), but I use thematic analysis to focus exclusively on the oral and ‘told’ content – the narratives co-constructed between the participants and me during the interview process. More importantly, narrative thematic analysis strives to keep a story intact by theorizing from the case rather than focusing on the form or structure of the story, “. . . where the primary attention is on “what” is said, rather than on “how,” “to whom,” or “for what purposes” (Riessman, 2008, p. 53-54).

Unlike some forms of qualitative analysis such as, Lieblich and colleague’s narrative inquiry, Riessman does not provide a prescribed set of procedures to carry out thematic analysis (2008). Instead, Riessman offers some flexible guidelines for conducting and analysing narrative text. The process involves transforming the interview conversation into written text, determining how and what aspects of the narrative constitute the basis for interpretation, and figuring out who determines what the narrative means and what (if any) alternative readings are possible (Riessman, 1993; Riessman, 2008). Following this is a lengthy process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting the narrative text. I will carry out the process of coding and categorizing the narrative text, and developing conceptual themes using the guidelines prescribed by Saldana (2013). These processes will be discussed in detail below in the *data analysis* section.

### **3.4. Participants and Data Collection**

**Participant recruitment.** I used both purposive and snowball recruiting techniques to search for participants, and advertised my research study in the Vietnamese community. For example, I posted advertisements in various multicultural agencies in the Greater Vancouver area and in rural and small communities along Vancouver Island (from Cowichan Valley to Port Alberni) in order to attract a variety of participants living in various small towns and with a broad range of demographics (see Appendix A for recruitment poster). I had anticipated that participants would consist of Vietnamese-Canadians that have resettled in rural small town communities, in urban

cities, or lived in both types of resettlement locations. This provided me with multiple illustrations of this phenomenon and at the same time, provided unique and rich details shared across this specific group of individuals (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lieblich et al., 1998). This demonstrates how I applied purposive recruiting; I intentionally sought out participants whose stories would likely answer the research questions (Lieblich et al., 1998). This was achieved by applying the following participant inclusion criteria: (a) the participant self-identifies as ethnic Vietnamese, (b) the participant was sponsored by a private or government agency under the 'refugee' status, and (c) the participant arrived in Canada between 1979 and 1989.

In addition, I used a snowball recruiting technique, which involved asking friends, colleagues, and settlement workers in different cities and communities to spread the word of the study to individuals who they know would meet the inclusion criteria for participants. I conducted this process of recruitment with the highest ethical considerations. I emphasized that, should the contact person know someone whom they believe is a potential participant for this study, the individual will give this person a letter of introduction that will provide information about who the researcher is, the purpose and goals of this study, and an assurance of confidentiality (see Appendix B for letter of introduction). The contact person was clearly instructed to refer the potential participant to contact me for a phone pre-interview. No attempt was made by me to contact the potential participant with the exception that individual has given permission, by means of oral consent, to the contact person to inform me know that I could contact the individually directly. Following this process ensured that the potential candidates would not feel coerced in any way to participate in this study, as the individual would feel free to deny participation without my knowledge of this.

**Pre-contact.** For individuals who had expressed interest in participating, I set up a telephone pre-screening interview to ensure that these individuals met the required criteria, to provide more information about the study, to inform participants of what to expect if they decide to participate, and to arrange a one-on-one interview that was expected to last between 1.5 to 2.5 hours. I informed the potential participants that I preferred conducting the face-to-face interview in English. According to Statistics Canada (2006), the majority of Vietnamese Canadians have been living in Canada for

two to three decades, and 88% of this population can carry on a conversation in at least one of the official languages. Thus, I anticipated that the participants would be able to participate in the entire interview. Because I suspected that the reality might not reflect the statistics, I conducted most, if not all, of the pre-interview on the phone in Vietnamese. This was an invaluable first step into my research experience before the interview started, as I observed first hand that language fluency may play a more significant role in immigrant resettlement than I had previously considered.

While I noticed that many potential participants could speak English, they preferred to speak in Vietnamese for the interview. I took this opportunity to be transparent with them, as it was an important part of the consent process. I informed these individuals that while I can speak and understand most of what they are telling me in Vietnamese, I am not able to transcribe the Vietnamese words, as my writing skills are much more inferior. Also, I explained that part of my research purpose was to understand how they came to develop the host language during their resettlement, so conducting the interview in English would provide me some understanding of this process. However, I did let them know that they will be encouraged to speak in Vietnamese for any words and phrases that they think cannot be translated into English or if they thought the essence of their story would be lost without using these words or phrases in Vietnamese. My ability to be forthright and transparent about my agenda helped to better inform these potential participants about the process of the study and helped them to understand my goals for the study.

The interview guide was given to them ahead of time (e.g., via email) for the purpose of allowing the participants to be familiar with the types of questions that I would ask during the interview. This served to prevent participants from being surprised or shocked by the questions raised during the interview. At the same time, I informed the participant that I may inquire more in-depth depending on how the interview process is evolving and if it serves the research purpose to explore certain topics further. I informed participants that the interview will be audiotaped for later transcription, and that I may take some notes during the interview. As well, participants were informed that the audio recordings and the handwritten notes would be kept safe in a locked cabinet, only accessible by me, until August 2017, following

which, the data would be destroyed. Until then, the tapes would be heard by me and possibly by my supervisor. The participants were assured that their identities would be kept anonymous, and a pseudonym would be used should any interview texts and corresponding analyses, derived from participants' narratives, be included in the thesis and used in any other formal papers.

**Use of a translator.** During my participant recruitment stage, I encountered difficulties with obtaining participants that would be comfortable carrying out the interview completely in English. One of the three settlement workers that I had been in contact directed me to connect with a few participants whose narratives, she believed, would add depth to my study and provide future readers with a more comprehensive understanding of the struggles that immigrants face during their adaptation. However, these participants preferred to be interviewed in Vietnamese. At first, I hesitated to consider interviewing these potential participants for two reasons: (a) one of my research goal was to gain insight into their English level through conducting the interview in English and, (b) my Vietnamese proficiency was not strong enough to conduct an entire interview in Vietnamese. After some personal reflection and consultation with my supervisor, I decided that the settlement worker was correct; these individuals' stories can inform my research study and the field of counselling in a way that "successful" immigrants cannot through gaining a deeper understanding of the struggles that continued to keep them marginalized in our community after having been lived in Canada for 30 years. Three of seven participants' interviews were conducted with a translator. For one of these three participants, I was fortunate to be offered translation help by the participant's public health nurse, and for the other two participants, I was able to obtain help from a friend who was fluent in Vietnamese.

**Interview.** Out of the seven participants whom I interviewed, six of the interviews took place in the participants' homes and one took place in a private room at the participant's work site. Before each interview began, I introduced myself to the interviewees and made small talk with the participants even though we have had a chance to speak for a bit on the phone during the pre-contact interview. The 'small talk' that took place between each participant and myself was not planned nor felt forced, rather it happened naturally. This social interaction that took place between

the participant and myself – in the case of a few interviews, this also took place between myself, the participant, and the translator – was a reflection of the Vietnamese cultural custom being played out in the interview environment. Once I observed that the participants felt comfortable (approximately 15 to 20 minutes later), I proceeded with the informed consent process, restating to the participants the confidential parameters in which the information will be used and provided an opportunity for them to ask me questions before I will began the interview. Then I requested the participants to read and sign a written consent form (see Appendix C). The participants were encouraged to keep a copy of the consent form for their record. Not all participants chose to keep a copy, and I let them know that they can always request a copy at a later time should they change their minds.

Following the signing of the consent form, I proceeded to fill out the demographic questionnaire with the participants (see Appendix D). A few participants had completed the questionnaires prior to the interview, a few decided to answer all of the demographic questions first during the interview, and a few participants immediately launched into their stories as I started to ask the first question of the demographic questionnaire. For the majority of participants, I began to audio record the interview after completion of the demographic questionnaire. For those participants that launched into their narratives almost immediately, I started recording the interview at that point. The interview was recorded until it was finished or unless the participants requested otherwise.

During the interview, I used a semi-structured interview process, guided by the core research questions: What do the stories of Vietnamese refugees reveal about how they coped with their struggles of adapting to the Canadian host culture? From this question, I have developed a series of open-ended questions that I used to allow for a deeper exploration of this topic (see Appendix E). These questions were used as a general guide; I modified some of these questions and omitted others as the interview progressed. Incorporating this flexibility allowed me to follow the participants down their trails as best as I could. For example, some questions were omitted or some were altered if during the moment, I judged them to be appropriate (e.g., it will add more depth to the storyline) based on what the participants were sharing with me.



As well, I encouraged participants to expand on their stories if they thought I have not inquired about something they believed I needed to hear in order for me to understand their experience. There were a few times during the interviews when participants rephrased the questions that I had asked in order to convey the narratives that were important to them. When I recognized they were doing this, I let go of the control and followed the path they are taking me on. Doing this was necessary to provide a comfortable space and it encouraged the participants to speak more openly about their experiences, whereas, adhering to a strict interview guide could lead to silencing the participants' voice and prevented pertinent meanings from emerging (Kvale, 1996).

The interview conversation concluded following the completion of the final question and any additional questions that came up for me during our conversation. I closed the interview by thanking the participants for sharing their stories with me and I provided an opportunity for each participant to clarify, to add more information, and to comment on what has been shared. Before I left, I encouraged participants to contact me by telephone if they would like to provide any additional information, if any questions arose, or if they wanted to withdraw any information they shared with me during our conversation.

A follow up interview was not need for this study, but I offered the possibility as an available option to participants. At the time, most of the participants subtly declined a second interview as unnecessary. Based on my experience with the large amount of time that I spent on arranging interviews dates and times I wondered whether there was another unspoken reason participants did not want a follow-up interview. My own personal experience of growing up in a Vietnamese culture has taught me that this unspoken reason was a polite way of participants telling me that they did not have time for a follow up interview by not directly declining a follow up interview. A few participants did offer that they could be available by phone if I needed more information or to clarify any questions I had.

**Research memos.** After every interview, I wrote notes that recorded information about the interview site, my observations of participants' non-verbal behaviours during the interviews, and my thoughts about the interview process. I used

these notes as descriptive data to support the emerging codes, categories, and themes constructed during the analysis process of each participant's narrative.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

**Transcription.** I chose to transcribe all of my interviews as recommended by Riessman (2008) rather than delegating the task of transcribing to a third party to save time. The transcription process is an important prerequisite component of data analysis and the interpretation process, as well as, being necessary for me to maintain consistency with the theoretical and methodological approach. While the process of transcribing can be time consuming, it allowed me an opportunity to listen to the participants' stories again. Re-listening without all of the 'noise' in my head that existed during the interview illuminated additional insight about some things that I have missed during the interview conversation, such as noting the cultural interaction taking place between me and the participants, hearing what participants *are* telling me, and becoming aware of what participants are *not* telling me. These insights and reflections were recorded in my research memos as I transcribed the interviews of each participant, helping me with the comparisons between different participants' stories (e.g., observations of similarities and differences).

**Displaying the narrative text.** Following transcription, I employed Riessman's (1993, 2008) method of narrative analysis for the remainder of the analysis process. For this study, 'transcript,' 'narrative text,' and 'interview conversation' will be used interchangeably. I presented my conversations with the participants by displaying a *reflected, pre-existing self* where I excluded my participation in the interview conversation, privileging the narrator's speech, and assuming the narrator's self as independent of the interaction between us (Riessman, 1993; Riessman, 2008).

The mode of transcript that I prepared for analysis was informed in part by the work of James Gee, a social linguist, on the poetic features of language (Riessman, 1993). The narrator's speech was reduced, organized into a series of stanzas or meaning units, and assigned titles to the stanzas (e.g., thematic point). Stanzas are, "a series of lines on single topic that have a parallel structure and sound as if they go

together by tending to be said at the same rate and with little hesitation between lines” (Riessman, 1993, p. 45). According to Gee (as cited in Riessman, 1993), stanzas are universal units in planning speech and in poetry stanzas reflect and build on how people carry out their everyday speech. Riessman (2008) recommends that researchers adapt Gee’s approach to their research analysis process, as it may benefit researchers in several ways: (a) it will help the researcher to identify thematic issues that would be missed if the narrator’s speech were not organized into stanzas, and (b) formatting the narrator’s speech to Gee’s form of structural analysis can help the researcher achieve data reduction such as, help to conform lengthy text to manageable representations.

The narrative text that results from this process is the *ideal realization* of the text for thematic analysis because it is cleaned of speech dysfluency, false starts, pauses, discourse markers (e.g., well, so), nonlexical expressions (e.g., “ums”), and other features of spoken language; as a result, it appears accessible, compact, and compelling for detailed analysis (Riessman, 1993; Riessman 2008). At the same time, the text is highly interpretative and affects how a reader understands the narrative. The process of transcribing and preparing the narrative text in this manner was considered an important part of the data interpretation and analysis process; it allowed me to familiarize myself with the narrative contents and thus, warming up and preparing effectively for the detailed work of analysis and interpretation.

**Analysis.** As I had discussed earlier, a thematic analysis approach exclusively focuses on the narrator’s reports of events and experiences, the contents of speech, rather than on the telling or talking process. In this study, the narrative that unfolds over the course of a single interview is defined as the participant’s story of fleeing Vietnam and the experience of long-term resettlement in Canada--the definition includes all speech that relates to dislocation and resettlement experiences. Once all of the interviews have been prepared into narrative texts, I worked with one single narrative text at a time, conducting the first round of reading and coding. I read for three specific aspects in the narrative. First, I read for information about their adaptation process, asking the question, “What are they doing and how are they feeling about it?” Second, I read for information that will inform me about the

conditions, context, and social institutions involved in their adaptation to their locale. For examples, I read the narratives asking the question, “What are they doing to engage in this process?” Finally, I read for information that would inform my research questions and sub-questions. I anticipated that the coding obtained from these three readings may overlap, and that my research questions will also be embedding within each aspects of these three reading processes.

**Coding.** Saldana (2013) propose a variety of *first cycle* coding methods for different research genres. For this study, I used the narrative coding method because it is, “appropriate for exploring intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions to understand the human condition through story, which is justified in and of itself as a legitimate way of knowing” (Saldana, 2013 p. 132). On a word document, I divided the paper into four columns. The first column took up the left half of the document and contained the prepared narrative text in stanza forms, as discussed earlier. The second right half of the document consisted of the remaining three columns with the three reading objectives in its headings, as described in the previous paragraph (refer to Appendix F for an example of coding). Before the first round of coding, I read through the narrative and familiarized myself with the participant responses, and jotted down any reactions or potential biases that came up for me. Following this, I conducted the first round of first cycle coding. In this first round, I stayed very close to the participants’ language, asking myself “What do I get?” and “What are they actually saying?” as I highlighted the stanzas and episodes of the participants’ responses that I thought had addressed the reading objectives and research questions (Saldana, 2013). Then I proceeded back to the beginning of the narrative and read through the transcript again more closely and reflected on whether the highlighted section was still relevant to the reading questions and if they were, I assigned the highlighted stanza a code – a word or short phrase that summarized the essence of that portion of the text (Saldana, 2013). The re-reading also gave me an opportunity to see if I had missed something else in the narrator’s speech that was pertinent to the study. The codes assigned to the text consisted of *in vivo* and descriptive codes because these codes allowed me stay as close as possible to the participants’ language. *In vivo* code is an actual word/phrase that I took directly from the participant’s speech and assigned as a code, and a descriptive code consists of

either words or phrases that summarize the core topic of the excepted stanzas (Saldana, 2013). After the first round of coding, I jotted down any thoughts, reflections, and questions that arose for me during the coding process.

**Categorizing.** Categorizing involves grouping similar codes together and assigning them a word or phrase to characterize that specific group of codes. In this process of condensing and organizing the large number of codes, categorizing helped me to become aware of the emergent patterns in the data and across different participants' narratives.

**Writing analytic memos.** The seven interviews I conducted generated a large amount of data so I engaged in the process of writing analytic memos to tease apart the numerous codes and categories that I came up with. For each participant, I took time to review the research questions and wrote in great detail regarding how each participant's narrative informs my research questions. Doing this allowed me to document and reflect on the emergent patterns, to refine the codes and categories, and to have a conversation with my data.

**Developing themes.** The lengthy time and energy I invest in the process of coding, categorizing, and reflecting on this work through writing analytic memos lead me to the final stage of the data analysis process--the development of conceptual theme(s). According to Saldana (2013), a theme is, "an *outcome* of coding, categorization, or analytic reflection" (p. 14). Similar to categorizing, I read through the categories, looking for similarities in the categories that give rise to a few abstract themes. I used the process of *codeweaving* (Saldana, 2013) to investigate how the core categories interrelate to give rise to a broader theme. Codeweaving involved integrating key words and phrases from my categories into a narrative sentence to see how they interact to arrive at a general abstract theme (Saldana, 2013). Subsequently, I reviewed participant quotes that support these potential themes as key examples. The overall goal was to come up with a few core themes that would answer my research questions, achieve the research purpose and represent the participants' narratives.

### 3.6. Measures for Ensuring Quality

There is no single concept of validity that exists in qualitative research that is comparable to its meaning in quantitative inquiry (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). Rigour in qualitative research can be ensured through demonstrating trustworthiness and authenticity, which replaces the traditional positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). To achieve this, I incorporated the following strategies in the research process: dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010).

**Dependability.** I established dependability by leaving a systematic and transparent audit trail that allows readers to follow the path of how I carried out my analyses, decision-making, and conclusions derived from my research.

**Credibility.** I established credibility by applying a few different approaches. First, I familiarized myself with the phenomenon by reviewing the literature on the topic. Second, I acknowledged my position in the text and how I was part of the co-construction of the research. Third, I kept any preconceptions in check and ensured that the participants' stories were being heard and actively sought their interpretations of their experiences. Lastly, I connected the research findings back to the literature.

**Transferability.** This is similar to generalizability in quantitative research, which suggests that the findings in one context can be used to understand other similar situations or participants. My goal was to conduct a thorough analysis of the stories from this group of Vietnamese participants and to develop core constructs that can be applied in the immigration agencies and therapeutic settings to inform their work with current and future refugee immigrants in Canada.

**Confirmability.** I took several precautions to ensure that I tried to be as objective as possible. Similar to dependability, I achieved this by providing a decision trail where readers can follow the path of how I arrived at the constructs, themes, and my interpretations of the data (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). In addition, I was cognizant of my role as researcher throughout the research process, which will be discussed below.

**Role of the researcher.** According to narrative research's philosophical stance, it is not possible to fully read the text openly or objectively. I incorporated reflexivity throughout the research process to critically reflect on any of my own biases that came up and monitor their relationships with the participants and my own reactions to participants' stories. To achieve this, I used a journal, wrote memos, engaged in peer debriefing, and kept in regular contact with my supervisors to discuss alternative interpretations during the data analyses stage to prevent imposing my own agenda onto the participants' stories. Following Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) suggestion, I was explicit about how my memo notes were positioned, as they can influence the relationship I have with my participants because my research texts incorporated these notes. This precaution was undertaken to prevent future criticisms about the quality, rigour, and the legitimacy of the knowledge and the meanings that were generated from this study.

**Ethical considerations.** Before I engaged in the interview process, I carried with me an assumption that the majority of the participants have created a life for themselves within the Canadian host culture regardless of where they resettled; thus, I anticipated that the chances that they will experience distress during the interview should be minimal to none. In other words, the risk of being harmed during this interview was no more than the 'minimal risk' of harm that they can encounter in their everyday life, as they can be asked to share their stories of adaptation and acculturation at any point in their everyday conversations with other people. However, there was a small possibility that participants may experience emotional distress as a result of discussing any traumatic experience(s) associated with their journey of leaving Vietnam, especially if family members were left behind or lost during the journey. Should they experience distress, I planned to encourage them to discuss that with me, and if necessary, I would have connected them to the appropriate community and mental health resources. In addition, I would have reminded the individuals that participation in this study was voluntary and they could decline to answer any question(s) or to withdraw from the study at any time, and could choose to do so without any consequences.

## Chapter 4.

### Results

Thematic analysis of my participants' narratives revealed that this group of Vietnamese refugees made meaning of their lives and their experiences of adaptation by taking actions to achieve *belonging* within the Canadian host culture. For these individuals, their journey of belonging took place over the course of three decades. It began from the moment they decided to leave their homeland of Vietnam, to their arrival and resettlement in Canada, and to living out their new lives in their host locale. They achieved belonging by *making sacrifices* (subtheme 1), by *connecting with Canadian culture and locale* (subtheme 2), and by *extending belonging through promoting children and family bilingualism* (subtheme 3) (see Figure 4.1).



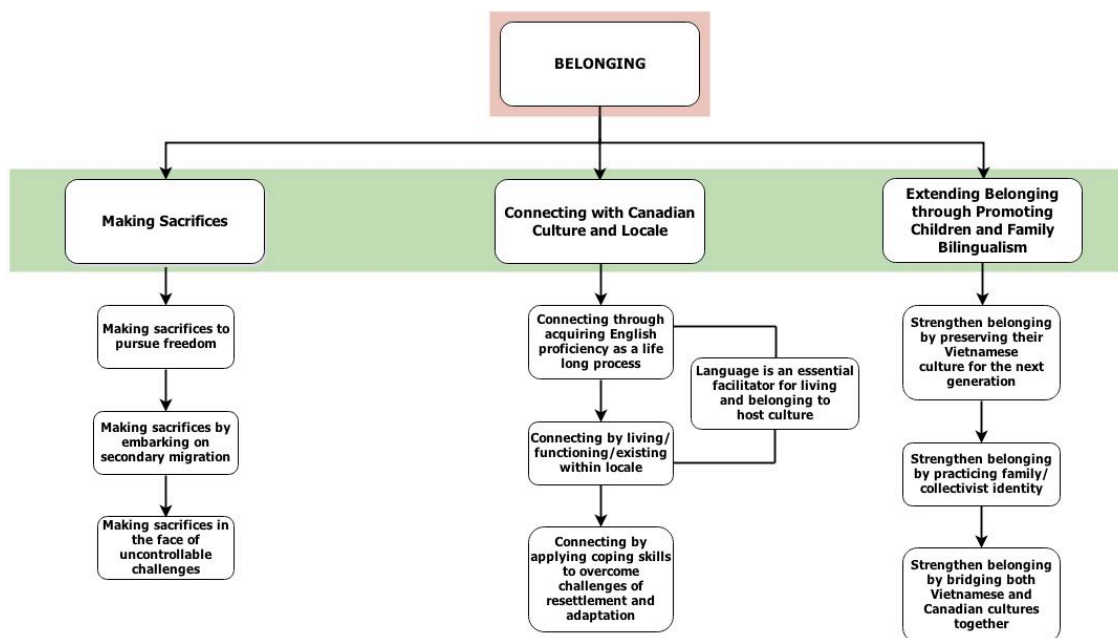


Figure 4.1 Flow chart of the theme, belonging, and the subthemes that emerged from thematic analysis of Vietnamese refugees' narratives of their pre-migratory, initial, and long-term settlement and adaptation to the Canadian host culture.

These theme and subthemes will be discussed below in further detail, supported by quotations from the participants in this study. Staying true to Riessman's (2008) thematic approach with regards to presenting the participants' words, I will present their quotes in stanza format; instead of altering the words to make it easier to understand, the stanzas are preserved in the form of how they were spoken during the interviews.

#### 4.1. Making Sacrifices

Participants told stories of incredible sacrifices that they made in the first stage of their journey to belong to a free and unrestricted society. Taking these actions, they make sense of the chaos of being dislocated from their homeland, of relocating to the new host land, and of determining how to belong in a new country with completely different culture, values and traditions. This section focuses on three areas related to

making sacrifices: making sacrifices to pursue freedom, making sacrifices by embarking on secondary migration, and making sacrifices in the face of uncontrollable challenges.

**Making sacrifices to pursue freedom.** All seven participants' narratives revealed various hopes for their new lives, but they were motivated by a common goal of escaping Vietnam and of pursuing these hopes; they escaped Vietnam to seek freedom to live. To understand this group's desire for freedom, we need to understand the intolerable environment they were living in and how it propelled them to risk their lives in pursuit of freedom. They were living under political oppression and significant social and economic reforms, instituted by the communist regime after the fall of South Vietnam in 1975, which made their homeland an unbearable place to live in.

At that time, the first participant, Tuyet, was a teacher (a revered and well-respected profession in Vietnam), but her job became a vector through which the communist government used to censor and to indoctrinate the people of South Vietnam to convert to their communism ideology. She described how her life and other teachers' lives were changed instantly, as they were forced to undergo re-education about their new government and were forced to pass along this teaching to their students. She said:

A lot of people. All teachers everywhere in that province.  
We have about 10 or 15 schools of teachers.  
They come to one big school and everyday,  
we have to go to a stadium, a big room, and  
a communist officer will teach [us] about communist political ways.

We had to learn about Ho Chi Minh.  
Do you know Ho Chi Minh?  
About how hard he get the independent country and everything,  
and we are the wrong way.

Another participant, Mai, was also a teacher. She described to me her frustrations with continuing to perform her teaching job under the censorship of the Communist regime:

For example, like before the North and the South,  
we live in the freedom of speech and whatever and suddenly,  
under the Communist regime... we feel very uncomfortable in... talking,

especially [because] I was a teacher.

So I don't feel comfortable in teaching.  
I have to watch out what I have to say or teaching to the students.  
I don't feel very comfortable and other reasons too.  
That's why I would like to leave.

For example, if you teach history or literature...  
sometimes you have to be very careful because we were born in the South.  
We have a different way of expressing things and...  
under the Communist,... at that time,  
everything should be very watched out before you say or you do it.  
So, that's why I decided to leave.

The economic reforms stripped people of the savings they have acquired and stripped them of their freedom to work and to support their family, leading the people of South Vietnam into poverty and starvation. At the time, Ngoc and her husband considered themselves part of the middle class, but when the communist regime became their new government, the middle class got eliminated. Their socioeconomic status reduced significantly to impoverished level when a new currency was instituted, and all of the monetary savings they had acquired before became worthless. With limited money they were not able to buy food to feed their families. When they were given their allotted portion of rice, it was often rotten rice. Desperate and hungry, Ngoc would sneak out to the countryside to steal some rice to feed herself and her family. Ngoc described their treatment by the communist government as cruel and comparable to being treated as animals:

Rice, they didn't even sell rice to us.  
In the countryside, there were many growing rice fields, but  
they did not allow rice to be transported to the city.  
The cruelty was that extreme. To the point where  
I had to disguise myself to go back to the countryside.

In the countryside, there was so much rice, but  
they brought all of it there so they can transport to the north,  
or to Saigon to sell per person. They divided kilograms per person.  
They sold rice together with yams/sweet potatoes  
so you have to cook it with yams/sweet potatoes to eat.

There was not enough rice to sell to us. Sometimes,  
they forced people from the countryside to grow more rice  
then they bought it before it was processed,  
then they kept the rice until it got rotten and we still had to eat it.  
Basically, [we] ate like the pigs.

According to my participants, freedom meant feeling grounded and safe, and not living in fear. Under the communist government, many Vietnamese people were forced to provide free labour in the fields and farms. In Lan's case, her experience with forced labour showed her that her life would continue to get more difficult and that she would not have a future if it continues this way:

[My] life was very difficult.  
When the communist came over, they took everything.  
I was forced to work in the farm - a work camp.  
It was difficult and I couldn't handle it anymore.  
It was better to escape and find a better life.

They made me do hard labour.  
As a woman, I was not fit for hard labour that they made me do, such as dig dirt and other extreme laborious activity.  
If I continued to be there and forced to do this work on a regular basis, my health would get worse and they would not give me medications to treat any health issues that would come up.

Life would just get worse so I decided to escape out of the country.  
I wanted freedom to live how I wanted to live.  
So that whatever I want to do for work and how I want to live, I can do that.

Tuyet was also forced to carry out free labour work in the field on the days she was not working as a teacher:

All teachers have to learn for a month about communist way and we have to go in the farm or the field or the river.  
We have to jump in there and work there.  
You know the government not give the job to anyone, but we do free! We have to do it that's why.

Yeah, we have to do.  
You think about clothes - no fabrics to have [to make] clothes, but you have to work like that.  
Later on, where are the clothes to wear to go to class to teach the students?

Yeah. And the food and you know, [they] control everything.  
So that's why we have to leave it.  
And you see the case. That's very terrible!

For individuals who had young children at the time or they were planning to have children soon, they became frightened for their children's future because they could no longer see a future in Vietnam for their children. In Tuyet's situation, she and

her husband had recently gotten married and they wanted to have children. Their desire to protect their children's future cemented this urgency to escape Vietnam. They wanted to find refuge in a new country where they are free to think, to speak, and to raise their children without fear. According to Hong, her parents feared that when she and her siblings went to school, they would get 'brainwashed' and spy on their family for the regime, as they observed this happening to other families around them:

I think that's also because living with the Communist for a few years – 1975 to 1980. That's 5 years right?  
We actually learned that we cannot trust anyone because the Communist people were using your own family to spy on you.  
So, you don't trust anyone.

Especially, they used kids to spy on their own family.  
Because kids going to school and they just [ask] them something like, "Oh well, what did your family doing today?"  
And they just wait for us to tell them what we do, what kind of food that we eat. So, they do something like that.

The kids... they didn't know. They don't understand.  
They just go home and they see what their mom and their dad [were] doing and they just go to school and tell the [Communist soldiers].  
... The system [was that] they were using the kids to see what you're doing or what you're hiding, or whatever you do in your own home.

... You don't trust anyone because the system was like that.  
That's the reason why [we] didn't want to stay there because well, you know, someday, my brothers and my sisters will just become that, which is hard for the family when they know.

... It's not just because they're innocent, they didn't understand and they [will] spread out information about their family and if their family get into trouble, they [would] feel guilty for the rest of their lives!

Hong's parents feared that true freedom would eventually be lost to the communist regime. If they continued to live in Vietnam, under this government, they could never be free to speak freely in front of their children.

After 1979, the communist government was monitoring the borders of Vietnam very closely, keeping track and monitoring the activities of its people (Do, 1999). This meant that people could only leave Vietnam by escaping under clandestine departure. The escape journey out of Vietnam was very risky and the punishment for getting

caught was often severe. In order to reduce the risks of getting caught and to ensure all members' survival, it was common to separate the family. Here, Ngoc described her family detaching themselves from their emotions in order to proceed with the decision to separate their family:

I think no one felt anything because at the time,  
we wanted to live. If we stayed in Vietnam,  
we don't know when we would be taken to the developing land.  
We don't know when they would take us, therefore  
no one will be sad when we are separated so we could have a peaceful life.

Therefore we weren't focusing on the idea of separating the family.  
It's not important but the survival was.  
Because living together, there was no food to eat, we would still die.  
Going to the developing land, we would still die because  
we can't do anything; therefore, everyone needs to find a way to live.

In Hong's situation, her family was large and it was difficult to escape altogether without drawing attention to what they were doing. Hong's family was broken up into two separate groups with her and her father consisting of the first group; they had to successfully carry out the attempt before the second group, which was the remainder of her family, could proceed:

He left [with me] and we cannot take the whole family because...  
when you escape Vietnam you don't want to take the whole family.  
We just have to try [with] a couple [of people] first and see if we [are] okay.  
If we go with the whole family [and] if you didn't [succeed],  
then your family would be [killed]  
like they would put us into jail and they would forfeit all of our properties...  
[our] houses and everything.

I noticed Hong could not get herself to say the word, "kill" aloud, allowing us to glean into depth of danger this group of refugees undertook to ensure their family's survival. This suggests that they risked being punished by death if they were caught. As well, Ngoc described her clandestine departure as a process that involved secrecy, hiding, and lying to those around her:

Oh yes! It was very, very difficult.  
In the process of escaping, we had to hide in other people's home  
and lied to them. For example, if [A] was the leader of the group,  
[A] would take me to the countryside.

Because I was not from the countryside,  
my skin colour was not the same as the people there, therefore,

I would have to find and wear ugly clothes like I was from the countryside and [A] would drop me off at a stranger's house, pretending that I was his aunt and that I needed a place to stay for a few days.

It was a frightening experience because  
I didn't know if I was going to be abandoned.  
So we would stay at these strangers' home for the day and then  
at night was when we did the escaping.

In addition to escaping the country without being caught, this group had to survive the open ocean on small, poorly constructed riverboats that were not meant for the open ocean. Here, Ngoc described her extreme shock upon discovering the boat she was going to escape on was not fit for the ocean and she truly began to fear for her life:

We would all meet up at one location and then  
the leader would take us to where the boat was. At this time,  
I was thinking that this small boat [that we were on] would lead to a bigger boat,  
but then I found out that this small boat was the boat to escape with.

I thought we were doomed! Ah, 47 people!  
The boat was not suitable for the ocean.  
It's more like a river boat,  
meant for transporting small firewood.

The boat did not have a head to properly steer and  
block the ocean waves. When they were building it,  
they built it from scratch with limited materials.  
I thought we were heading to a bigger boat before we reach the ocean.

So, we waited and waited and everyone on the boat was screaming.  
Finally a man announced that we were reaching the entrance to the ocean  
and told everybody to hold on.  
This was when I realized that this WAS the boat  
and that there was no bigger boat!

In the middle of the ocean, many refugees hoped their boats would not sink and avoid being attacked by Thai pirates (Doan, 2011). Here, Ngoc described her experience on the small, cramp boat, and fighting to survive:

It was 5 days and 5 nights in the ocean.  
We were very hungry and thirsty! There was no water to drink.  
Any food we had brought with us was put elsewhere by the captain.  
We didn't know where it was because nobody was able to move around.

No water to drink! I drank my own pee.  
I couldn't communicate with anyone.

I was below the deck in the dark storage space, next to a very small window. I got very thirsty! Sometimes, they gave us some water, but it was very limited as there was a very small tin can of water being passed around and everyone had to share it. When I got so thirsty that I could not bear it anymore, I would drink my own pee.

I didn't know whether it was day or night. There was no food because it was kept away from us and no one could move around. Sometimes, I looked out the window and all I see was very dark water. The only people that got to move around were the people that knew the captain, but other than that, you were only sitting in one spot. You're sitting tight at one spot. At one point when I peed, my pee looked like coffee.

When I saw that the pee looked like coffee, I became scared and stopped drinking it. I rarely peed but when I saw that the colour of the pee was the same as coffee, I thought "Oh my god! That's so black. I can't drink it anymore." From then on, whenever I had to pee, I just peed in my pants.

The escape journey for Hong's family was not free from risks and consequences. Hong and her father made it safely out of the country and arrived at a refugee camp in Malaysia, but the remainder of her family that escaped afterwards was caught. Her mother and oldest brother were jailed and punished as a result:

Yeah, we got out alright and then my mom... Actually after that, my mom took my brothers and they DID try, but it wasn't a success and they were put in jail for 2 years.

So, [one of] my brothers... he was only 18 years old at the time and he had to take care of the whole family; trying to maintain the family, working and trying to... wait for my dad to sponsor them after that.

All I know was they were trying to escape and they got caught... [The regime] thought that she was the organizer so they put her in jail for 2 years. Also, my older brother [was jailed]. They released my younger sisters and my younger brothers.

My [other] brother who was [close to my age], S. He was left behind. At first my mom was so sad because she thought, "Oh, we left one of them behind." He couldn't get [to the meeting location] on time.



So, when the boat leave, he wasn't on the boat  
so she thought they left him behind.

But... since they got CAUGHT! It's lucky because S was just left behind.  
He was 18 years old so he took care of the younger siblings...  
He [tried] to find a job to support them everyday for meals and things like that.  
And he tried to get some money so he can buy some food for my mom and my  
[older] brother who was in the jail at that time.

The excerpts from both Ngoc and Hong's narratives provide us with rich, detailed examples of the perilous situations that many refugees often encounter in their journey of leaving Vietnam. Ngoc's graphic description of drinking her pee conveyed her determination to survive, and Hong's story of her family being captured was meant to demonstrate the ultimate sacrifice parents could make for their children in search of freedom – putting their life at risk for their children.

For all participants, the arrival in Canada meant they had achieved their pursuit of freedom. To have survived the dangerous boat journey, and to have arrived safely at the refugee camps represented a payoff for the sacrifices and risks they endured to escape Vietnam. This group continued to make sacrifices after they arrived in Canada, as they still had immediate families living in Vietnam that were dependent on them for their survival. The goal to pursue freedom was often attached to the responsibility to support their family after they arrived in Canada, often in the format of sending remittance back to Vietnam and saving money to sponsor the remaining members to Canada. In the following stanzas, Tuyet juxtaposed her conflicted feelings of being happy to be free in Canada and worrying about how to support her family who were still in Vietnam, living under the harsh conditions of the communist regime:

[I was] very happy because what we want is...  
Important [thing is]... We know over there [is] very hard times for our family.  
That's the culture about Vietnamese.  
We always live [for] our family. Big family.

You know, the stressful is  
think about families back home.  
Because back home and with the time, communism and very poor over there.  
How do I work and send money over there?

My English is not well and how [do I find] the job?  
That's the hard time. The tough time.  
Tough time to think, "Where we go and get the job and

the money to send back home?"

So yeah, that's the tough time.  
Important is we cannot speak English and who will [hire] us?  
We working and where we go?  
Where we live? And... how we do?  
Who will take us to work?

That time, no work in Duncan. Not any job in Duncan.  
So we contacted a friend in Toronto, Vancouver. Contact for go to work.  
And we don't know the future and what [will] happen.

According to Johnson and Stoll (2013), refugees are often haunted by guilt after they arrived in their new locale. Here, Tuyet's described the guilt that she and her husband often felt whenever they did anything that was comforting:

Even when you eat,  
you have food and you eat, and you remember back home.  
Your parents have no food or whatever.  
Until now, I still remember. We tried a lot!

When we eat, we look. We try a lot because back home,  
your sisters, your brothers, and your parents  
[do] not have enough food.  
So, that's why.

In addition to immigrant guilt, Tuyet explained that her motivation to work immediately after she arrived in Canada was to help her family back in Vietnam. It was culturally bounded--an inherent cultural value of being Vietnamese:

Even when you get married, you [are] still responsible for your family  
Your father and your mom and you help your sisters, brothers.  
So that's why we work. For all of the people.  
Yeah. So, that's one of the reason.

Often, the urgency to work to support their family in Vietnam came at the expense of sacrificing their own opportunities to develop their English proficiency, thus, affecting the foundation to improve their long-term quality of life in Canada. Soon after arriving in her resettlement locale, Lan was able to find work immediately and she opted out of the opportunity to attend school because she was determined to sponsor her family to Canada. In addition, she relinquished support from the church that sponsored her, as she thought she could support herself. Despite being able to find

work, she was only able to obtain temporary, seasonal work (e.g., restaurant dishwasher, mushroom farm worker, factory worker). While she enjoyed the freedom to work and to make money, the temporary nature of these jobs meant she was always in search of the next minimum wage job that did not require English skills. During the interview, Lan shared her regret of her decision to rush to work rather than take advantage of the opportunity to learn English:

I did not enroll in school and take the English classes.  
If I had enrolled and had done well in the English classes,  
the government would have given me opportunities  
to receive skills training.

At the time, Lan did not know that this decision would have resulted in a cascade of future consequences, limiting her future options and quality of life in Canada. Being able to voice this regret during our interview was bittersweet for Lan; it allowed her to grieve for the life she could have had if she had pursued school, yet, accept the life she is currently living.

For both Tuyet and Lan, there was a sense of comfort in accepting that they could not have done anything different because it was impossible to have gained this hindsight when they first arrived in Canada. Other participants in this study also made the decision to work after they arrived in Canada. This decision reflected the power of their obligation to their family; they had the freedom to sacrifice their own opportunities in order to support their family who were still living in Vietnam at that time.

**Making sacrifices by embarking on secondary migration.** All participants in this study were resettled in either a small town (e.g., a small town on Vancouver Island) or a big city (e.g., Vancouver) in British Columbia (see Appendix D). During the 1980s when Canada was sponsoring Vietnamese refugees, the country was in an economic recession (Multicultural Canada, 2013). Regardless of whether they had relocated to a small town or to a big city, all participants experienced challenges in finding permanent employment or employment that would pay better than the minimum wage; especially for participants, such as Tuyet, Minh, Ngoc, and Hong, who resettled in small towns. They had limited English skills and work experience, which prevented

them from being hired because many employers often preferred both of these pre-requisites. These type of obstacles made it difficult for Vietnamese people to sustain their family or send money to support other family members still living in Vietnam. Below is Minh's experience of finding employment after he finished his first welding training through secondary migration:

After school, I finish.  
After school, I go to learn welding.  
After [learning] welding, I'm looking for jobs.  
[It was] very hard to find jobs in Nanaimo for welding.

So I go to Victoria and look for job.  
They need welders, but they don't need welders like me  
because I'm new welder they don't need.  
They need experienced, like ticket level A or B.  
My level was C and not even get the ticket yet.  
[I] applied many places, but no job.

Yeah. They advertised looking for welders, but I can't apply.  
They don't let me.  
No work in welding so I move to Vancouver.

And looking for jobs in Vancouver too.  
But no welding for me.  
I think the reason because my welding just finished school.

They need welders, but they need experienced welders and  
I don't have experience.  
They need at least 1 to 2 years of experience.  
So, that is difficult for me.

Minh's excerpt gives us insight into the frustrations that this group of refugees often felt as they encounter this double edge sword struggle in their search for employment. With no success from seeking work in both small towns and large cities, Minh approached a welding company and volunteered to work for free in exchange for increasing his work experience. For his sacrifice, he was offered a minimum wage position as a burner with that company. He did this for approximately six months and he quit after he obtained enough skills and after he realized he was possibly underpaid. He was doing a very hard and dirty labour job that paid him the same minimum wage as an employee at McDonald's. After numerous unsuccessful attempts in his search to find a welding job, Minh contact his co-nationals in Toronto

about work opportunities. While British Columbia's economy was struggling, Toronto's economy was booming so Minh, along with many Vietnamese refugees, embarked on a secondary migration to this big city in order to find employment and sustain themselves and their family. This sacrifice paid off, as he was able to find employment in welding the day after he arrived:

... That time, many people from Vancouver and Nanaimo move to Toronto.  
That time was recession time so no jobs here [in British Columbia] at all.  
Recession.  
So everybody in Nanaimo moved to Toronto.

That time everybody don't have a job.  
[From] 1979 for about a few years.  
I think [the recession affected] the whole Canada, but Toronto was still big.  
Still have jobs.

I go up to Toronto and [after] only one day, I get a job.  
Yeah. So many jobs in Toronto.  
I go up there and get a welding job.

I just came to Toronto only evening and next morning I go looking for job  
[through] Man Power. I see so many jobs, welding jobs.  
So I apply one and then they called me right away...  
They say, "Next day, come to work". So, I do welding job.

The pay was not exceptional, but he was able to live and save some money without fear of unemployment.

After working a few years in Toronto, Minh decided to move back to Vancouver to pursue a personal relationship. After he moved back, he was able to find a steady, well paying job as a burner because he now has experience as a burner:

So, I go back to Vancouver.  
I also know somebody here so I wanted to go back.  
[I] liked a girl here.  
So that's why I come back.

So, I go back I look for a job here [in Vancouver].  
Then I found another job. They were looking for a burner.  
So, I have experience [as a] burner.

So, I work for that company for long.  
Yeah. For burning.  
And they paid good.  
Pay well.

[Before] it was minimum wage  
then I got paid very high.  
That time compare to [other] people, I am very good.  
Yeah, more experienced.

Reflecting back on this experience Minh shared that he would not have been able to reach this point if he had not made the necessary sacrifices, such as relocating for employment and carefully planning for the future. He refrained from the temptation to make money quickly by jumping from one job to the next. Rather, he waited patiently for an opportunity to obtain a well paying job:

Just [be] patient and  
focus on working on your job.  
Your focus.  
And try your best to learn.

These sacrifices paid off, as they helped him to improve his employability; he was considered a skilled burner; afterward he moved back to Vancouver and his higher wage reflected this.

Similar to Minh, Tuyet and her husband also relocated to Toronto at the encouragements of their co-nationals to find work. When they arrived in Toronto, Tuyet and her husband have already carefully crafted a plan to utilize this opportunity for Tuyet to find work in a jewellery factory and to obtain goldsmith training so they could open their own jewellery business in the future. According to Tuyet, they sacrificed their immediate need to feel settled in their small town locale in order to find stable employment, develop a long-term career plan, and save money to support their family in Vietnam. Driven by their responsibility to help their family and plan for their future in Canada, they lived in a big city as a temporary sacrifice that was necessary to pursue financial independence in Canada. For ten years in Toronto, they focused on working, acquiring the skills they needed, and saving up money while raising their daughter. When they had saved up enough money to start their own business, they moved back to another small town on Vancouver Island.

**Making sacrifices in the face of uncontrollable challenges.** As discussed in chapter two, Canada's sponsorship of Vietnamese refugees between 1979 and 1981 marked the largest influx of immigrants who entered Canada thus far. Many of

the participants in this study arrived during this timeframe. While Canada's quick response to this humanitarian crisis meant Canadians supported a major movement of Vietnamese refugees into the country, the stories obtained from this group suggested Canadians were underprepared for providing immigrants with services that extended beyond shelter, food, and clothing. While the adults struggled to adapt to their new locales, it was especially challenging for the children and youths who arrived in Canada without their parents. This was the case for Minh; Minh and his cousin were resettled in a small town on Vancouver Island in 1979 when Canada had just opened their doors. One week after they arrived, Minh's cousin took off to Toronto to find work. Minh described being very lonely and homesick during the first few years of being on his own in his new locale:

When I was in Vietnam, I'm still young  
so everything...  
my parents were the ones [to] take care [of me].  
So, I just only go to school.

I don't know anything else because  
I'm still in school. Still young.  
[They] took care of everything, yes.  
In Vietnam, we do have [relatives] close by.

I feel very difficulty.  
Very homesick.  
I want to go back, but ...  
If I can have freedom at that time, I want to go back.

Because here also, I was homesick.  
I just want to go back to visit and come back here, but  
no way you can go back to visit at that time.  
That time not open yet.

Because Minh reported that he was 16 years old at the time he arrived, he was placed in a local high school. Despite having no prior knowledge of the English language, he was placed in the same classes as his Canadian counterparts without additional ESL support or resources to help him transition to attending a Canadian school. He often struggled to understand what his teachers and peers were saying in class:

When I came here, I don't know English.  
No English. Only say 'hello' and 'bye bye'.

So I came here and government put [me] in.  
[To] learn English class.

But because my age at that time, I'm 18.  
Because in Vietnam, people always put [their age as] under 18  
because they want to avoid going to the war.  
All of the young boys have to put 2 years or 3 years younger  
so when I arrived here, I'm [actually] 18.  
In document, [I'm] only 16.

So, government put me in school for 2 years.  
Only one year I study, but I don't understand what they [are] talking [about] in  
class.  
Because in Nanaimo, there's nothing much like in Vancouver right now.  
That time, no [ESL] for refugees.

So, we must go to school together with the [local] people.  
In the same class.  
So whatever teacher talk, I cannot [understand].  
I don't know what they were talking about.

Despite being confused much of his time in school, Minh did find a small comfort in attending his math class because this course did not require understanding English to do the work and he enjoyed attending English class because there were only immigrant students in that class; it was the only place in the school where he felt understood. In order to keep up in school and to understand what was being taught in class, every night Minh would use his Vietnamese-English dictionary to translate his schoolwork. After doing this for a year, he became frustrated with not getting much out of school and quit school. According to Minh, continuing school would serve no further purpose; instead, he focused on planning for a career in welding:

... I studied [for] 1 year and then I tell my teacher I'm already 18.  
I want to learn welding instead of continue to grade 12  
because they put me in grade 10 and 11.  
But I have no English so I cannot continue study.

Similarly, Lan did not imagine her life would turn out the way it did when she finally arrived in Canada. She had imagined that after achieving freedom, she would find work and sponsor her family over to Canada. Two years after living in her locale,



she gave birth to her first child. She had two sons within the span of five years and after the birth of her second child, she and her children's father had separated, leaving her to be a single mother without child support. Initially, she coped financially by using up the money she had saved during the two years that she was working. This money ran out very quickly due to the care required for her two young children.

By this point, the layers of barriers continued to mount for Lan; she had achieved limited English proficiency and little transferable work experience, leaving her to face a very difficult decision regarding how to care for her children without any family in Canada--she had to choose between work and her children. On one hand, she could continue to work at low paying labour jobs, which would continue to provide her with a sense of independence and accomplishment, but this could only be maintained at the expense of being away from her young children. On the other hand, she could access social assistance in order to stay at home to raise her children, but it would mean isolating herself from the community. Although Lan prides herself in being independent and self-sufficient, she reluctantly chose the latter option – to access welfare – in order to provide for her children. According to Lan, making a sacrifice for her children was the best option at the time:

I never did return to work.  
I stayed home and raised 2 children.  
If I had gone back to work,  
I would have had to put my children in daycare.

The cost of putting my children in daycare was very high.  
Working did not provide me with enough income  
to pay for daycare, pay for rent, to buy food and raise my children.  
I did not ask for any additional assistance. I only received social welfare.

If I worked, I would have had to pay for Medicare and  
pay for medications myself. Being on welfare,  
the government helped to pay for the additional costs of Medicare and  
medications for the children.

The children were sick a lot so I decided to stay on welfare  
in order to be able to afford to care for and raise my children.  
There was not a better option.  
I didn't have a choice in staying at home.

If I went back to work,  
I would never make enough money to raise my children.

There was no way I could physically work a lot more in order to make enough money to support us without the help of welfare.

While all participants carried additional hopes in their journey to Canada, some struggled to reconcile their hopes with the challenges they encountered after resettlement. This was the case for Van. When he left Vietnam, he had to leave his mother and his fiancé behind. He had hoped to find work and make money so he could sponsor them to Canada. After his liver failed and he received a transplant in 2005, he could no longer work and had to go on disability and live in social housing. This had a significant impact on his life, as it took away his independence and quashed his dreams of supporting his mother and sponsoring his fiancé to Canada. Here, he spoke about letting go of his hopes and accepting his current situation:

I think that the satisfaction also changed a little bit because I used to hope for a lot of things including sponsoring family members. But eventually, I think I became okay with accepting what I have and being satisfied with that level, but not really happy or overwhelm with what I have.

Basically the hope died down a little bit. Surviving and having enough money to live on and stuff like that, but I [no longer] have big dreams like bringing someone over and having a family.

So, I accepted what happened and I am not planning anything big at all. My mom has passed away now and... I don't really have any big plans for my life at the moment. I just try to survive.

## **4.2. Connecting with Canadian Culture and Locale**

After the Vietnamese immigrants arrived in their resettlement locale, many focused on obtaining work to support themselves, their own family in Canada, and their family in Vietnam, as discussed earlier. Whether it is searching for employment, learning English, or learning to navigate in their new locale, the participants in this study were engaging in actions that helped them to connect to the host culture, bridging their search to belong to their new locale.

### **Connecting through acquiring English proficiency as a life long process.**

All participants reported receiving six months of free introductory ESL classes after their arrival. Afterwards, they were required to pay out of their own pockets if they wanted to continue learning and improving their English skills. All participants, with the exception of Mai, stopped attending ESL classes after the preliminary six months and proceeded to find work due to various personal responsibilities that included repaying the government for their flight to Canada, sending remittance back to Vietnam, sustaining their own family in Canada, and so on. After being here for over three decades, Hong spoke passionately about feeling cheated from receiving only six months of ESL classes after she arrived:

Oh, I always think about that...  
the limit that the government give [us] is only 1 year  
and they only allow [us] 6 months for ESL.  
I think the government should have give us more time, you know,  
considering that some people don't know any English at all!  
I mean, for 6 months we wouldn't be able to communicate.

To help us to learn more and get better,...  
they should have allowed us more time in school  
instead of just kind of limit us to 6 months and then kick us out, and  
[tell us], "you have to go and find jobs yourself."

I understand that the government is limited, but if  
there's any chance to give us more time for study and that way,  
we can get better job, better life, you know.

It really affect [our future] because... with limited English,  
what can [we] do?  
[We] cannot work in a place [we] wanted.  
[We] just have to work in a place where they don't really need [English skills]  
like bakeries and dish washing and something like that.  
That's all we can do, right?

Similar to other participants, Hong believes it takes time to learn a whole new language. By the end of six months and under encouraging ESL teachers, Hong was able to possess a basic English vocabulary in order to understand simple things and basic every day conversations, but she still struggled to understand complex conversations. According to the participants' experience, six months was just the starting point where immigrants begin to feel comfortable and understand how to learn a new language. Once the six months were up, they often felt the rug was pulled out

from under them when they were told to find work, because six months of ESL was enough time to learn the necessary English to do so. In addition, the last stanza of Hong's excerpt suggests that acquisition of English proficiency has the power to improve or limit an immigrant's employment opportunities. In her situation, it was the latter, as having only access to six months of ESL limited her employment opportunities to minimum wage labour jobs.

In spite of the limited resources offered to help them improve their English proficiency, many participants have engaged in their own efforts to learn English for the past three decades. Hong faced this challenge by trying to practice what she has learned in her ESL class and being opened to learning from other people:

... I think you have to get out of your shyness... you have to really [try to] talk.  
... Some [people] are nice. They correct you and things like that.  
That's how you learn. That's all I remember...  
You have to talk. The main thing is you try hard!

... I had that feeling too when I say something and they don't understand me;  
they starting to say, "Pardon me. Pardon me. Can you say that again?"  
You start to lose your confidence. You feel embarrass[ed]  
so you don't want to say it again.

What I found is the more you have to talk and the more you say it out,  
then you'll be able to learn. They will correct you.  
Lots of people are really nice. They'll correct you and they are just helping you.

To do this, she put her own internal criticisms aside and engaged other people's corrections of her English abilities as their attempts to help her improve her English. As well, Hong practiced speaking English every chance she could even if it meant she could embarrass herself during the process; in the beginning, she practiced with other immigrants and later on, she practiced with friends and co-workers. To demonstrate how active engagement in the process of speaking English is necessary to develop one's own English proficiency, she provided this rich description, comparing the different approach that her mother and father took in developing their English proficiency, and her descriptions suggests that gender role may influence how Vietnamese men and women approached learning English:

I found that lots of men, older men like my dad.  
They don't have that confident... They have their pride  
so they [think] if they say something, they have to say it right.

Other than that, they don't say anything so it's very hard for them to learn...

[For example], my mom - she talk and she doesn't care.  
She just says whatever she thinks. They'll correct her, but  
she learned faster than my dad. My dad... didn't want to talk.  
He understands, but he didn't want to talk.

In Tuyet's situation, she utilized the various stages of her work life to improve her English skills. Her work as a goldsmith in a jewelry factory allowed her to meet a lot of people, and she utilized her interactions with her co-workers to learn and improve her English skills. Similar to Hong's positive experience, Tuyet's co-workers were often willing to help her learn English:

In the factory you don't need to talk, but you meet a lot of people.  
Different.  
And work by work, and they talk and you hear and they ask you and you talk.  
That's what I think that's a good school for learning English.

You have to [interact]!  
Look like my co-worker is just beside [me].  
And he ask me and just talk. And I talk back and I hear.  
That's learning English.

And I have the book in my side.  
What they say this one and she write down for me.  
Write down what that's call. So I learned English.  
After a year, a year, a year, I feel I have good English.  
I understand and I can talk back to them and whatever.

After 10 years of working in a jewelry factory, Tuyet and her husband saved enough money to open their own jewelry store. She utilized the challenges encountered in this process to continue improving her English skills; for example, they needed to know how to register their business with the government, how to carry out their own bookkeeping, and how to finance their merchandise. Without co-workers to help her, she turned to her Vietnamese-English dictionary to assist her in translating and filling out all of the administrative forms. This effort took up a lot of her own time. She said:

So, learning! Learning.  
You know after work, so tired every day, but at night  
I have to learn every English words about the taxes.  
I have to learn myself... with the dictionary.

I have to learn. And I ask the people.

The silver lining of this hurdle was it gave her an extra skill set and motivation to continue learning English. Tuyet continues to use that same dictionary to this day; she even used it to translate the interview questions and be prepared for the interview ahead of time. In her own personal life, Tuyet took active steps to increase her English by learning from her children rather than rely on them to be the family's "language broker," which was often the case for many immigrant families (Doan, 2011).

Similar to Tuyet, Minh engaged the same focus and dedication that he used to pursue employment to his own efforts to learn English. Despite dropping out of school, Minh continued to learn to speak, read, and write in English on his own time. According to Minh, it was essential to learn to write in English in order to declare himself proficient in all areas of the English language:

Everyday I have to...  
For me, everyday and every night,  
from the class I go home.  
I keep writing those words that I learned.

I keep writing until I know how to write.  
Because I memor[ize] how to write.  
I can write Vietnamese, but English, I cannot remember.  
Even I pronounced, I cannot remember.

So, I keep writing until I remember how to write.  
But most people now they just only speak,  
they don't want to learn how to write.  
That's why now I can write and I can read [in English].

Minh's disclosure reflected that he was proud of this accomplishment because he knew many Vietnamese refugees who arrived in Canada at the same time that have not mastered writing English even though they could speak and read in English.

In essence, the narratives of the individuals that actively engaged on their own to improve their English skills suggest that regardless of the obstacles, it is the immigrant who holds the greatest responsibility for learning the host language; the individual needs to be willing to learn, listen, and engage in the process of conversing in English with other Canadians. One method of doing this can consist of taking higher

levels of ESL courses to improve their English competency. They showed that their efforts in the past three decades have paid off by opting to conduct their interviews entirely in English. As well, their continuous efforts to learn and improve their English suggest that learning the host language is a life-long process, and is the main pathway to connecting and establishing belonging with the host culture.

Currently, Tuyet is a widow and has two adult children living far away from her. Aside from the obvious benefit of being able to communicate with other Canadians in English, Tuyet used her situation to poignantly demonstrate that the ability to communicate with others in the host language is extremely necessary to maintain independence and to advocate for oneself, especially as she gets older and requires more help:

You know, because in here [your] children don't live with you.  
Because they have the job somewhere else.  
They love you, but they cannot live with you.  
And you learn the Western way; you [become] independent.

So, I think English is very important.  
Even when you get old, you need language MORE than [when] you are young.  
Because when you get old, you need help.  
If you don't know how to talk to people, how do you tell them to help you?

Yeah! Don't think when you retire, you don't need to work and  
you don't need to learn.  
No. It's important!  
Yes! That's what I think is very important!

While Mai was fluent in French and was familiar with the English language when she arrived in her locale, this advantage could not prevent her from being taken advantaged of during her first year in Canada by her employer and by her landlord:

I did [get taken advantage of]! For the first year at work.  
So, I think sometimes when you work with a boss or store owners and  
the boss sometimes.. some bosses are nice... BUT not all!  
Some try to abuse us. Especially when we don't know [our] employment rights.

Like when you don't know about employment standards, tenancy rights,  
so... the manager abuse us.  
... I was lucky. The first manager of my building, he was very nice too.  
Or maybe... when I first came here... I didn't see that people were abusing me.

... I was young so everything I just take on the good side.  
... I didn't see a lot of problems.  
But then later, with improvement of my English and...  
my knowledge of the country, of the rights and responsibilities...  
I can determine who's helping me and who's abusing me.  
... And how to deal with those problems.

I was very happy until they changed the manager.  
When I first moved in, the manager was very nice.  
We were living in the same level.  
Then the manager left and the next manager was very terrible!

It was terrible!  
... I don't want to tell a lot, but one thing I can tell you is  
when we sent out the moving notice, the letter, and then we moved out...  
I rent a new place two weeks ahead.  
I had two weeks for cleaning, moving, and cleaning the apartment.  
Everything was very clean. Perfect.

And when we came back to visit the apartment,  
someone spilled coffee on the walls and the carpet.  
You can figure who did that! If it's not the manager, right?!  
No one [else] has the keys to get into my apartment and then make it dirty.

Luckily, we still have two days before we return it.  
That's why my brother was very angry.  
I could calm him down and then we cleaned up the walls again.  
How bad he is! I don't want to talk about what he did to other [tenants],  
like he put the gums... in people's key holes. People told me that.  
My neighbours told me that.

This experience taught Mai to understand the extent that this manager would go to in order to retain her damage deposit, and she needed to become a savvy tenant if she was to prevent from being taken advantage of again in the future by potential unethical landlords. Tuyet's and Mai's narratives suggest that it is important to connect to the host locale by acquiring English proficiency, as it allows immigrants to learn about their rights as citizens in Canada and to advocate for themselves and their health when they get older.

These experiences illustrate how possession of the host language allowed the participants to establish a sense of physical belonging to the locale, as they were able to speak and interact in the same language as their co-workers and friends. I also noticed the process of developing friendships and connections with other Canadians in the community at work helped them to establish emotional belonging to the host



culture. Mai discussed the significant impact of having good friendships during the early years of resettlement in her new locale:

And I was lucky I had a friend... She passed away many years ago, but she's like a mother for us when I first came here.  
... I learned lots of Canadian tradition and culture through her.  
Lots of sharing between us. And I had lots of good friends and teachers!

She's a Canadian from this town. And she's like our mom...  
for me and my friends.  
Other friends too, like other Canadians,  
because we came here under 30's.

So we met lots of people who are like,  
"Oh, you guys don't have families here, don't have parents here...."  
so they will take us [in] like their children, right?!  
So, that's great!

These friendships played a critical role in helping Mai to attach emotionally to her locale and to develop a sense of belonging to the Canadian culture.

**Connecting by living/functioning/existing within locale.** As I mention earlier in this chapter, the majority of this group struggled to find steady employment during the first five to ten years of living in Canada, and this was due to reasons that included internal context (e.g., they possessed limited English proficiency and had no vocational training) and external host context (e.g., British Columbia's struggling economy added an extra barrier for immigrants to obtain steady, decent paying jobs). These obstacles made it hard for the participants to live and function productively within their locales; thus, reducing their ability to connect and to belong to the host locale.

Coinciding with improvements to their English proficiency, they improved their employment situation, thus improving their quality of life and connection to the host locale, by embarking on secondary migration (e.g., Tuyet and Minh) or pursuing continuing education (e.g., Van, Hong, and Mai enrolled in additional ESL courses and engaged in vocational training). In Minh's situation, being able to obtain the burner job after moving back to Vancouver was the turning point of his resettlement in Canada. Receiving this stable and well paying job changed his life; it provided him the financial

security to start saving financially for a future he had always dreamt of for himself in Canada:

From that burner job it changed my life because  
they pay good and stable job.  
And I can live in Vancouver too.  
It can change your life.

You can buy a car.  
You can get married.  
You can support your family.  
Not like broke all the time.

Saving money, buying a house and starting a family in Vancouver meant establishing roots in this big city locale. As he continued to live, work, and make connections with other people in his community, his sense of belonging became permanent as he built a home here for himself and his family.

In Van's situation, he continued to work various positions in restaurant kitchen jobs and his responsibilities would increase, but he continued to be underpaid. Losing his job in 2003 lead him to seek employment training from an immigrant service centre called MOSAIC to improve his work situation:

Before 2003 I had lost my job, and I got some training from MOSAIC  
for English and cooking skills  
to prepare me to get another job in the restaurant business.

Even though I pick up quite quick and I became a sous chef,  
but because I didn't have a certificate  
it did not improve my salary or position.  
So that's why I was introduced this program at MOSAIC,  
and after that I got a better job.

Basically, I received a certificate after I finished the courses  
and my salary got better.  
Then I fell sick in 2005.  
I had liver failure and since then I can't work anymore.

This was a bittersweet achievement for Van, as it was short lived. Despite the success of the transplant, he has been on disability since he recovered from his operation.

After Van went on disability, he lost his ability to be self-sufficient and he gave up his dream of sponsoring his fiancé here. In addition, he had to reduce his standard

of living by downsizing from an apartment suite in a nice neighbourhood to renting a small room in a crowded social housing building, situated in the low income area of downtown. It was a struggle to adjust to this new lifestyle, but Van coped with this life-changing illness and regained his independence by utilizing his own resources to volunteer his cooking skills:

My hands still shake a bit but I am still able to help with the kitchen.  
We do communal kitchen every two weeks.  
Even though I am not working after the operation,  
I still volunteer with the church.  
I help with serving food to people.

Here, I am the main person who helps run the kitchen with T,  
like helping people cook and serving food for people.  
Even though I am not working for money,  
I still use my cooking skills and many different skills  
to help the community and be useful.

As well, he has engaged personal dedication to helping the elder seniors who live in the same building. Here, Van eloquently described how he came to take on an advocate role on behalf of the elder seniors living in the same building:

I am very helpful to the elders in this building.  
We have a lot of Chinese elders living in the building and  
most of them don't have families or  
their families ignore them by not visiting.

I really take care of them by knocking on their doors everyday  
to make sure that they wake up in the morning because  
people die alone in this hotel quite a bit.  
They're 90's or 80's years old and sometimes, they are not well in the morning  
and no one even know right?

So, I'm the one that takes care of the elders in this building.  
I joke around and make them laugh. I make sure everybody okay.  
When there's food, even when I cannot walk fast,  
I would bring it to every room where people cannot leave their room.

I think that's a part of my living here now.  
Being and doing well yourself but also take care of others.

It is through Van's active engagements with the people in the building that helped him to connect authentically with other people in his building, to function, and to exist within his locale.

For Mai, being familiar with the English language helped her to communicate with people in her locale. During my interview with Mai, I learned that she has a penchant for volunteering and learning. For example, she volunteered in high school and university when she was in Vietnam and she volunteered to teach English during her stay at the refugee camp. She actively continued this practice after arriving in her locale. Reflecting with fondness on her history of volunteering, she smiled as she shared:

I build my connections through volunteering.  
I like to volunteer so I think through all the years that I have been here,  
I have been volunteering with so many places and groups!  
The worst thing is how to say good bye to the groups after that.  
Everyone wants to keep me with their place though.

[I] learn a lot through volunteering.  
That's what I told people.  
That volunteer is a help for a Canadian experience.

Volunteering, such as organizing workshops and forums, allowed Mai to learn about Canadian life. While she never volunteered to network for jobs, her volunteer work often yield employment opportunities because people had made connections with her:

So many [jobs], I don't remember, but sometimes people came and ask me.  
I knew them through like when I organized workshops or forums or things  
or some events with my friends or with colleagues.  
Sometimes, some manager or director, they already got [me] in mind  
so later when they come and said, "I have some job postings.  
Would you like to come and work with us?"

So, they show me. I didn't know they have a job posting.  
They need someone to [work for them]... and  
I said, "Yes, it's great" so I apply.  
Sometimes I got 2 or 3 jobs at the same time.  
And that's my experience.

**Language is an essential facilitator for living and belonging to host culture.** During my analysis, I suspected that there was a strong connection between primary categories of language fluency, belonging, and living that were emerging from

my participants' narratives. I used the process of codeweaving<sup>11</sup> to investigate how these items might interrelate or connect together. The result yielded the following statement, which further supports the second category: *language is an essential facilitator for living and belonging to the host culture*. Relating to this study, language is the "thread" that dictates the strength of the participants' sense of belonging to Canadian culture. If the thread is strong, due to strong language proficiency, then that sense of belonging is also much stronger, and if the thread is weak, due to weak language proficiency, then the sense of belonging is weak. Mai's experience of arrival, resettlement, adaptation, and living in Canada for the past three decades reflects the former, whereas, Lan's experiences reflect the latter.

In Mai's situation, she was able to speak French fluently, and this allowed her to communicate with the hotel manager and learn from him about how to navigate in her new locale from the first night she arrived in Canada. She learned about the layout of her neighborhood, where to buy groceries, how to use the bus system, how to search for and to rent apartments, and so on. This is a process that took the other participants a few months to learn. In addition, having familiarity with the host language was also advantageous to learning and developing her English proficiency. While the other participants reported that they stopped pursuing ESL after the free six-month period ended, Mai enrolled in a local college and continued to improve her English. Mai stated that being fluent in a second language, French, contributed to a positive experience of learning English and in turn, motivated her to further her education:

[Knowing English]. That's the help.  
But besides that, because of my French accent  
sometimes to learn English has some problems, but  
on the other way, it's a help too because...  
from Vietnamese into English is quite difficult, but  
from French into English is easier.

That's why after 1 year in here,  
I could already finish my English at King Edward College  
so I could already start for a higher degree or vocational trainings and

<sup>11</sup> According to Saldana (2013), "Codeweaving is the actual integration of key words and phrases into narrative form to see how the puzzle pieces fit together" (p. 248).

it's a help for me later.

Similar to all other participants, Mai still had to work to fulfill her obligations to her family. She worked during the day and attended classes at night during her first year in Canada. Obtaining high school English equivalency allowed her to move forward and she pursued vocational training, specifically pursuing a diploma in fashion design. When this career path did not work out due to the change in the locale's economy, she did not hesitate to go back to school to train in another field. Throughout the 31 years Mai has lived in Vancouver, she continued to pursue education on a regular basis, whether it was for her job or for her own personal interests. Below, Mai points out the positive relationship between continuing education, improving employment opportunities and setting roots in her locale:

I remember the fashion designer [degree] because  
it's the first things I learned in here and later,  
I took the interpretation certificate and then the counselling and then...  
lots of certificates and lots of.. professional development...  
helping [me] to secure the job.

Yes, it's helping me because I started getting roots,  
having some roots in here. So, that helps.  
[Having] education plus the knowledge in the country... helped me to get lots of  
jobs.  
Getting jobs later is no more the problems like in the beginning.

And even like I'm not looking for the job, I got the job offer.  
So, it's comparing to when I first came here,  
I had to spend a lot of energy looking for a job and now,  
the job is offered to me.

The narrator's personal dedication to learning can be traced back to her background and positive experiences with education in Vietnam. In Vietnam, Mai held a distinguished professional career as a teacher, having completed a university degree and possessing fluency in French and some familiarity with English. This background suggests she was highly educated and cultured, and would have possessed strong work ethics, study skills, and dedication to learning in order to reach this point. I believe she utilized these strengths and applied them to the academic setting of learning English and pursuing her various vocational trainings in her resettlement locale. As she continued to improve her English skills and to learn additional skills, the

opportunities to find well-paying employment continued to improve for her while the efforts required to look for them decreased.

Mai's narratives suggests that the language thread for her was stronger, the concept that language is an important facilitator for living and belonging to the host locale and culture. Possessing host language proficiency can help improve many areas of an immigrant's life - to find employment, to obtain financial stability, and to communicate and socialize with friends, therefore, building connections to other people and establish belonging to the locale.

In contrast to Mai's experience, it was a longer and a much more difficult process for Lan to make connections and to establish belonging within the host locale. After Lan made her decision to become a stay-at-home mom instead of working, she struggled to maintain the basic level of English she had previously learned and it continued to decrease because she stopped using it on a regular basis:

Currently, I think it is harder [now] than when I first arrived.  
I think I have forgotten a lot since then.  
When I am out now, it is more challenging to converse in English than  
when I first arrived.

When I first arrived, I was able to converse better because  
I was learning and practicing speaking English on a regular basis at the  
[refugee] camp.  
When I first arrived I knew quite a bit of English that I didn't need help much  
and I was able to do things on my own.

I have forgotten much of it because at some point [because]  
I stopped using it on a regular basis.  
My English skills started to decline after I started settling in Canada.  
Because for many of these years,  
I was staying at home much of the time and raising my children.

So it kept declining because I also did not continue to go to school.  
Even if I return to school now I am not able to learn and memorize anymore.  
That's why when my English skills started declining,  
it continued to decline.

The kids were small and I stayed home doing this and that to take care of  
them.  
During this time I thought that because I had already possess the English skills,  
it will always be there for me to use them when I want to again.  
However, when I wanted to use them again,

I realized I had forgotten a lot of it.

While Lan stayed at home to raise her children, she chose to speak only Vietnamese to her children to ensure they could speak Vietnamese fluently. This effort came at her own expense because she neglected to continue practicing her English until one day she tried to use it and discovered she had lost it.

In addition, Lan became closed off from the community she lived in, leading to emotional struggles. Without friends or family nearby, she had no one to 'vent' to about her financial and personal struggles with raising her children. In the interview, Lan revealed that she experienced a mental breakdown when her children were toddlers:

I [became] very stressed here at the time I had children on my own.  
After I gave birth to my second child and by the time he was three years old,  
I was extremely stressed out that I didn't know anything anymore.  
I had to stay in the hospital for three months.  
After three months, the stress was gone and I went home.

I was on my own and raised two children.  
There was barely enough money and other problems would arise.  
It became too stressful to handle.  
I was stressed in Vietnam.  
But I was stressed here too during the time I started having kids  
and had to raise two young children on my own.  
I had a 'mental shut down'.

I went to the hospital because I could no longer remain balanced.  
I could not control myself anymore.  
[I was] sad, angry, and frustrated.  
So, I thought I should go to the hospital to get help.

They gave me medications to take.  
Taking the medications helped my body to not feel sad and bored anymore.  
I felt happier again.  
I don't know what medications the hospital gave me.

I took two different kinds of medications, but I can't remember what they are.  
When I was better, they let me go home.

Currently, she has developed a more effective long-term approach to coping with stress. Since the year 2000, she has been attending a psychoeducational support



group called Parents Together group, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

**Connecting by applying coping skills to overcome challenges of resettlement and adaptation.** After enduring traumatic, pre-migratory stresses, Vietnamese refugees continued to encounter challenges after arriving in their host locale. These challenges often include finding employment, learning the English language, and sustaining their family both in Canada and in Vietnam. Because coping with struggles was not new to this group of immigrants, many applied coping strategies they had learned in Vietnam to deal with the challenges they faced in their new locale.

For Tuyet and her husband, they overcame the challenge of finding work by physically relocating to another city and province where its economy was offering a plethora of employment opportunities. According to Tuyet, the biggest challenge they encountered was juggling both raising a young family and launching a jewelry business, which was to be their main source of income:

But, you know, it's hard because  
we not do only business, we still keep looking out for children.  
They go to school. They have their problems in school.  
What they do in school and how we help them with school.

So that's why it looks like I work from early morning,  
wake up at 6 o'clock and cook for children and take them to school.  
And go home, I work until midnight because children have to learn  
and I have to help them.  
I have to ask them about how school is going on.

Beside that, I have to learn the new things in the business.  
Do the paper, do the book keeping and sometimes,  
I have to bring work from the store home to work.  
Yeah, so that time we work all day long.  
Seven days a week and work so hard!

Tuyet coped with this overwhelming stress by turning to her Buddhist religion:

I'm Buddhist.  
I think any religion we believe is God and we pray,  
but in Buddhism they show us the way to relax;  
you will deal with stress. That's Buddhism.

So, that's meditation.  
Meditation and when you worry so much  
and you have to sit and  
keep quiet and relax and nothing, anything.  
You don't think [about] anything and take... time, and after that you feel better.

While Tuyet did not clarify when exactly she started practicing Buddhism, I suspected she was practicing it before she left Vietnam because when I listened to her other stories throughout the interview, I noticed her determination to cope with the stress in Vietnam resembled the same coping strategies she applied here in Canada. It is a coping skill that she currently continues to apply to other stressful situations, such as coping with loneliness after her husband had passed away and after her children have grown up and moved out:

... now...my children are gone and I [am] lonely myself. Alone  
So I do meditation and make me feel good. Yeah.  
With our business and come home and relax. Really relax.  
You don't think much about.  
Just take some time. 10 minutes, 15 minutes or half hour or 1 hour.

Similar to Tuyet, Ngoc also shared that practicing her Buddhism faith has helped her to embrace and accept the struggles she encountered after arriving in Canada. For example, she could only find low paying jobs that required limited skills and she made many sacrifices for her daughter who did not return the effort when she got older. Acceptance of her situations helped to ground her and provide her with the sense of peace in her life, the same peace that she was seeking when she decided to leave Vietnam:

Fortunately, I have this, which is why I can survive.  
Buddhism has taught me a lot about life.  
I accepted like what Buddha taught, therefore my life is peaceful.  
I do not want to compare.

For example, that person has better/higher education is because  
in their past life, they have done good? I am very content.  
I can survive because of this.  
Do you understand what I'm saying?

Yes, I feel peaceful ever since I understand Buddhism.  
If anyone who can understand Buddhism,  
their life will be very peaceful.  
Understand, meaning to know and practice what Buddha has taught you.

You would live peaceful without any comparison.  
If anyone is mean, that is their business.  
You just have to avoid them.  
I feel fortunate because I understand Buddhism.

In Ngoc's experience, she was familiar with the Buddhism teaching while she was in Vietnam, but it took the harrowing experience of escaping Vietnam and the communist government, and surviving the journey for her to truly understand and apply the teachings of her faith:

I knew nothing about Buddhism.  
I knew Buddhism not too long ago.  
I didn't know about Buddhism before coming to Canada, but  
after being able to come here, to escape from there.

My desire was to just live, even to live in low [status].  
I would still accept it. Because I got that luck [to escape],  
therefore I don't ask for much but I didn't know about Buddhism then.

During the interviews I attempted to explore their cultural practice for help seeking, especially regarding seeking psychological services in order to explore how counselling can play a role in helping Vietnamese refugees with challenges of immigration, adaptation, and psychological stress from their traumatic migratory journey. I tried to explore what their core concerns were and what they needed counsellors and therapists to know about in order to understand how to help them and other future refugees effectively. To do this, I asked each participant about their help seeking practices in Vietnam and how it has changed after they arrived in Canada. Consistently, all participants reported that they often turn to family and very close friends for physical and emotional support.

Hong spoke very highly of her family being an unconditional source of love and support for her through difficult times:

Because you are family!  
In my culture, we know that family are your own blood  
so they will help you to go through the bad time and the good time.  
They will stand up for you.  
They will support you 100% if you really need help and  
you're in bad condition or something like that.  
They'll be there for you!

After eight years of living in Canada, Hong had four children with her current ex-husband. Similar to Lan's experience, the participant was often overwhelmed by the tasks of raising her children, but unlike Lan, she had her mother and immediate family living in the same town to provide her with the physical and emotional support she needed:

I was lucky because I have full support from my family.  
... Usually after you have a baby you become... sad and depressed and things like that, but I was so lucky that I have my parents; my mom [was] here when I was having my babies.  
I get all the love from them. They care.  
For me, I was lucky. For the others, I don't really know.

According to Hong, her mother always intuitively knew when to provide the necessary support without being asked:

Just think about there's a lot of women in here [that] they don't have family. They would be more like depressed and stressed because they don't have family who help them.

But, I was lucky because my mom was here.  
She took care of the kids when I need some kind of sleep.  
She took care of me... I don't have to do anything.  
She just have to [look out for them]...

I don't have to ask. My mom - she has more experience so she just kind of helping me. Like she'll [tell me] I need some bread or something like that. I mean, for me, I understand...  
I have some knowledge of the [host] language.

So.. for me, I think I was luckier because  
I had the opportunity to understand something like that and my mom was there and my family was there to help me.

Hong considered herself lucky to have received unconditional love and support from her family, which buffered her from developing depression, which she had often seen happen to immigrant women who have children without family or community to support them.

For Minh, he arrived in Canada with only his cousin, who abandoned him after a week to find employment in another. With his family in Vietnam, he turned to a small Vietnamese community in his locale; they were also refugees that arrived around the same time frame as Minh. The Vietnamese enclave is the closest thing that

represents family, as these people are from the same culture with shared values. In this locale, Minh befriended other Vietnamese refugees in his English class and stayed closely connected with this small Vietnamese community. For example, he rented a room and received board from a Vietnamese family who required his money to help supplement their social assistance income. The Vietnamese community provided him with the emotional connection he would have received from his family back in Vietnam:

Yes, [I coped] differently [in Canada].  
Stress. You see your friends.  
We go out.  
We visit friend's house. Something like that.

... It still helped.  
I don't think I can survive if no Vietnamese community around.  
If I don't know anybody around,  
I don't think I can survive there.

In addition, the Vietnamese community served as a network for Minh to find employment:

Yes, it helps.  
It helps to have Vietnamese people together  
than to live alone.  
Because you can get some information.

Because they can tell where the work is.  
Somebody work here, "Oh, my shop needs work"  
and then they call around then we know and  
[we] come to apply for a job.

But if you are alone and don't know anybody,  
you cannot find job.  
Mostly you get job by friend.  
Friend tells you, "Oh, over there have job" so you come.

Or the friend works and then they talk to the boss,  
"Oh, I have a friend who wants to work,"  
and the boss tell him to come.  
That's how Vietnamese people get jobs.

These narratives by Tuyet, Ngoc, Hong, and Minh demonstrate how Vietnamese immigrants make connections within their host culture by utilizing the coping skills they have learned previously in Vietnam to overcome the challenges of resettlement and adaptation.

Under the Communist regime, Vietnamese feared seeking help beyond their family and few trusted friends, yet they hope it would be different when they arrive in Canada. Therefore, they made efforts to connect with their host locales by reaching out for tangible help from the host community. As discussed earlier in the chapter, Van sought out MOSAIC, an immigration service centre, to improve his English skills and obtain employment training. After he finished and obtained a cooking certificate, he began to receive a fair wage for his work as a sous chef.

After 20 years of living in Canada, Hong sought external help when she had to deal with a problem that was beyond her family's capability to intervene. She turned to her family doctor and her community's multicultural centre for help when her son experienced suicide ideation:

My son... He was living with his friend and he was working.  
And then somehow one day, he just quit the job and [stayed] home.  
I didn't understand that so I'm trying to force him  
to go back and he didn't want to.

Lately, I found out through my older daughter he said  
he just want to kill himself...  
I was just so scared so I had to go see the doctor.  
The doctor... refer him to see a counsellor.

I got help from the multicultural society  
to get him to see some counsellor about that.  
So, they [talked] to him and [tried] to understand why he's doing this and that...  
Yes! He did [connect with a counsellor]. He went for a couple of sessions.

Currently, Mai works as a settlement worker for an agency in Vancouver. Using her experience to help clients, she tries to help new immigrants belong by providing them with tangible help that immediately connects them in some way to their host community:

I used to have the habit to asking when I see people,  
"Oh, what's your religion?" The best way is connection.  
If you're Catholic, [I] connect you to the church, right?  
If you're Buddhist, [I] connect you to the temple.

So, from those places, lots of people right?  
... They can make friends and they can start to have some friends and  
they can find out like more resources.  
Me too because I'm going to those places to get more resources because

one person cannot be enough sources of resources when... lots of people [need them].

Like whomever's asking me about something,  
sometimes I have the answers right away, but sometimes I don't have.  
I said, "Okay. I will keep in mind and look for you."  
... And then I will find out resources everywhere.

Because it's easier for them to communicate, right?  
Because you have the same religion, right?  
... sometimes even friends, they have conflicts in religion... in belief, right?  
So, that's why I try to connect them to.  
I hope. I try to connect them to the right group.

As the years go by, this group continued to live, work, and establish permanent roots for themselves in Canada. As well, they began to adopt new coping strategies that were more conducive to cope with the challenges they faced in their locale. Earlier, we learned that Lan faced many obstacles raising her children alone. In the 1980s, there were limited support, especially outreach services provided in the community to support newly arrived immigrants. As the city of Vancouver grew and became home to many diverse immigrants on a daily basis, immigrant services and programs began to emerge to meet this demand. For Lan, the opportunity to access the services she needed finally emerged in the year 2000, when she was able to access a psychoeducational support group for Vietnamese parents called Parents Together group:

I go to this community group every Saturday morning.  
It's called Parents Together.  
I've been attending it for a long time.  
[Around] the year 2000 and something.  
It's been a while, I can't remember.  
Let's say, it's been approximately 5-6 years.

I learned a lot from this group. Most importantly,  
I get to meet with other parents and socialize with them.  
Secondly, K and the other instructor teach us many different skills.  
We learn something new every week.

For example, we learned some useful parenting skills,  
such as how to guide and sooth [our children].  
We learned different skills on how to guide and  
direct our children to go to school.

They bring in some instructors to teach us about computer skills.  
We get to learn a lot of different and interesting things.  
Last week, K and J taught parents who had children  
who were about to enter high school on how to prepare their children for it and  
taught parents that had children close to college age  
on different ways to prepare their children so they can be ready to enter  
college.

In addition to learning about how to prepare in terms of money,  
we learned how to enforce different discipline and  
the different ways of raising and teaching them  
when they are in high school and at college level.

They do teach us how to support our children emotionally:  
to find different ways to support them when they need us,  
to find different strategies to communicate with them and  
how to be closer to them.

They had different programs like health classes  
where they bring in a nurse to teach us about health issues,  
self-defense classes where a policeman is brought in  
to teach us some self-defense skills, and [cooking classes]  
where a chef is brought in to teach us how to cook different meals.  
I liked the self-defense one the most.  
As well, I found the classes about health are the most helpful.

This community support group allowed Lan to socialize, relax, and make  
connections with other Vietnamese parents. Sharing and hearing their experiences  
validated her experiences and efforts with raising her children on her own and it  
provided her with emotional and social support she has been missing since she had  
her first child. As well, this group provided her with additional parenting and life skills  
to help her raise her children. I believe it gave her hope; it allowed her to know that  
there was always something she can do to help her children live healthier lives. No  
longer living in isolation, she has also learned healthier ways to cope with stress  
instead of turning her previous approach, which was to suppress her feelings until they  
overwhelmed her:

Now, I would go to communities, such as to K's Parents Together group and  
share with her and the group that I am feeling stressed.  
The group can then share their advices with me.

For example, if I had a child that won't listen to me,  
won't go to school but stay at home.  
Then I would get frustrated because I cannot say or



do anything that will get him to go to school.

So, I would attend the group, tell them about my problems and ask them if they have any opinions that can help me. Every one there has a different suggestion based on their own experiences that I can try to help solve my problem, which helps me to deal with the stress.

Now, the help that I can get from the community is amazing! Of course, this approach helps a lot. I can vent out my stress and there are many people who give me support and share with me their advices so that I can go home and solve the problems that I am having with my family.

Because this is free, close to where she currently lives, and it is facilitated in Vietnamese, it has been very accessible for Lan to attend and learn from these group meetings. Currently, Lan still attends this group even though her children have grown up; one is 24 years old and the other is 18 years old.

As I continued listening to Lan share with me about the invaluable benefits she gains from attending this group, I observed obvious changes in her entire physical demeanor. She was more engaging, talkative, descriptive, and enthusiastic about this part of the interview compared to other topics we discussed. This observation helped me to understand the significant impact of social support for a new immigrant who struggles alone. It gave me insight into how the host culture can help immigrants like Lan, who came from a social culture where she was often surrounded by family support, to establish their belonging to the host culture and locale by providing accessible, tangible social support.

In Mai's own experience and in her work with immigrants where she comes across stressful situations, she has learned to place her own mental health a priority and to make efforts to implement self-care practices on a regular basis in order to cope with stress and prevent burnout:

[I] Learn in how to deal. How to help ourselves first.

So like, I learn acupuncture, but the new way, new style,  
not the traditional acupuncture.  
Like I learn the Vietnamese acupuncture.

It's different from the Chinese one.  
Like we don't use the needles.  
We use other tools.  
That's very easy to use....

And what I enjoy the most is self-care.  
Like the massage.  
... how to help us to feel less stress.  
... how to help us enjoy like good health, mental health.  
Experience those things is a, a help.  
Learn meditation to distress....

#### **4.3. Extending Belonging through Promoting Children and Family Bilingualism**

After being dislocated from their own country and arriving in Canada, this group was trying to do what they have always done under thousands of years of foreign occupation, which was to establish belonging within and to their host country. However, unique to this group's process is that they were trying to connect and to achieve belonging while raising their children in a foreign country that was not Vietnam. In addition to achieving belonging, Vietnamese immigrants try to strengthen and extend belonging by promoting children and family bilingualism so that the current and next generation will be strongly connected to both the parents' and the host cultures. It is possible to suggest that there is a sense of urgency, by the participants who have children, to cement the sense of belonging to the parents' Vietnamese culture out of fear of losing the next generation to the Canadian host culture, therefore, losing a sense of belonging to parents' culture. Vietnamese parents strengthen that belonging by preserving their Vietnamese culture for the next generation, by practicing family/collectivist identity, and by bridging both Vietnamese and Canadian cultures together.

**Strengthen that belonging by preserving their Vietnamese culture for the next generation.** As often the case for all immigrant groups, this group of Vietnamese immigrants was concerned with preserving the Vietnamese language, cultural values,

and ethnic identity, as they create a permanent home for themselves and their family in Canada. According to the participants in this study, especially those who are parents, one of their biggest challenges that they faced in their locales was helping their children integrate with the Canadian society while still retaining their culture. The participants with children reported using multiple strategies, which consisted of speaking Vietnamese to their children at home, teaching their children about their religion/faith, and celebrating Vietnamese holidays with the Vietnamese community in their locale, in order to achieve this goal.

In Tuyet's experience, she did this by taking her children to a Buddhist temple every Sunday to pray and encouraged her children to speak only Vietnamese at home:

You don't worry about you lose your culture.  
Make sure it's at home.  
Your culture.  
You keep your culture at home.

My children. When they are still at home,  
Sunday we go to temple and they can sit there.  
Even if they don't know about the bible, but  
they can listen and they sit there.

And you know, time by time, they know it.  
Even they learn school, but now they still know the culture.  
That's good. It think it's good for them.  
Make for them rich! The ideas more.

You [can] still keep culture at home.  
Weekend [is the time] to bring to Vietnamese community and together,  
you keep the culture.  
But, you know your children need to talk with Canadians.

For example, I was worried about my children so I send them to daycare.  
When they small and they not go to school,  
I send them to daycare  
so when they go to school, they don't have problems.

But, that does not mean they [do] not speak my language.  
My children speak my language.  
It's home. I keep my language.  
And they go to Vietnamese community together.

So, that why they have both culture;  
they have Western and Asian so it's good for them. Good for them.

You know, it's very good because Canadians only have one culture,  
but [my] children are lucky.  
They have 2 cultures so they bring both cultures and they going good.

According to Tuyet, ensuring that her children learn and retain the Vietnamese language is critical to retaining the Vietnamese culture. Tuyet believed her efforts to help her children preserve their culture while promoting their integration with the Canadian culture further benefitted her children, as these actions helped them to become culturally rich.

Similarly, Hong believes it is crucial to teach her children to retain their mother tongue and Vietnamese culture because they were born in Canada:

That's what I want to tell my kids!  
Even though they're Canadian; they're born here [and]  
they speak the [English] language, but they're still [Vietnamese]...  
They go outside and people look at them and they still say,  
'You're Asian. You're not Canadian.'

Even though they're Canadians, they're Asian, right?  
So, I keep telling my kids that.  
I keep still telling them to speak the Vietnamese language at home  
so they don't forget their roots.

Oh yes! Because they're Canadians anyway...  
They're more like Canadians than Vietnamese.  
The only thing is that they look Vietnamese.  
But, I think they think they're more like Canadians.

Just like you.  
If your parents talk to you, you still have a little Vietnamese in you,  
but then the way that you think and everything,  
you think like Canadian now.  
But that's good because you adapted both cultures.

To strengthen their culture, Hong tried to make sure they celebrate all Vietnamese holidays every year and regularly gather with the Vietnamese community within their locale:

You go to every year. You have some kind of celebration.  
Like Vietnamese New Year.  
That way, you still keep the culture in your life and through your kids.  
... You're teaching them that they have Vietnamese roots in them

so they should know... some kind of the culture that they still have to keep.  
That's the connection that you do every year...  
[For example], you have some parties or celebrations...

Contrasting the importance of strengthening her family's belonging to the Vietnamese culture, Tuyet emphasizes the importance of interacting with the host culture and its community in order to extend the sense of belonging between both cultures for her children. Her rationale is that at some point after living, working, and raising her children in Canada, the host locale and its community have become her family's permanent home. Reflecting on her experience, Tuyet suggests that Vietnamese immigrants can risk being 'stuck' and remaining dislocated within the host country if they only socialize with their ethnic enclave, hindering their own adaptation:

You know, having Vietnamese community is good.  
But beside that, you remember that you live in this country.  
You have to know your life.  
Deal with the Canadians.

You cannot live in small group. Yeah.  
Small group is for you. Besides that, you share.  
But you remember,  
you have to deal with the big group, the Canadians because why?

You live with Canadians...  
If you go to just the Vietnamese group/community  
you have to stay there.  
[You will get] stuck there and you [will] not learn.

Similar to Tuyet, Hong was mindful to teach her children to cautiously balance the time spent between Canadian and Vietnamese community, and to avoid the temptation to be drawn solely into only staying with the Vietnamese community in order to maintain their connection to the host community:

For me, when I come here it meant I have to learn to live with the people here because that's the only way that you have to connect with the country that way.  
If you still like you [can] keep to Vietnamese,  
you don't learn the language, you don't learn anything;  
[then] how can you can you go to work because  
it's mostly it's for the living you have to do.

You have to learn to adapt into the new country because  
it's for financial [reason].  
You have to work, you have to be connected because

you don't want to be isolate yourself in your Vietnamese [community].  
You just have to be connected with the outside.

You have to socialize with people who you encounter with...  
Well, more and more [I] do that, [I] start to change to who I am right now today.  
AND also, you have to be open-minded... or you will never adapt.  
You can never... survive with the people around you.

Adding emphasis to Hong's words, Tuyet suggests staying closed off with only the Vietnamese community can leave one dependent on this community to survive and not develop the necessary skills and resources within the broader community to help their children live within the host culture:

So, you know you don't need English [when] you live there.  
If you suddenly you move somewhere that don't have Vietnamese community,  
how do you live with Canadians?  
And your children need [your] help.

So, you still talk with Vietnamese community.  
It's good because you keep the culture,  
but remember, the major [is] you live with Canadians.

This connects back to Tuyet's quote that was presented earlier in the chapter where she emphasizes the importance of immigrants learning the host language to achieve independence both of the family and of the community. Here, she stresses that it is equally important for immigrants to teach their children these skills through living and interacting with the host community while still maintaining their ties to their Vietnamese community.

Tuyet and Hong's narratives suggest that it was the parents' responsibility to ensure their children learn and retain their Vietnamese culture while helping them to integrate to the Canadian life and culture, thereby promoting children bilingualism. The experiences shared by Tuyet and Hong's reflect the extensive time and efforts many Vietnamese parents had to engage in order to teach and strengthen her children's connection to their Vietnamese culture. According to Tuyet, their efforts have paid off, as she has seen the number of Vietnamese communities increased and grow across Canada, and their children are playing an integral role in promoting and sustaining them:

So, you see [in] many cities, [there are] many Vietnamese communities...  
After working, now the people relax more.

Now, the people working a lot more for Vietnamese community.  
And you know, in the big city, I saw many children;

they go to school and they learning and they [came] back  
to service and work with Vietnamese community

Yes, you know now, Vietnamese [children] are now grown up now.  
They have Vietnamese television.  
You can watch it or listen to the radio.  
A lot of them work for the Vietnamese community.

It's been 30 years over, and the people build up the community more stronger.  
And they still keep the children in touch with the community, and  
they be back and help the community.  
That's why you know, we can connect and we [are] happy here.

So, we see here is enough.  
Yeah, we can have Vietnam in here [now].

**Strengthen belonging by practicing family/collectivist identity.** Combining what I have learned from the analysed narratives, from my own personal experiences, and from my research of Vietnamese culture (Do, 1999), I can confidently state that family is the most valued of all social units in Vietnam. “Hieu,” also known as filial piety, is one of the basic virtues of Vietnamese culture and it refers to the unconditional love, care, and respect that children give to their parents (Do, 1999). Here, in Western culture this is commonly recognized as practicing collectivism. My participants’ narratives reflect family collectivism as a core value at the heart of Vietnamese culture. For these participants, their identity of being Vietnamese was often equated with being collectivists. In addition to preserving their Vietnamese culture, parents often teach family collectivism by practicing these values in the home for their children to witness. This practice was composed of providing financial support, providing emotional support, and ensuring children’s future.

In Tuyet’s home, she and her husband taught their children about family collectivism by financially supporting their family and siblings that were still living in Vietnam after they arrived in Canada. Here, she describes how her obligation to her family remains important even after having her own family in Canada:

Very happy because what we want ...  
Important. We know over there [is] very hard times for our family.

That's the culture about Vietnamese.  
We always live [for] our family. Big family.

Even when you get married, you still responsible for your family  
Your father and your mom and you help your sisters, brothers.  
So that's why we work. For all of the people.  
Yeah. So, that's one of the reason.

In Minh's experience, he practiced family collectivism by working hard and providing for his family financially. When I explore Minh's thoughts about the life he has built for himself in Canada, Minh shared with me that he considers his story to be a successful one; he built his own company from scratch, he currently owns two homes in Vancouver, and he has been able to put his children through private school from kindergarten to grade 12. To support this, he goes into great detail to describe how he could afford to give his son extra tutoring support when he struggled in school:

He mostly [gets] straight A's, but there are times he's stuck.  
Like have trouble with math or social studies then  
we have money to send him to another school at night for a couple of hours  
to clear the problems. For a few times.  
After that he understand clearly the problems then he stop  
and he keep going and keep on the same level all the time.

Because student I find now because I have experience;  
if you are not good in school for one subject and you are stuck  
and then next year your marks get gets down and you want to quit.  
You want to drop out.

That's what happened to me.  
Because I cannot continue because I don't understand English  
and I cannot study.  
So, I just want to get out.  
I don't want my children like that.

Ensuring his son has a positive experience with education is important to Minh because he had a negative experience with school after he arrived in his locale; it was filled with struggles and there was no one to help him. He did not want his children to experience what he had in school, especially when he can afford to do something to help them. As well, Minh emphasized that he is most proud of his success as a father and as a husband:

... for me, I work from my hands,  
my sweat,



to become this.  
So my wife is very proud of me. My children look up to me.

And my children also do the same what I'm doing.  
I'm very happy that I'm their father, guiding my children to see it.  
I can see my children are also very good  
and I am happy with it.

Sometimes it's important not with the money,  
but I am success with my family.  
I am success with my children.  
That's what I see. I'm success with children.

But not the money.  
Success doesn't mean only money or things you see,  
but success is you happy with your life,  
with your family.

Success is when you are happy  
and your family is happy.  
Happy marriage. Happy children.  
Your children are good.

Minh engaged his own definition of being 'successful' as having a happy family; his children are doing well in school, and he has the love and respect of his family.

**Strengthen belonging by bridging both Vietnamese and Canadian culture together.** For this group, the participants' efforts to strengthen and extend belonging through promoting children and family bilingualism is a dynamic process; as the parents are making efforts to preserve the Vietnamese culture at home, their children are engaging with the Canadian culture while they were at school and in the broader community. The results can lead to conflicts between these individuals and their children.

In their experiences they had to negotiate which Vietnamese cultural practices to keep and let go, and which Canadian cultural values to adopt in the best interest of their family. Hong, for example, explained her efforts to steer away from the strict traditional practice of parenting in Vietnam and to be more flexible with her own children:

I let my kids think for themselves...  
They can choose whatever they want to do, but the thing is,

in Vietnam it's like, "You have to do this. You have to do that."  
But in here, it's like, "Okay, I want you to do that, but if you don't it, it's okay."

The main thing is I just have to talk to them.  
Well, I like it because the way in here [is] I [try] to talk to my kids  
just like you're friends. A lot of things I learn from that.  
I just want to be friends with my kids instead of being a [traditional parent].

Being a parent, I have to keep telling them to do this and that [and]  
they just [may not listen]...  
so I just trying to let them decide what they want to do.  
I DON'T force them like in Vietnam [where] lots of people [will] say,  
"Oh, your kids go out and you have to be this and this and that."

You force them too much and the kids will be more depressed....  
So, I let her or him decide what they want to be in their life.  
[For example], my daughter wants to marry Caucasian, [that's] fine.  
[As long as] she's happy, that's okay.

But, well, [I said], "This is your what decision. You have to live with it."  
That's more like opening up. I think that's more [what] I adopted.  
It's kind of like I let them be more open up... and they open up to me, and  
I find that way we can just connect better than [I] tell them what to do.  
Usually kids... when you tell them to do one thing, they just do the opposite!

Yeah, I find that they can just talk to me and they can joke to me  
rather than [me] being a very strict parent and they just keep it to themselves  
and they don't like to talk [to me].  
But even when I open up, but I don't think my son opens up to me.  
Sometimes he does. He does now!

According to Hong, she chose to be more flexible in her parenting practices, giving her children more freedom to make their own decisions. This decision allowed her to achieve an egalitarian relationship with her children, where they communicate more openly with one another, unlike the patriarchal relationship that is more commonly practiced in Vietnam (Do, 1999).

While Hong was open to allowing her children more independence than she had from her parents after they arrived in Canada, she insisted on keeping certain Vietnamese parenting practice and passing the cultural value of respecting elders to her children:

... They are out there everyday and I don't want to keep them [bounded].  
BUT STILL, I have some strict rules [from] my own culture. Like I said.  
I keep something that is really good from my culture

and something that is too strict or whatever, I discard it.

So, I adopted some of the new culture in here [to raise my children].  
... [For example], I won't let my kids sleeping over [at their] friends' place.  
I don't want to do that because... I [want] to protect my own kids.  
I'm just crazy about that.

I don't know what they're doing over there.  
If anything happen to them when they're sleeping over at their friend's house,  
I'll regret it for the rest of my life.  
I will be blaming myself for the rest of my life if anything happens to them.

So, I just make sure that they're at home with me.  
If anything happens, it happens at home and I'll be there and  
I won't feel so guilty or something like that...

I always tell them, but it's up to them  
to respect their elders and they still do that...  
It's a good thing to keep....  
Nowadays, when kids go to school, they don't teach [them] that.  
They only teach [children] other things, but nothing like [manners].

You have to respect your elders...  
In Vietnam, it's very important thing [to learn] when you first go to school.  
You have to respect your elders.  
You have to respect your elders.

Similar to Hong, Minh turns to both Vietnamese and Canadian culture to help him in parenting his children. Also, he was willing to be flexible, deciding to apply the specific approaches from both culture that provides him the most help with his children:

I see I've changed.  
I'm not the same like Vietnamese in Vietnam.  
The way I think is a little bit more Canadian,  
but still Vietnamese.

More heavy in Canadian than Vietnamese,  
but still there. Vietnamese culture still there.  
Just like the way I raised my children.  
It's more in Vietnamese.

Just like the way I'm thinking.  
I apply both and see which one is good and use it.  
Which one is more benefit for me, I'm going to use it.  
Just like that.

It's good to know 2 cultures.  
If I see which one is good, I use it.  
Vietnamese values.  
Still hold onto some...

One clear example that Minh gave was describing his decision to steer away from the traditional Vietnamese practice of applying a double standard towards the gender of his children, allowing boys more freedom than girls. He provided an example of not allowing gender to dictate how he would raise his daughter:

... Let's say the parents don't want the children to play somewhere because you are a girl.  
Vietnamese parents don't want the girl to go out after 10pm, but for me, I see the situation different.

I see that IF she goes safe with friend and I know who her friend is, I'm okay.  
Just like that. That's how I make decision [as a Canadian].  
But some [Vietnamese] parents say, 'No, you cannot go like that. You are a girl.' They don't let her go too.

But for me, it depends.  
[When] I make a decision, I [think about it].  
Not every time I go, but I can see [whether] it's safe or not, good or not, good friend or bad, and then I make a decision.

I'm more open. More open and  
More free to other people around.

Minh believes he is able to approach parenting with more flexibility than his Vietnamese peers. He attributes this to the evolution of his cultural identity in the 33 years he has been in Canada:

Yes. I can see that I changed a lot compared to people in Vietnam because I live here [a long time].  
I don't know when I started to change, but now I can feel that I've changed a lot.

Yeah. Maybe about 10 years [ago]  
I see that I've changed.  
I can figure out; I can see myself that I've changed.  
But before that, I didn't see that I changed yet.

It just happened.  
It slowly happened,  
but you don't know until later on  
you realized 'Oh! I've changed a lot'.

Hmm. I'd say I'm Canadian.

I've adopted more Canadian [traits].  
I am more in Canadian than Vietnamese.  
With the people about my age that came the same time here,  
I see them [being] too much Vietnamese.  
But I changed a lot.

I don't know, but I just feel happy with the way Canadian and  
I feel comfortable so I feel more Canadian.  
Unless I make decisions in a group with the same age of people  
who came to Canada at same time.

Those people make decisions the same way Vietnamese people think.  
But I make decision in the same way Canadian think.  
That's how it is.

During my research on the topic for this study, I learned that many Vietnamese individuals, especially youths, encountered discriminations during their resettlement. Yet, I felt relieved to learn that the majority of my participants did not encounter discrimination in the three decades that they have been living in Canada; rather, they had very positive experience with the people in their locale. The exception to this was Hong, who shared two memorable experiences of encountering racism on a personal and community level. On a personal level, Hong and her family experienced discrimination from their neighbours immediately after they purchased their first home together:

... I remember one time when my parents bought the house on Hillcrest area  
and those people [living around there] were really racist.  
They [threw] eggs and stuff like that into my windows....  
People [didn't] understand us; they were racist.

Hong and her family were angry that they were personally targeted, and her father and older brother took non-aggressive actions to protect their family, and to demonstrate to their neighbors that they would not tolerate this act:

When we got that [house egged], my parents just got mad and we got mad too.  
[We wondered], "Why are they doing that to us?  
We didn't do anything."  
So we had to do something to protect ourselves.

So my dad would get a... pellet gun...  
Yeah, he just took it out and  
he and my brother just walked around the property and

just keeping an eye out.

He just kept loading that gun and keep doing that.  
He didn't shoot anyone, but he's doing that to show them that  
we are not the ones you can just keep doing that to us.

So when they saw that, I think they just realized that  
we're not someone you can abuse easily.  
So they just stopped doing that. Yeah. Yeah.  
We just have to cope with [discriminations].

People [can be] understanding, [and] it's okay.  
If they don't, that's fine. We don't interact with them anymore.  
The stereotype people, we don't care about them.

Not long after, their neighbours stopped egging their house. Her family came to understand that the neighbours carried this act out of jealousy and ignorance; the neighbours did not know that her family was able to buy a house because the entire family collectively put all of their savings together in order to do so:

Like they just don't even know us! They're just racist...  
Lots of people are like that.  
They don't like us because we work hard, right?  
Well, we work hard.

So, we saved some money - the whole family together.  
We worked hard and saved some money and we got the house.  
They just [thought], "Why is it so easy for you to get the house?"...  
That's why I think it's more like jealousy...

So, they don't like us so that's why they [thought], "You shouldn't get that."  
... The thing is that Caucasian people don't understand us;  
[our] family is more important.  
We can pull family together and make it work.

According to Hong, this experience raised her awareness to the cultural difference between Canadians and Vietnamese with respect to valuing family; she engaged Canadian culture as valuing an individualistic society, whereas, her Vietnamese culture values a collectivist society. She learned that it was an advantage for her children to belong in the host culture by extending and strengthening their practice of family/collectivist identity.

On the broader community level, Hong witnessed a community leader broadcasting an unjust stereotype about the Vietnamese community. This incident occurred in 1993/1994 at the community level. During that time, some Vietnamese individuals in her locale were committing crimes, and the police chief made a public statement in the newspaper generalizing the entire Vietnamese community as drug dealers:

I just [remembered]. One time...there was the head of the police.  
I think his name was...Sigma... I can't remember [exactly].  
He was on the news and he addressed one thing;  
he said, "Most of the Vietnamese communities are drug dealers."  
He said, "Vietnamese communities are drug dealers!"

And we, together, a whole Vietnamese community -  
at that time, not very much people and Vietnamese families here -  
and my sister was the leader of the Vietnamese community here and  
we actually went up to them and we all protested to them and  
said we want him to say he's sorry about that because  
he cannot address us [as], "All Vietnamese are drug dealers".

Hong and many other Vietnamese people were outraged at this public act of stereotyping Vietnamese people, as this police chief had the power to brand their community in this small town, and influenced how the broader community viewed Vietnamese people from then on. Hong's sister organized a protest where the small Vietnamese community joined with multicultural society to protest against police chief's discriminating statements and demanded he recant or rephrase his statement:

... It was 1993 or 1994 or something like that.  
And then we all stick together with the community and the multicultural society  
and we just protest and we wanted him to REPHRASE what he had SAID.  
"All Vietnamese communities are drug dealers!"  
He cannot say that.

Oh, finally he said 'sorry'... He said he didn't mean that.  
Well, you know I think I remember him saying,  
'Well, SOME of them are not drug dealers.'

To support the validity of their protest, they challenged him by presenting the evidence at the courthouse – the narrator and her sister did translation work and when they were at the court house, the majority of criminals they saw were Caucasian Canadians – and of Vietnamese people working and being contributing members in their town:

My sister work[ed] at the courthouse.

We go there every day.  
We can see a lot of people - drug dealers and everything.  
They were mostly Caucasian!

So... just think about the whole, large population and  
Vietnamese people are just a little bit [of] that.  
But of course, we have some people commit a crime, and  
[the public] cannot just address it as all of us doing that.

[We think], "Well, what about your community?  
You do have that everyday at the courthouse too.  
So, you cannot address us as we are all doing that.  
We have people who are good citizens like my brother  
[who] has the shop for a long time."

We just show them all of these [Vietnamese] people who work hard.  
They are good citizens.  
[They] cannot just combine them all together and say that about us.  
So, I think finally, he just said, "Sorry about that."  
Yeah, I think [it was a public apology].  
Or we just have to make it appear to the public.

According to Hong, it felt very satisfying to fight against discrimination and to  
hold leaders accountable for their actions:

It felt good!  
We just have to fight for what we believe in, right?!  
I know there's some [Vietnamese] people who are drug dealers...  
There's Caucasian people who are good people, but there are bad people too,

So are we. We are human beings.  
Some of us are good and some of us are bad,  
but you cannot say that [about all of us].  
It felt good that when we fight for our rights and for our beliefs.

Their protest against the stereotype about Vietnamese people was effective because  
it involved working together with the Vietnamese community and fighting for their voice  
to be heard:

That's another thing. That's why I said... we have to stick together.  
The community. We have to stick together.  
You cannot fight back with just one people.  
You cannot say anything like that....

For Hong, fighting racism on a community level with the support of Vietnamese  
community and the broader community (e.g., multicultural society) cemented her



family's belonging to their locale and demonstrated to their community that Vietnamese culture has a voice and place within their community, and have the support of the broader community. While these experiences with discrimination can harden some immigrants' view of the host culture and prevent them from trusting the dominant culture, Hong walked away from these experiences more empowered and these experiences helped to strengthen her belonging to her community.

## **Chapter 5.**

### **Discussion**

This study aimed to answer the question: “What do the stories of Vietnamese refugees reveal about their experiences of adapting to the Canadian host culture?” I used narrative inquiry, a qualitative methodology, to explore the stories of the participants’ in this study. Thematic analysis of my participants’ narratives revealed that this group of Vietnamese refugees made meaning of their lives and their experiences of adaptation by making sacrifices, by connecting with the Canadian host culture and locale, and by extending this sense of belonging through promoting children and family bilingualism in order to achieve belonging within the Canadian host culture. In this chapter, I will begin by comparing the results in this study to the existing literature on Vietnamese refugee immigration and adaptation; for example, I will discuss how the theme and categories conceptualized from the participants’ stories are supported by and contribute to the current literature. In addition, I will highlight the insights gained from exploring the role of location on the participants’ resettlement and adaptation to Canada and present Bhatia’s dialogical model of acculturation to explain Vietnamese refugees’ process of acculturation to the Canadian culture. Next, I will address the implications for counselling based on the results. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by outlining the limitations of this study, providing suggestions for future research, and sharing my thoughts on my experience of working on this research topic.

#### **5.1. Comparison of Results to Existing Literature**

Within the theme of belonging, several issues emerged from the participants’ stories that present as critical for counsellors and other immigrant workers (e.g., settlement workers), to be aware of in their work with Vietnamese refugees and

possibly, with other refugees, and these issues include: balancing financial obligations, extending the time frame for receiving practical support, understanding the relationship between language and adaptation, and recognizing vulnerable populations within the general refugee population.

**Balancing financial obligations.** The participants' stories serve as a reminder of the incredible obstacles and sacrifices that refugees have to overcome to arrive safely in their host country. However, making it to Canada does not mean they are free from carrying the trauma of their experience with them, such as separating from or losing their loved ones along their journey, or experiencing guilt from being the one who survived the arrival in Canada. In addition, participants reported that they faced significant financial pressure after they arrived in Canada. This included the responsibility of repaying the Canadian government for their transportation loans, sending remittance to their family in Vietnam, and sustaining themselves and their own family in Canada (Johnson & Stoll, 2013; Multicultural Canada, 2013). The journey to survive and to belong began when they left Vietnam, and it continued for a significant period of time as they settled in Canada.

The obligation of remittance could be considered the most stressful issue that overshadowed the participants' experience of resettlement and adaptation to their host locale, and this was supported by a study by Johnson and Stoll (2013). In their study, Johnson and Stoll (2013) conducted focus groups with Vietnamese and Sudanese refugee leaders and settlement workers who presented their views regarding Vietnamese and Sudanese refugee remittance practices and the impact of this obligation on the remitter. Relating to their findings with the Vietnamese focus groups, the researchers found that during the early years of their resettlement, remittance was an urgent obligation for the Vietnamese refugees that arrived in Vancouver, British Columbia, between 1979 and 1990. The Vietnamese refugee leaders shared stories that mirrored the significant effects that the obligation of remittance had on the participants in this study. These effects included reduced money available for living in Canada; working multiple, minimum-wage jobs; encountering conflicts with their own family; and feeling guilt or pride, depending on whether they have met their remittance obligation (Johnson & Stoll, 2013). For the majority of the participants in this study,

working multiple jobs meant there was little time for school or for improving their English; thus, many participants sacrificed their own opportunities to develop their English fluency and skills training in order to meet their remittance obligation.

The silver lining is revealed when one carefully listens to the participants' motivations underlying the remittance obligation. During the initial years of resettlement, the need for remittance is great and urgent because the participants wanted to support their family who were still struggling financially under the political situation in Vietnam (Johnson & Stoll, 2013). However, this need diminished as the participants were able to sponsor their family, help their family become self-sufficient, and/or North American trade relations with Vietnam evolved and improved during the mid-1990s, allowing the people of Vietnam more access to economic opportunities (Johnson & Stoll, 2013). When Vietnamese refugees achieved safety and freedom in Canada, their memories of what life was like in their home country were still in the forefront of their minds. Despite having to juggle the expectations of family members back in Vietnam and the limited financial resources they have in Canada, Vietnamese refugees reported feeling proud and being able to sleep at night knowing their remittance was helping to improve their family's quality of life back in Vietnam (Johnson & Stoll, 2013). In the following excerpt, Tuyet exemplified this grappling tension of feeling pressured and proud at the same time:

Yeah, but you know, after years and years,  
after 30 years and I [am] happy.  
I help my parents and my sisters and my brothers.  
Yeah.

When we were in the ocean and we have no food in the boat,  
I just prayed with my religion for if I'm still alive,  
I come here and I help my parents.  
I remember now. Still a tough time [at] that time.

Yeah.  
When you eat here. Our food is here, but  
you remember that over there, they don't have.  
Yeah.

Yes, [that was a lot of pressure to meet],  
but now I am happy.  
I did help my parents and my family back home.

**Extending the time frame for receiving practical support.** When I explored the topic of their sponsorship process to Canada, the participants shared with me their gratitude to Canada and its citizens for sponsoring them, for providing temporary financial assistance, and for giving them the opportunities to start a new life. During the time I spent interviewing the participants, I learned that they are very proud Vietnamese individuals who prefer to work and not to depend on the government, as reflected by their willingness to work at any job they could obtain. Yet, their stories of encountering challenges and personal responsibilities during the initial settlement years suggest the arbitrary time frame imposed by the government support (e.g., one year of financial assistance and six months of English classes) contributed to the struggles the participants encountered after their arrival. The literature available on the group of Vietnamese refugees that resettled in Canada during the 1980s have found that obtaining language fluency and occupation are two top priorities for immigrants to establish a successful trajectory for adaptation to the new country (Brown, Schale, & Nilsson, 2010; Do, 1999; Tsai, 2003). However, the subtheme, making sacrifices to belong, that emerged from this study presents a need for extending the time frame of the resources and support that was offered by the government during the first year. For example, Hong felt cheated of the missed opportunities and possibly, a different future outcome, when she compared the limited support she received in Canada to the extended support that her American counterparts received in the United States:

Oh, I always think about that...  
the limit that the government give [us] is only 1 year  
and they only allow [us] 6 months for ESL.  
I think the government should have give[n] us more time, you know,  
considering that [we] don't know any English at all!  
I mean, for 6 months we wouldn't be able to communicate.

To help us to learn more and get better,...  
they should have allowed us more time in school,  
instead of just kind of limit us to 6 months and then kick us out, and  
[tell us], "you have to go and find jobs yourself."

I understand that the government is limited, but if  
there's any chance to give us more time for study and that way,  
we can get better job, better life, you know.

It really affect [our future] because... with limited English,

what can [we] do?  
[We] cannot work in a place [we] wanted.  
[We] just have to work in a place where they don't really need [English skills]  
like bakeries and dish washing and something like that.  
That's all we can do, right?

I was just SO disappointed at that time when  
I connect with my friends in the states and they said,  
"Oh yeah, I'm still going to studying. I'm going to study this and that and  
I'm going to university."

And I'm just kind of like, "[This] sucks! I'm here."  
Yeah, I wouldn't be able to go to the whole thing.  
I was stuck with 6 months and that's it.  
I'm thinking that I'm stuck here... finding a job...That's it!

It is [sad]! Thanks for the government sponsor us here, but then ...  
They just kind of like, "Okay, I take you here.  
I pay a year for you to live and that's it! You be alone!"  
... You know, at that time it was SO hard because they said, "that's it"...

Also, we still have family back home and we had to think about them.  
Yeah. I got freedom, ... but I cannot achieve whatever I want because  
I'm still limited on... the language and everything.  
[I] cannot achieve what [I] want.

So. I think the main thing is about the language....  
If you don't have the full understanding of the language,  
you can get through,  
but you cannot achieve the higher goals that you want to, right?

Similarly, other participants' narratives in chapter four, relating to limited resource and sources of support, demonstrate that it was difficult for the participants to juggle both tasks of attending English classes and of obtaining employment after their arrival in their locale. The imposed conditions that came with government support included only six months free of basic English classes, regardless of their proficiency level, and the free English classes had to be attended full-time immediately after arrival to Canada. Without alternative options, they were compelled to choose between developing their English proficiency and finding employment, and many chose the latter because the remittance obligation and sustaining their family were higher priorities at that time. As a result, many Vietnamese refugees sacrificed their opportunities to learn English in order to work and meet their financial obligations to their family (Johnson & Stoll, 2013). The viewpoints provided by the participants on

the time frame suggest these restrictions were isolated to the Canadian context and Canadian immigration policy. Based on the results of this study, an extension of government assistance would assist refugees to optimize their long-term adaptation experience (e.g., being able to reach economic independence sooner) and minimize the continuous struggles with limited support (e.g., not being able to access well-paying occupations due to their low English speaking abilities).

#### **Understanding the relationship between language and adaptation.**

Regardless of the outcome of their adaptation experiences, all participants agreed that obtaining host language competency is critical for successful adaptation. They reported that they would have continued to learn and to develop their English proficiency if they had been given more opportunities to do so. In addition to extending the time frame to access free English classes, participants suggested English classes could be made more accessible for refugees during the early resettlement years. For example, they wanted the option to attend classes at night while they work during the day. Another example was having the option to postpone their attendance to English classes during the first few years of resettlement. This would allow the participants time to settle into their locale and organize their financial obligations so that when they were ready to attend English classes, they would be more focused and encountered a positive experience with learning English. This would contribute to a positive cascading effect, as they would be encouraged to continue to develop their English competency and to invest their own money in order to do so. These options, if available at the time, would have made learning English more accessible for Vietnamese refugees by reducing the pressure to choose between work or attend English classes; instead, they would have been afforded the option to do both. Specifically for the participants, availability of options would have prevented the regrets they felt for not utilizing their opportunities to learn English after their arrival. Improving options for refugees to access English development can have a significant impact on their future employment opportunities and quality of life, as they provide a stronger foundation from where the refugees can begin to build on after their arrival in Canada. Obtaining English proficiency sooner would translate to improving their opportunities to find better jobs with better pay, and improve their quality of life (Tsai, 2003).

A literature review on language and immigration adaptation for Vietnamese refugees yielded many studies (Chris, Schale, & Nilsson, 2010; Oppedal, Roysamb, & Sam, 2004; Tsai, 2003) that support a strong relationship between language and adaptation. For example, Oppedal and colleagues (2004) noted that host language competence is a critical and necessary step for immigrants to achieve in order to obtain acceptance and be acknowledged as part of the host culture. This supports the second subtheme of this study's findings; to achieve belonging, participants in this study connected with the Canadian culture and their resettlement locale by acquiring English proficiency, by living/functioning/existing within the locale, and by applying their coping skills to overcome challenges of resettlement and adaptation.

In addition, the theme of belonging that emerged from this study contributed to the current literature by expanding on the topic of language and Vietnamese refugee immigration and adaption: language is an essential facilitator for participants to live and to belong to the host culture. Relating to this study, language is the "thread" that dictates the strength of the participants' sense of belonging to Canadian culture. In chapter four, Mai's narrative was presented to demonstrate that when the thread is strong, due to strong language proficiency, then that sense of belonging is also much stronger. In contrast, Lan's narrative was presented to show that if the thread is weak, due to weak language proficiency, then the sense of belonging is weaker. With stronger language fluency, Mai had more advantages compared to Lan; Mai was able to continue to develop her English fluency and to access better employment as her English improved. As a result, Mai was able to obtain a higher income and quality of life. The advantage to better employment is consistent with previous research by Beiser and Hou (2001); their 10-year study on language, acquisition, unemployment, and depressive disorder among Southeast Asian refugees found that refugees who achieved fluency in English were correlated to obtain better employment opportunities.

Comparing and contrasting between Mai and Lan on their process of arrival, resettlement, adaptation, and living in Canada for the past three decades also highlighted a relationship between women refugee and prior education and its influence on employment. Mai's teaching profession in Vietnam reflected an individual who has achieved formal education in Vietnam prior to arriving in Canada, whereas,



Lan did not receive formal education in Vietnam. As discussed in chapter four, possessing formal education and a well paying job meant Mai had acquired study skills and job search skills, respectively, that she applied to pursue further education and search for employment in Canada. The findings in Beiser and Hou's (2001) study supported the advantages that Mai had over Lan. For example, Beiser and Hou (2001) observed that immigrants and refugees that possessed middle-class status, formal education in their home country, and familiarity with the English language prior to immigrating to Canada – such as the case of Mai's experience – predicted higher English fluency and opportunities compared to other women refugees with limited formal education or professional training in their home country.

According to Tsai (2003), obtaining language fluency and occupation are two top priorities for immigrants to establish a good adaptation to the new country. This is reflected in the stories of struggles, sacrifices, and compromises that the participants had to endure during the first ten years of their resettlement in Canada. Also, the participants' stories remind us how the advantages and disadvantages that immigrants may encounter are dependent on their ability to possess the host language, and how timing and opportunity to learn the host language can impact their adaptation, their quality of life, and their journey to belong within Canada.

**Vulnerable populations within the general refugee population.** The narratives shared by Minh and Lan describe some of the struggles often faced by immigrant youth and immigrant women, respectively, and demonstrate how the lack of access to support services in their communities can negatively impact their resettlement and adaptation. Lan's story serve as a reminder that there are pockets of vulnerable populations within the general refugee population, which may require additional support during the resettlement and adaption stages in order to prevent development of psychological issues during the settlement process.

In chapter four, I presented Lan's narrative, describing her mental break down to demonstrate the mental health consequence that can occur for immigrant and refugee women who were isolated in their new locale and facing many barriers during their resettlement to their new locale. According to Guruge, Collins, and Bender

(2010), there is a set of social determinants that immigrants face following their migration to Canada that can negatively influence their mental health. These eight social determinants include social isolation; language barriers; financial and employment constraints; role reversal; new intergenerational struggles; racism; and discrimination (Guruge et al., 2010). Lan's narrative demonstrates her struggles with the first four determinants: social isolation, language barriers, financial and employment constraints, and role reversal. According to the study conducted by the Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees (1988), Lan's situation would fit their criteria of double jeopardy, as mentioned in chapter two, because she was bereft of important sources of support during difficult times and she continued to worry about the welfare of her family that was left behind. These determinants interacted at the time when she was most stressed – her children were young and she raised them on her own in a community where she had no access to emotional or social support – to trigger the onset of her mental break down.

Lan's experience is supported by previous literature on the relationship between Vietnamese immigrant and refugee women and mental health issues. For example, Beiser, Johnson, and Turner (1993) studied Southeast Asian refugees and discovered that loss of income was the significant link between unemployment and depression. When Lan chose to remain at home to raise her two children, it was often frustrating for her to reconcile the loss of income and self-worth that was attached to being employed. The frustrations developed into being overwhelmed and depressed regarding the outcome of her financial situation. Lan's situation is supported by a study conducted by Brown and colleagues (2010) who examined Vietnamese immigrant and refugee women's mental health in relation to age of arrival, length of stay, income, and English language proficiency; it revealed that Vietnamese women who reported poor English fluency also reported greater mental health distress. According to Brown and colleagues (2010), Vietnamese women with poorer English speaking ability and lacking connection with the host community, such as Lan, experience greater mental distress because they are unable to communicate their needs effectively to other people in their community, and thus, unable to access assistance and support to solve their problems at the presenting symptomatic stage (e.g., feeling overwhelmed and wanting help, needing more financial support, needing

respite care) before it escalates to a mental break down where they can no longer cope with the stressors in their lives. In addition to achieving belonging by possessing host culture competence (Oppedal et al., 2004), it is also critical for this population to possess host culture competence in order to understand the resources available in their community and how to access them. Lan's experience, supported by the literature on Southeast Asian women refugees and immigrants and mental health, suggests more work is needed to determine strategies for reaching out to immigrant women who experience isolation within their locale.

## **5.2. Reflection on the Role of Location**

When I set out to conduct this study, I had planned on exploring how the role of resettlement locale can influence Vietnamese refugees' experience of adapting to Canada. The outcome shows that location is not a critical factor influencing adaptation, as I had expected. As a matter of fact, for the participants in this study, the role of resettlement locale was not relevant; rather, secondary migration was more relevant to these participants in regards to their adaptation to Canada. When these participants arrived in Canada, one of their primary goals was to find work. They struggled to find work, despite their willingness to accept any job that required limited English proficiency. Unable to obtain work a few participants, especially those living in a small town, relocated to Toronto where they could find work. They relocated in order to sustain themselves and their families. Undoubtedly, participants made sacrifices to belong by embarking on secondary migration.

Currently, secondary migration is a common adaptation strategy for many immigrants that arrive in British Columbia. According to the participants in this study, many people immigrate to Vancouver because this city is a hub of international communities that appeal to them. After they arrive, many immigrants find it difficult to obtain employment and embark on secondary migration to other provinces where the economy is more viable for newly arrived immigrants; there are more employment opportunities for them to seek out (Kinnon, 1999; Multicultural Canada, 2013). The participants' economic motivation for secondary migration is supported by the study conducted by Sherrell (2003) with Kosovar refugees; the researcher discovered that if

the host communities in small British Columbian cities, such as Vernon, could provide the Kosovars with the adequate language and training skills to obtain 'meaningful' employment to support their families, the Kosovars were less likely to consider secondary migration to larger cities in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario.

### **5.3. Theoretical Understanding of Adaptation**

When I began research on the topic of this study, I encountered numerous American studies that have been published on Vietnamese refugees and acculturation within the United States and its associated contexts (Berry, 2005; Birman & Tran, 2008; Gellis, 2003; Shapiro et al., 1999). As mentioned in chapter two, there is limited research in the literature regarding the process of acculturation and strategies that Vietnamese immigrants employed following migration to Canada, and this study attempted to glean some insight into this process. In this study, thematic analysis was employed to analyse the participants' narratives of their journey of leaving Vietnam and resettlement in Canada resulting in the theme of belonging that emerged from this process. Understanding how Vietnamese refugees made meaning of their lives and their experiences of adaptation are reflected in the actions participants engaged in to achieve belonging within the Canadian host culture. To bolster the theme of belonging derived from the results of this study, I will discuss below how Sunil Bhatia's (2002) dialogical model of acculturation is suitable to explain how acculturation can be a life long process for the participants in this study and how contextual factors can influence their process of acculturation to Canadian culture.

**Dialogical model of acculturation.** When I first conducted the research on the topic of Vietnamese adaptation and acculturation, I anticipated that Berry's (2005) model of acculturation strategies would be sufficient to help me understand my participants' experiences of acculturating to the Canadian host culture, as this model has been well documented and influential within the area of acculturation research in the field of psychology for the past three decades (Bhatia, 2002). Applying Berry's (2005) model of acculturation, I predicted that the participants who adapted well to the Canadian culture, such as Vietnamese refugees that have obtained good occupations and achieved English proficiency, would have adopted integration as a strategy.

Berry's model would also suggest that those who struggled to learn English and acculturate to Canadian culture, such as individuals who struggled to interact with the host culture would adopt the separation strategy, and remain reclusive in the Vietnamese community. After I interviewed participants, heard their stories, and analyzed their narratives, I came to understand that each participant's process of acculturation is unique and complex, and Berry's (2005) model could not account for the variability that exist between different participants' experiences of acculturation. For example, Lan and Van struggled to learn the English language during their resettlement years and they still have not achieved host language fluency during the three decades that they have been living in Canada, but they managed to live and develop meaningful connections with their host community. Thus, they could not distinctively be categorized as adopting the separation strategy. If I attempted to categorize the participants' experience of acculturation under one of four acculturation strategies, as summarized in chapter two, I would be oversimplifying and generalizing their experiences of adapting to Canada.

In contrast, I found Sunil Bhatia's (2002) dialogical process of acculturation model more appropriate to understanding the participants' process of acculturation because it captures "the psychological complexities, contradictions, and cultural specificities involved" in the experiences of Vietnamese refugee communities (p. 55). According to the studies conducted in the field of acculturation, it is ideal for immigrants to adopt the integration or bicultural strategy (Berry, 2005). However, Bhatia (2002) argues that Berry's theory of integration strategy is limiting due to the central assumption of universality that underlies Berry's theory of integration strategy. Universality assumes that all immigrants experience the same psychological processes during their acculturation to the host culture (Bhatia, 2002). This is not the case with participants in this study. It is not possible for all immigrants to experience the same psychological process of acculturation, as the contexts surrounding their migration and adaptation vary. For example, the participants in this study share a similar motivation for leaving Vietnam, which is to gain freedom, but their migration journey, the reception they received in their new locale, and the challenges they faced after arrival in Canada varied, which means they could not have experienced the same psychological process during acculturation to their host culture.

In addition, the dialogical model of acculturation is suited to assist in gaining a deeper understanding of the context surrounding and contributing to challenges that immigrants and refugees faced during their acculturation (Bhatia, 2002). For example, to understand the acculturation of Vietnamese refugees and possibly, other refugees, researchers and counsellors need to understand the historical, political, and social forces that shape their migratory experience (Gibson, 2001). The participants came from a country where people endured thousands of years of occupation by various external countries, such as France, China, and the United States of America, but they maintained their own unique culture and values despite these occupations. When they finally left their own country, they did it because they could no longer see a future for themselves or for their children under the Communism government. Thus, when the participants arrived in Canada, they brought no personal belongings with them; instead, they carried with them a history of being politically oppressed, but also a rich culture they wanted to sustain, as they adapted and acculturated to Canadian culture.

In addition, drawing from postcolonial and diasporic studies, Radhakrishnan (1996) highlighted the relationship between choice and the process of bicultural integration and acculturation; for Vietnamese refugees, acculturation process is not a matter of individual strategy where immigrants have a choice to integrate seamlessly, adopting the values of the host culture and one's own immigrant group. Rather, Bhatia (2002) proposes the process of acculturation and identity formation that takes place with immigration "involves a constant process of negotiation, intervention, and mediation that is shaped by issues of race, gender, sexuality and power" (p. 59). Relating this concept to the participants in this study, their acculturation process is considered a dynamic process that occurred over the course of three decades. During this time, they were negotiating with the host culture, making sacrifices for their family, and migrating between locales to work, to live, and to sustain themselves, their family, and preserve their culture. In Lan's situation, gender and power, and lack of education interacted to prevent her from accessing the necessary resources to improve her process of acculturation. As a woman who is new to Canada and still practicing the gender discourse relating to women's rights in Vietnam – for example, at that time in Vietnam men have more rights than women – she was not aware that women have legal rights in Canada to obtain child support from the children's father and as a result,

she did not know to pursue that route to obtain the financial assistance she needed to raise her children. Based on the above discussions on the importance of host language acquisition, we know that possessing language fluency equates to having the power to communicate, to obtaining well-paid jobs, and to accessing resources in the community. Isolated and possessing limited English fluency, Lan lacked access to the power that would improve her experience of adapting and acculturating to the host country during her resettlement years.

Last, but not least, acculturation process is strongly influenced by structural and contextual factors in the host country (Bhatia, 2002; Gibson, 2001). According to Berry (2005), the host culture carries great responsibilities to promote successful acculturation when they agree to sponsor refugees; the host city, province, and country must be prepared to adapt national institutions, such as education, health, and labour, to better meet all groups living under the pluralistic society. The narratives offered by the participants suggest many of these services were lacking; for example, the Vietnamese refugees arrived during a period of economic recession in Canada where they had to compete with English speaking Canadians for limited employment available and there was a lack of community agencies and workers to reach out to vulnerable refugee populations isolated in the host community (Kinnon, 1999; Multicultural Canada, 2013). This implies that the host culture needs to share some responsibility for the outcome of the participants' adaptation to Canada (e.g., living in poverty, being underemployed). Indeed, the burden of not being able to achieve the RRP's definition of success cannot be solely placed on the refugees themselves.

#### **5.4. Implication for Counselling**

Studies that have examined help seeking practice among Asian Americans reveal that Asian Americans, especially Vietnamese-Americans, are still underutilizing mainstream mental health services (Nguyen & Anderson, 2005; Phan, 2000). During the interviews for this study, I explored how counselling could play a role in helping Vietnamese refugees to deal with the challenges of their resettlement and adaptation. I asked participants what they thought was important for counsellors to understand about their experience of immigrating to Canada under a traumatized culture. For this

section, I provide insights I have gained from the participants that may contribute to counselling therapists' work with other groups of refugees who arrive in Canada under similar circumstances. I discuss the following six areas: understanding Vietnamese help seeking practices, collaborating with settlement workers, providing education on counselling services, establishing trust, validating Vietnamese refugees' resilience and individual coping strategies, and facilitating their connection to the host locale and community. The suggestions I am proposing are based on my interpretation of the experiences of this specific group of Vietnamese refugees and cannot be generalized to the whole of Canadian refugees.

**Understanding Vietnamese help seeking practices.** In my efforts to explore the cultural practices of help seeking among the participants in this study, I learned that culturally bounded help seeking is restricted to stay within the family boundary. Participants' stories about help seeking suggests it was, and possibly still is, considered a cultural taboo for Vietnamese people to access psychological services outside of their family, that is going to see a counselling therapist for psychological and emotional support. According to Nguyen and Anderson (2005), the stigma associated with mental illness in Asian cultures is a significant factor that prevents many Asian Americans from accessing psychological services. For the participants in this study, carrying out this action would bring shame to their family. If they needed to seek help outside of the family, this behaviour implies that the problem could not be taken care of through their own means or within the family. In addition, participants' stories of help seeking suggest that there is an unspoken discourse that equates to the following phrase, "We do not air our dirty laundry for other people to see," which is taught within Vietnamese culture. According to the following excerpt by Tuyet, an individual can bring embarrassment upon the family if their community, especially if the Vietnamese community, is aware that the individual needs help:

[For example], in Vietnamese community sometimes we have problems.  
Anything happen to you, the culture is  
you don't want the people to know it  
so you keep to hold it.

But when you cannot hold it [anymore], then big problem.  
That's because we don't want to share!  
That's the culture.



You don't want anyone to look at your family and know what happened.

These were the cultural beliefs, related to help seeking, that the participants have carried over from Vietnam and applied it to their new lives in Canada. According to Beiser (1999), the mental health and social services sectors expected an overwhelming demand for health services upon arrival of the Vietnamese refugees in the 1980s, but this demand never materialized. The cultural stigma and shame associated with help seeking practice amongst the Vietnamese culture, as shared by the participants, may have prevented them from voluntarily reaching out for emotional support to cope with the psychological stress associated with the traumatic pre-migratory journey and the challenges faced during their resettlement, such as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and so on.

According to Schulz (1982), in the traditional Vietnamese culture, there is a hierarchy system of help seeking practices that Vietnamese people commonly follow. Supporting what the participants are saying in this study, Schulz (1982) describes helping seeking practice within the traditional Vietnamese culture as a hierarchy system model that Vietnamese people adhere to. Within this system, individuals typically address their problems first within the immediate family, followed by the extended family, if warranted, and then only seek help outside of the family when a situation becomes unmanageable (Nguyen & Anderson, 2005).

The participants in this study have been living, working, raising their families, and interacting with the broader Canadian community for over three decades. According to Tuyet, the Vietnamese community is evolving and is starting to be more open to seeking help and support outside of the family:

Now, we still have [that belief], but after 30 years here  
they are open more.  
If anything happen to your children or happen to your spouse,  
you can see the counsellor and they help you.

Back about 10, 20 years ago, mostly we handle.  
We keep the problem in the family.  
That's when you know sometimes, abuse children  
or abuse between wives and husbands can happen.  
I think now, the Vietnamese people are open more and we are better now.

She believes that it is possible that this group has lived here long enough to learn that it is socially acceptable and encouraged by the Canadian culture to seek professional help. This is consistent with the findings from American studies on acculturation where acculturation to the host country is strongly related with positive attitudes towards seeking psychological help (Luu, Leung, & Nash, 2009). As the time frame for Vietnamese immigrants living in the United States increases, they are more exposed to and accepting of, especially youth and children refugees, to the beliefs, attitudes and knowledge regarding Western practices on help seeking (Luu et al., 2009).

In Hong's case, she never sought counselling or similar types of professional help when she encountered overwhelming stress while raising four young children with limited assistance from her husband and stress that ensued later from her divorce. Rather, she turned to her family for physical and emotional support to get through those stressful times. However, Hong did eventually seek out professional counselling when her son encountered psychological problems; her son was struggling with suicide ideation. At first she attempted the traditional route by trying to solve the problem herself and by turning to her family. After she exhausted her traditional help seeking practices, she realized her son required professional training that extended beyond her family's competency to support her son. While the literature (Nguyen & Anderson, 2005) would consider Hong's action of seeking professional services for psychological problems as resorting to the last recourse, Hong chose to view her actions as reflecting her efforts to extend her repertoire of coping skills to include seeking professional help outside of her family. In addition, Hong reported that the positive experience she encountered with seeking help for her son lead her to consider seeking professional counselling help in the future instead of turning to the Vietnamese community. She learned that the former approach would ensure that her privacy and confidentiality was maintained, whereas the Vietnamese community is not bounded by this professional regulation and rumours of her struggles could get out to the community. These guidelines allowed her to get help for her son while preventing embarrassment for her family; the Vietnamese community was not aware of their situation.

**Collaborating with settlement workers.** During the participant recruitment stage, I was fortunate to receive some assistance by various community-based agencies to post and distribute the participant recruitment advertisements for my study. In this process, I received an opportunity to learn about the broad range of immigrant services offered by these agencies. I was impressed by the availability of specialized programs, services and supports offered for newly arrived immigrants on both Vancouver Island and in mainland Vancouver, especially after hearing from my participants about the dearth of services available when they arrived in their resettlement locale. It would appear that current immigrant services have improved significantly in the past three decades, making the transition to a new life in Canada a little easier for new immigrants (Brown et al., 2010). A settlement worker is often one of the first few people immigrants and refugees come into contact with after they arrive in Canada. According to Mai, the settlement worker serves as a gateway for new immigrants to access services in their resettlement locale that include, and are not limited to, interpreting and translation, assistance with various applications (e.g., social insurance number, medical service plan, child benefits, employment insurance, citizenship, income tax), registering children into the school system, and referrals to community resources (e.g., employment training, housing, recreation, education, social support groups). In speaking with a settlement worker, immigrant clients can become overly comfortable coming for help and sometimes seek the worker out for emotional and psychological support. In these situations people are referred to counsellors who are familiar and entrusted.

I believe it is important for counsellors to build a strong, collaborative relationship with settlement workers in their community. Brown and colleagues (2010) support this finding because one of their study's recommendations for counselling professionals, working with Vietnamese immigrant and refugee women in their transition process, is to develop a relationship with the resettlement agencies and be informed about the programs that are offered to immigrants. For counselling professionals, being aware of the services offered by these agencies can better assist them to effectively develop counselling intervention plans and appropriately facilitate the clients' concerns and goals for counselling. For the settlement worker, this networking process affords them an opportunity to get to know the counsellors and to

become familiar with the counsellors' theoretical approach for working with refugees and immigrants. Once they approve of the counsellors' competency, the counsellors can serve as an additional resource that resettlement workers can utilize as a referral resource. In essence, settlement workers can serve as a bridge, connecting their clients in need of counselling to the counsellors they trust. A symbiotic relationship with settlement workers can bolster the legitimacy of the counsellor and the counselling profession to the immigrant community, especially the Vietnamese community (Brown et al., 2010; Luu & Leung, 2009). Most importantly, establishing this symbiotic relationship is in the best interest of the immigrant clients, as the foundational work of pre-screening counsellors has been conducted ahead of time by the settlement workers and on behalf of the clients to ensure clients can access counselling in a timely manner should the need arise in the future.

**Providing education on counselling services.** Despite the resettlement worker's endorsement of the counsellor, many Vietnamese immigrants still may not feel comfortable seeking out counselling help from someone they have never met. Narratives from participants about their help seeking practice in relation to counselling suggest that many Vietnamese people still lack knowledge about the field of counselling, the role of the counsellors, and how counselling can help them cope with the challenges of resettlement and adaptation in their new locale. In addition, the current literature suggests Vietnamese-Americans still hold cultural assumptions and beliefs about seeking psychological services for mental health issues (Luu & Leung, 2009; Nguyen & Anderson, 2005).

To address this issue, this study suggests providing education about counselling services to newly arrived immigrants in the same environment where they learn about immigrant services. In conjunction with developing a collaborative relationship with settlement workers, counsellors can introduce themselves and provide an informational workshop about their services at one of the support group facilitated by a settlement worker. For example, settlement workers may invite various helping professionals to present at workshops and educate clients about the various services they can access in the community. In this way, immigrants can begin to know the counsellor and feel better to volunteer themselves to go and speak to that

counsellor. Other immigrants, in the future, might more readily ask for the counsellor's contact information, and speak more openly about their struggles. By introducing themselves to psychoeducational groups or workshops that immigrants attend, counsellors provide immigrants opportunities to be familiar with the counsellors, to understand about counselling services, and to clarify any cultural assumptions that would prevent them from accessing counselling.

When addressing Vietnamese refugees in these workshops, counsellors need to emphasize the actions they will take to ensure client privacy and confidentiality (Luu et al., 2009). Supporting Hong's concerns about protecting her family from judgment by the Vietnamese community, Luu and colleagues (2009) believed that Vietnamese people have a more positive attitude to seeking professional psychological help if they are assured that their confidentiality is protected, especially from the Vietnamese community in their locale. As well, it would be important to address the cultural misunderstanding regarding the practice of disclosure in counselling. The practice of disclosure and emotional expression in psychotherapy is a potential barrier that may prevent Vietnamese people from accessing psychological services (Nguyen & Anderson, 2005). This practice may be unfamiliar and uncomfortable for this population (Sue & Sue, 1990), as Vietnamese people are reluctant to talk about issues that can reflect negatively about their family or make them appear weak. While some forms of Western psychotherapy emphasize disclosure of personal problems and feelings as a major part of the healing process, counsellors need to let immigrants know that it does not have to be this way, as the counselling process is different for every individual. Vietnamese clients need to know that counselling is flexible and the process will be focused on the clients' goals for counselling and to access the necessary resources they need to achieve their outcome goals.

Last, but not least, counsellors need to emphasize that the counselling process is non-judgmental. For example, settlement workers may recommend counselling to immigrant parents who encounter cultural conflicts with their children, but the parents often hesitate to pursue counselling referrals because they fear receiving judgments about their parenting skills. According to the participants, this is one stereotype of counselling that may still persist amongst the Vietnamese community. Counsellors will

need to inform newly arrived immigrants that counselling is a safe place where they can share their problems without judgment and the counsellors will work with the parents to develop problem solving strategies that are aligned with their cultural and family values as well as being socially accepted within the Canadian culture. By emphasizing that the counsellor's role is to work with the parents, this approach will validate the parents' roles and convey respect on the part of the counsellor, therefore, increasing the probability that the parents will access counselling.

In essence, if counsellors can articulate clearly to newly arrived immigrants of how counselling can benefit them, these individuals will be more likely to consider counselling as a helpful resource that they can access in the nearer future. In counselling, a therapist can use the counselling tool of 'planting the seed' during a session with a client to introduce a concept that encourage the client to consider different perspectives relating to experience and process in counselling. Similarly, the process of providing education about counselling services at these workshops can serve as planting the seed to inform newly arrived immigrants and refugees that accessing psychological help, such as counselling, can be a safe, confidential, non-judgmental, and culturally respectful. It is accessible when they need it.

**Establishing trust.** The clinical training that I have received in the counselling program has taught me that the foundation of building a therapeutic relationship with any client is dependent upon my ability to establish trust with the client. In order to build trust, I need to understand the context surrounding the client's presenting concerns and their hopes regarding their outcome for counselling. This tenet of relationship building is especially critical in working with this group of Vietnamese immigrants (Nguyen & Anderson, 2005). Phan (2000) investigated the use of services for Vietnamese people with mental illness and discovered that this culture often struggle to trust and seek help from mental health professionals who were not familiar with and accepting of their cultural perspectives. Counsellors can start to build trust with this population by having a deep awareness of their history of colonization and oppression, which was discussed earlier through Bhatia's model of acculturation. It is important to understand how these issues can interplay and influence their adaptation to the Canadian host culture, how they cope, and how they seek help. When

counsellors are aware of their lived experience and history, they can understand how the Vietnamese culture, specifically the generation that escaped Vietnam, have developed mistrust in many social institutions and only feel safe in turning to their family for support, and develop an appreciation for how this small network of support have enabled them to cope with tremendous obstacles thus far. As a result, in the clinical encounter with this group, we can work to establish trust with this group and other refugees by attempting to understand their stories, learning more about their unique predicaments and developing the skills needed to respond effectively (Nguyen & Anderson, 2005).

**Validating Vietnamese refugees' resilience and individual coping strategies.** Kirmayer (as cited in Simich & Andermann, 2014) suggests that as counsellors attempt to understand Vietnamese refugees' stories, it is important that this group's resilience be understood not as the inevitable outcome of some inherent quality or capacity of the individuals, but as a dynamic process of interactions between individuals and the circumstances in which they find themselves. This dynamic process of resilience was demonstrated in the strategies they engaged in to survive their journey of leaving Vietnam, to sustain themselves, to support their family that remained in Vietnam, and to support their own family in Canada, all of which are part of their journey to achieve belonging within the Canadian host culture. It is important for counsellors to validate their process, to reflect their strengths, and to encourage them to apply these resilient strategies to overcome their current challenges in Canada (Hinton et al., 2006). The following set of stanzas shared by Tuyet allows us to understand how she has conceptualized her dynamic process and applied them to help her cope with the challenges of starting a business, raising a young family, and supporting her family back home:

And you know very funny is sometimes,  
my husband, he told me, "Everything [is] okay.  
You believe because when you oversea, you escape in the ocean.  
That's the hard time! That is very very hard, but you passed!

Why you worry about this one?  
If you look back, that was the hard time. Why you struggle to pass this?"  
So, that's what helps a lot. We have to find the way.  
He says, "Not worry about anything. If we are not successful,  
up and we will do it again."

And don't worry. He said, "Don't worry. Just keep on to go."

Yeah and he says, "In here, no one to let us [go] hungry.  
Don't worry. Don't worry.  
Just work in here and if we have nothing,  
the people will help us."

So, that's why it makes us feel better.  
So.. [we] keep on going.

Focus on "Keep working"...  
"Keep working" means never stop.  
If you have trouble or you have difficult time,  
keep on to go. Never stop! Never stop!

If you not successful at this one or at this year, never stop!  
Going. Going.  
If this way is no good, go another way.  
And in the end, we make it.

Yeah, but you know, after years and years,  
after 30 years and I [am] happy.  
I help my parents and my sisters and my brothers.  
Yeah.

When we were in the ocean and we have no food in the boat,  
I just prayed with my religion for if I'm still alive,  
I come here and I help my parents.  
I remember now...

Brown and colleagues (2010) also strongly encourage counselling professionals to empower Vietnamese refugees, especially the women population, to identify their own resources for coping and encourage their clients to utilize them. Similar to understanding the traditional cultural approach to help seeking, it is important to recognize the individual strategies that participants have used that have helped them to get through difficult times.

**Facilitating their connection to the host locale/community.** In chapter four, I showed that part of the participants' journey to achieve belonging within Canada involved making connections to their host locale. They did this by obtaining steady employment and establishing permanent roots, both of which connect back to the practical support that this group was looking for during their adaptation. The participants' narratives suggest that counsellors can provide practical support by



providing employment or career counselling. For example, in Van's situation, upgrading his English classes and undergoing employment training at MOSAIC helped him to obtain a cooking certificate, find steady employment, and an increased wage. This process allowed him to escape the cycle of underemployment. Similarly, other participants also reported improvement in employment opportunities when they engaged in some form of vocational training or upgrading their English skills.

In addition to helping Vietnamese refugees make connections through working and living within their community, it is important for counsellors to encourage immigrants to strengthen their connections through actively engaging in their community. For example, Mai volunteered in various community activities as a way to learn about Canadian life. Her efforts to reach out and to engage with her locale lead to developments of personal friendships and professional networking opportunities, both of which strengthened her connections to her locale. According to Lai and Hynie (2010), Mai's efforts represent civic participation, a form of community engagement where she carried out volunteer activities that benefit other people in the community. Counsellors can learn from Mai's experience and encourage new immigrants to engage with their communities through social participation (e.g., informal activities that can include visiting with their neighbours, joining a support group, and attending community events) and civic participation (e.g., volunteer activities in their community that can include joining a community action group or volunteer to assist in educational workshops) (Lai and Hynie, 2010). Participating and interacting with the community can help immigrants to establish belonging to their community and benefit from the psychological outcomes, which include building attachment to the members within their community, increasing their autonomy and environmental mastery, and adding purpose to their life (Lai & Hynie, 2010).

Last, but not least, counsellors can always provide practical help by connecting new immigrants with referrals to the community. It is important to have additional referrals readily available for the immigrant youths, women, and seniors to access in their community, as they often are in need of more support. Also, accessing inexpensive and available resources that encourage them to develop their English proficiency is invaluable (Brown et al., 2010). These examples include referring clients

to free online resources (e.g., free interactive language programs offered by their local library) and to the free resources offered in their local community (e.g., non-profit bookstores offering literacy and English classes; multicultural agency to help prepare resumes, apply for employment and offer skills training). According to Brown and colleagues (2010), helping clients to access online resources may be a solution to help connect refugees who are busy working to fulfill their financial responsibilities and to help isolated women who encounter barriers that prevent them from accessing English classes at their local multicultural society, which include and are not limited to inconvenient class times, lack of child care, limited or no transportation, or disapproval from their spouse or family to take the classes.

## **5.5. Limitation of the Study**

In this study, I was only able to recruit participants that resettled in British Columbia and not from other provinces in Canada, which means that the experiences they encountered, such as obtaining employment and accessing social services, were related to the context of their resettlement locale and Vietnamese refugees in other provinces may have experienced their resettlement and adaptation differently. As mentioned in chapter two, the funding to support Vietnamese refugees after arrival in their locale was distributed unequally to different provinces across Canada, with British Columbia receiving one of the lowest amounts (Sherrell et al., 2004). This suggests that it is possible the refugees who settled in provinces with higher funding may have received more financial assistance and education opportunities. Specific to the participants in this study, they reported that these resources and their limited time frame did not alleviate the urgent struggles. However, we do not know if this was the case for Vietnamese refugees who arrived during the 1980s and resettled in other provinces; thus, the results from this study are contextualized to settlement experiences within British Columbia.

Another limitation of this study is establishing member checking. Upon the completion of my interviews with the participants, the majority of my participants expressed that they do not wish to receive a copy of my study findings; they entrusted me to share their stories with the counselling community in hopes that the results

extrapolated from their narratives will provide suggestions to improve immigrant services.

## **5.6. Future Study**

This research adds knowledge to the literature on Vietnamese refugees who resettled in Canada between 1979 and 1989, their experiences of adaptation, and the strategies they engaged in to cope with challenges they encountered within their locale. Based on the results of this study, I recommend two areas that future research can be conducted in to extend the theory of belonging. One area for suggestion is to extend my study and findings by exploring how the children of Vietnamese refugees, who were part of this journey, makes sense of their experience of resettlement and adaptation in Canada. It is an opportunity to tease apart their experience in relation to their parents and to test the theory of belonging derived from the narratives of the participants in this study. One of the core reasons that motivated the participants to leave their homeland was to provide their children with a future. The future study in this area could seek to understand the strategies that their children utilized to pursue belonging in Canada and to explore how the children's strategies differ to their parents.

Another area of importance is to explore Vietnamese youths' experiences in the Canadian school system in order to extend the idea of belonging based on their experiences. A literature review on adolescent refugees and cross-cultural adaptation reveal inconsistent findings. For example, research by Matsuoka (1990) in the United States suggest younger refugees are more likely to adopt American values and customs and adjust to the host culture better than the older generation that arrived at the same time frame. In contrast, Sodowsky and Lai (1997) observed that adolescent immigrants display greater adjustment difficulties during their process of adaptation to the host culture. Similar to his American counterparts, Minh was confronted with an education system that placed him in grade levels according to his age with little to no support in place (e.g., unavailability of an ESL program), and this caused him to fall behind in his formal education. According to Do (1999), many Vietnamese youths became discouraged when they realized they were behind their peers in the academic setting and without help to catch up, they often dropped out of school--exactly Minh's

case. As well, Minh briefly shared his experience of encountering discrimination from his Canadian peers at school. To cope with discrimination, he surrounded himself with other immigrant students and with other Vietnamese refugees who arrived in his community around the same time as he did. According to Minh, he adopted this strategy because he believed they understood the isolation he felt. According to Gibson (2001) this strategy of turning to his ethnic enclave also helped provide a buffer against the negative impacts that can result from racial discriminations. Minh's experience of the Canadian high school has piqued my curiosity of exploring how the Canadian public school systems have evolved to competently support current refugee children and youths both on the academic and social levels. Further study with Vietnamese immigrant youth and refugees can also illuminate the positive coping strategies they used that can be translated to helping future immigrant youths navigate the Canadian school system with minimal cross-cultural conflicts, and to reduce the number of immigrant youths dropping out of school.

## **5.7. Conclusion**

When I first set out to conduct this study I was driven by my curiosity to see if there were other Vietnamese refugees who experienced similar difficulties, as my parents, in their pursuit of freedom and hope for a new life in Canada. After listening to the narratives of the participants in this study, analysing their stories, and arriving at a theme of belonging, I feel a huge sense of relief. Our family was not alone in this journey. While every individual's story is unique, we shared a collective commonality in regards to having hopes for our future; searching for stability and belonging for our family and ourselves; establishing permanent roots; and preserving our culture while extending our belonging to Canada.

The opportunity to conduct this research has been an incredible learning experience, as it has allowed me to learn more about the refugee experiences of people in my culture, reflect on my own experience, and deepen my awareness of the barriers refugee immigrants can encounter in Canada. In my own personal experience, I have come to develop a renewed sense of immeasurable gratitude for the freedom that my parents have given me by escaping Vietnam and pursuing a new

life in Canada. Hearing the participants' stories allowed me to develop a deep compassion for my parents. Similar to the participants in this study, my parents did the best they could against the struggles and barriers they encountered during their resettlement and adaptation to their locale. It has allowed me to reframe the responsibility of having to care for my younger siblings as an opportunity to contribute to our family's journey of belonging, to be grounded in my family, and to feel connected to my Vietnamese culture in a way that would not be possible if I had the same childhood experiences as my Canadian friends.

The goal of narrative research is not to generalize the results to participants outside of the group I spoke to, but to describe the deeper meanings and strategies that participants engaged in to make meaning of their experiences. In this way, I did not impose the results of this study onto my family's experience or vice versa; rather, I attempted to demonstrate that each story is unique, and at the same time, connected by a set of experiences we share, such as our hope to obtain freedom and our journey to achieve belonging, as new Canadians. The results of this research should ignite interest from the general public and various helping professions who need to learn about the challenges and struggles faced by refugee immigrants during their resettlement and adaptation in Canada.

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## Appendix A.

### Participant Recruitment Advertisement

# *Vietnamese Participants Wanted*

A Research Study is being conducted on the topic of Vietnamese Immigrants' Experience of Resettlement in Canada

Are you a Vietnamese individual who:

- Is currently 19 years or older
- Was a refugee and sponsored to Canada by a private group/agency or by a government agency, and you arrived in Canada between 1979 - 1989
- When you first arrived in Canada, you and/or your family lived in a small town or in a large/urban city

If you are, I would like to hear your story about your resettlement experience.

If you are interested in participating or know someone who would be interested in participating in this study, and would like more information, please contact:

Ngan Vu, BSc (Graduate Student, MA Program)  
Supervisor: Dr. Patrice Keats, PhD

Simon Fraser University: Faculty of Education, Counselling Psychology Program

Vietnamese's Experience  
Ngan Vu, BSc

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## Appendix B.

### Letter of Introduction

#### STUDY INFORMATION FOR POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

**Project Title: Influences of Resettlement Location: Narrative Analyses of Vietnamese Refugee Adaptation in Canada**

Hello,

My name is Ngan Vu. I am a graduate student pursuing a Master of Arts (MA) in Counselling Psychology in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. I am conducting a thesis research study on the role of resettlement location with respect to Vietnamese immigrants' experiences of adaptation to the Canadian host culture. My research is being supervised by Dr. Patrice Keats (Associate Professor at SFU). You are presented with this letter because the person who presented it to you is assisting me with the process of participant recruitment and 'spreading the word' about this study. S/he believes you meet the following participant criteria for in this study:

- You identify yourself as ethnic Vietnamese
- You immigrated to Canada as a refugee (between 1979 and 1989), and you arrived in Canada between 1979 and 1989 with the help of a private and/or government sponsor(s)
- You have important experiences to share about your settlement in either a rural/small town or in an urban city in Canada.

I am hoping that you will participate in this research study, as your experiences could be valuable in facilitating an understanding of the experiences of Vietnamese refugees, such as yourself, as they seek to resettle in Canada. The path you have travelled and the challenges you have overcome with respect to your location of resettlement in Canada could offer insight into the experiences of refugee resettlement. Through an analysis of your immigration process, employment search, host language acquisition, social support development and maintenance, and accessibility to resources/services (i.e., physical and mental health care), this research hopes to understand how the location of resettlement and its associated characteristics have altered how you adapted to your new lives in the Canadian host society.

I would be very grateful if you would be willing to participate in this research. Your research commitment would involve granting me an interview that would take between 1.5 to 2.5 hours of your time. In some cases, when I need to clarify your responses to the first interview, I might request a second interview. This second interview will generally take 30 to 60 minutes. The time and location for the interview would be arranged at your convenience. The interview will be audiotaped for the purposes of data collection and all information shared with me will be held in strict confidence. You will be requested to provide a pseudonym (i.e., a fake name) by which your information

will be identified, as your name will not be connected to the data from your interview in any way.

At the beginning of the interview, I will be asking demographic questions such as your relationship status, your education and career, and some basic information about the context of your pre-migratory and post-migratory journey to Canada. Then you will be interviewed with questions concerning your experiences of adapting to the Canadian host culture in relation to your resettlement location, and ask you to consider the factors that influenced this process. For example, you might be asked: "What influenced you to leave Vietnam and seek a new start in Canada?" "Tell me about some of the challenges you faced in your initial resettlement location while adapting to your new life in Canada?" "Who helped and/or what type of services were provided to help you in your host community?" and "How have your experiences affected how you view yourself as being able to build a new life in Canada?"

I want to thank you for considering being a part of this research. I am excited about the possibility of learning more about your experiences and would be honoured to have you share them with me. Your participation would be very valuable to this study. If you consent to participate, you will be welcome to share as much information as you would like, but in no way are you pressured to do so. Should you feel uncomfortable or experience discomfoting thoughts on recollecting previous experiences, you will be free to discontinue at any point and offered to complete the interview at another time. You may withdraw your participation at any point in the research process and I will not include any information you would like removed.

As you probably have a busy schedule, I would be pleased to arrange an interview time and location convenient for you. If you are interested in sharing your experiences through participating in this research study and would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact me by email at [xxxx@sfu.ca](mailto:xxxx@sfu.ca) or by phone at xxx-xxx-xxx. Thank you very much for your interest in participating in this research.

With sincere regards,

Ngan Vu, B.Sc (MA student)

Counselling Psychology Program

Faculty of Education

Simon Fraser University

Phone: xxx-xxx-xxx

Email: [xxxx@sfu.ca](mailto:xxxx@sfu.ca)

## Appendix C.

### Informed Consent Form

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

##### Project Title:

Influences of Resettlement Location: Narrative Analyses of Vietnamese Refugee Adaptation in Canada

##### Introduction:

You are being invited to participate in a thesis research study examining the effects of resettlement location on Vietnamese immigrant's experiences of adaptation to the Canadian host culture in British Columbia (BC).

You are asked to participate in this research study because you meet the following participant criteria for this study: you identify yourself as ethnic Vietnamese, you immigrated to Canada as a refugee, you arrived in Canada between 1979 and 1990 through a private and/or government sponsorship(s), and you have experiences to share about your adaptation in either a rural/small town community or in an urban city in Canada.

The researcher, the principal investigator, is Ngan Vu (BSc. 2005; Diploma in Education 2010). The principal investigator is a MA student in the Counselling Psychology Program in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. She is supervised by Dr. Patrice Keats in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study at any time, please contact the principal investigator, Ngan Vu, (email@sfu.ca or at xxx-xxx-xxxx) or the supervisor, Dr. Patrice Keats (xxx-xxx-xxxx or at email@sfu.ca). The principal researcher has received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to conduct this study.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time without explanation and without prejudice. Also, you are encouraged to ask questions at any time.

##### Purpose of Study:

This research study seeks to understand the role of resettlement location with respect to Vietnamese immigrants' experiences of adaptation to the Canadian host culture. By conducting this research, I hope to learn more about your experiences and any challenges you encountered during your adaptation and how you coped with the challenges of resettlement. The result of this research may be instrumental in developing effective resettlement supports for Vietnamese immigrants to Canada, and may inform cross-cultural counselling training practices to better support this community.

##### Procedures:

When you agreed verbally on the phone (during our pre-contact conversation) to meet for an interview, you were sent a document containing a list of questions that will be asked of you during the interview. By signing this Informed Consent document, you are agreeing to participate in an interview that will be guided by these interview questions. The amount of time required for the interview will likely be 1.5 to 2.5 hours. The time required for the interview will vary depending on your interest in answering the interview questions. The interview is held at a time convenient for you and at a private location of your choosing: your home, a university office/study room at Simon Fraser University, or at another public space that is quiet and private (i.e., room in a public library). The interview will be audiotaped.

After signing the Informed Consent form, the researcher will ask you for some demographic data regarding your age, your relationship status, your education and career, and some basic information about the context of your pre-migratory and post-migratory journey to Canada. Similar to the interview guide, the demographic questionnaire was sent to you following the pre-contact conversation and before you arrived for the interview, so that you could be familiar with the questions that are going to be asked of you.

Following the completion of the demographic questionnaire, the interview will begin and it will require you to describe your experiences of adapting to the Canadian host culture in relation to your resettlement location, and ask you to consider the factors that influenced this process. For example, you might be asked: "What influenced you to leave Vietnam and seek a new start in Canada?" "Tell me about some of the challenges you faced in your initial resettlement location while adapting to your new life in Canada?"

A second interview may be requested to clarify your responses and/or to address questions that are not completed during the first interview. The second interview will take 30-60 minutes and will be again held in person at a time and location of your convenience. In the case that the researcher and participant's schedules are in conflict, participants can request an alternative option of conducting a face-to-face interview via Skype or on the phone. However, please be aware that if a follow up interview is conducted over the phone or Skype, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

#### Risks:

To the best of my knowledge, there are minimal risks associated with your participation in this study. However, should you experience discomforting thoughts or emotions on recollecting your experiences of leaving Vietnam and resettling in Canada, you will be instructed that you are free to discontinue at any point and/or offered to complete the interview at another time. If you find you or it is observed that you are overly uncomfortable, the principle researcher will check-in with you and your involvement in the study may be terminated. The principal investigator will provide you with external counselling referral information.

#### Benefits:

Through participation in this study, it is hoped you will enjoy and benefit from the opportunity to share your stories and personal experiences of adapting to Canada. You may experience indirect benefit from your involvement in answering questions

raised in this study. Otherwise there is no direct benefit to you. Through a greater understanding of your experiences during resettlement in Canada in your particular location, the findings of this study may serve to better support future Vietnamese immigrants during resettlement in rural and urban communities throughout British Columbia.

Cost/Compensation:

In agreeing to participate in this research study, you are reminded that participation is completely voluntary, and you will not be penalized if you choose not to participate or if you choose to stop participating at any time. There will be no cost to you to participate in this research study, other than your time. Also, you are aware that there will be no compensation for your participation.

Concerns and/or Complaints:

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the study, please contact Dr. Dina Shafey, Associate Director of Office of Research Ethics, at xxx-xxx-xxx or at xxxx@sfu.ca.

Request for Study Results:

If you would like a copy of your interview transcripts or the final study report, please contact the principal investigator, Ngan Vu, at xxx@sfu.ca.

Confidentiality:

This research study is committed to protecting participant confidentiality. You will provide a pseudonym (e.g., a fake name), which will be used instead of your real name so that identifying information will not be linked directly to you. Your information will be identified only through a pseudonym. This Informed Consent document along with all other print and digital materials generated during the course of this research will be kept in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator's office until August 2016, after which time all audio recordings will be destroyed. Audiotapes of the interview(s) will be transcribed, downloaded to a memory stick, and retained in the same locked cabinet. Digitally stored information on a memory stick still be encrypted and protected by a password. No data will be stored on a computer. No one other than the principal investigator will have access to the Informed Consent Form, the Demographic Form, and the audiotapes of the interview(s). The transcribed data and analyzed materials may be reviewed by the researcher's supervisor (Dr. Patrice Keats) and a fellow M.A. student to assist the principal researcher with the analysis process (i.e. to obtain a secondary opinion on thematic content), however, participant identity will be kept confidential at all time during this consultation process.

Permission for research:

I have read and understand this Informed Consent form. I understand the purpose of the research study and the role involved by my participation. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and received satisfactory answers. I know my participation is voluntary, I can refuse to answer any question(s) during the interview, and/or I can withdraw at any time without giving a reason. I give permission for my interview(s) to be audiotaped and for the use of my quotes, without my identity being



disclosed. I understand that the data (e.g., transcribed words of the interview(s)) might be looked at by the researcher's supervisor and/or by a peer researcher for reviewing without my identity being revealed. I understand that all information will be kept confidential, my identity and privacy will be protected, and my information will be stored securely and then destroyed. I have received a signed copy of this Informed Consent document for my personal reference. I hereby give my informed and free consent to take part in this study.

Signature:

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Signature of Participant

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Printed Name of Participant

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Date

Note: I have received a signed copy of this Informed Consent document for my personal reference: (please initial) \_\_\_\_\_

Optional (When a translator is present to assist the participant):

I am aware that \_\_\_\_\_ (name of translator) is translating for me from Vietnamese to English, and this person will keep the information that I share in this interview confidential.

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Signature of Participant

---

Signature of Translator

Principal Investigator Contact Information:

Ngan Vu, B.Sc. (M.A. Student)

Department of Counselling Psychology

Faculty of Education

Simon Fraser University – Surrey Campus

250 - 13450 – 102 Avenue

Surrey, B.C. V3T 0A3

Telephone: xxx-xxx-xxx

Email: xxx@sfu.ca

## Appendix D.

### Demographic Form

TITLE: Influences of Resettlement Location: Narrative Analyses of Vietnamese Refugee Adaptation in Canada

#### Demographic Information

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Age:

- Age at time of arrival in Canada: \_\_\_\_\_
- Current age: \_\_\_\_\_

Year of arrival in Canada: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of time you have lived in Canada: \_\_\_\_\_

Resettlement timeline:

- Places lived in Canada prior to settling in current location:

Location _____	Dates _____
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Location _____	Dates _____
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Location _____	Dates _____
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Relationship status (i.e. single, married, betroth, etc.):

- Marital status at the time you arrived in Canada: \_\_\_\_\_
- Current relationship status: \_\_\_\_\_
- Do you have any children? If yes, how many? \_\_\_\_\_

Refugee camp experience: (If Applicable)

- Name and location of the refugee camp you lived in before being sponsored to Canada?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Length of time in refugee camp: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Sponsorship (If Applicable)

(i.e., government organization, church, family, individual, etc.):

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- Length of time you received help from your sponsor(s):  
\_\_\_\_\_

List the different types of support that were offered to you when you arrived in Canada:

- At the Government level:  
\_\_\_\_\_

- At the Community level:  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Family Support:  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Other forms of support:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Of the supports you listed in the last question, which support did you accept and use?

\_\_\_\_\_

Education:

- Level of education you had when you arrived in Canada (i.e. elementary school, high school, college or university, Masters, Doctorate, etc.):  
\_\_\_\_\_

- List any education and/or work training you received in Canada?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- What is your current level of education?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Employment:

- What was your employment (i.e. your job) at the time you left Vietnam?  
\_\_\_\_\_

- What type of work did you get when you first arrived in British Columbia?  
\_\_\_\_\_

- List all of the jobs you held since you have arrived in British Columbia and how long you worked job for (i.e.: mechanic – 5 years). Please list them in the order starting with the job you obtained when you first arrived in BC to your current job.

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- Your socioeconomic status (i.e. lower, middle, upper) at the time you arrived in Canada and your current socioeconomic status:

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- How satisfied are you with your current socioeconomic status? List a number between 1 to 10 (i.e., 1 = very unsatisfied, 5 = satisfied, 10 = very satisfied and happy with it)

---

English Language:

- What was your English ability when you left Vietnam? Please circle one of the following number:

0 = I could not understand, speak, read or write English.

1 = I can understand English when other people are speaking to me, but cannot speak, read or write English.

2 = I can understand and speak English with other people in a conversation, but cannot read or write English.

3 = I can understand, speak, and read and write English.

- What was your English ability after **1-2 years** in Canada? Please circle one of the following number:

0 = I could not understand, speak, read or write English.

1 = I can understand English when other people are speaking to me, but cannot speak, read or write English.

2 = I can understand and speak English with other people in a conversation, but cannot read or write English.

3 = I can understand, speak, and read and write English.

- What was your English ability after **5 years** in Canada? Please circle one of the following number:
  - 0 = I could not understand, speak, read or write English.
  - 1 = I can understand English when other people are speaking to me, but cannot speak, read or write English.
  - 2 = I can understand and speak English with other people in a conversation, but cannot read or write English.
  - 3 = I can understand, speak, and read and write English.
- What was your English ability after **10 years** in Canada? Please circle one of the following number:
  - 0 = I could not understand, speak, read or write English
  - 1 = I can understand English when other people are speaking to me, but cannot speak, read or write English.
  - 2 = I can understand and speak English with other people in a conversation, but cannot read or write English.
  - 3 = I can understand, speak, and read and write English.
- What is your English ability **now**? Please circle one of the following number:
  - 0 = I cannot understand, speak, read or write English.
  - 1 = I can understand English when other people are speaking to me, but cannot speak, read or write English.
  - 2 = I can understand and speak English with other people in a conversation, but cannot read or write English.
  - 3 = I can understand, speak, and read and write English.

## Appendix E.

### Research Interview Guide

**Project Title:** Influences of Resettlement Location: Narrative Analyses of Vietnamese Refugee Adaptation in Canada

The following questions will guide the interview:

Opening Question:

“Can you tell me about what it was like for you to leave Vietnam and start a new life in Canada?”

Pre-migratory Experiences:

1. Purpose: To understand the circumstances/factors that led Vietnamese people to leave Vietnam.
  - Tell me about your reasons for leaving Vietnam:
    - i. Can you describe what your life was like at the time you decided to leave Vietnam?
    - ii. How did you make the decision to leave Vietnam and start all over in a new country?
    - iii. What had you **hoped** to gain from leaving Vietnam?
2. Purpose: To gain insight into the context (i.e., external factors, influences) surrounding how they were resettled in Canada.
  - How did you come to resettle in [name of small/town or city]?
  - Did you have a choice in choosing your resettlement location?
  - Were there opportunities available to help you prepare for the move from the refugee camp to [name of small/town or city]?
  - How did this location of resettlement compare to what you had hoped for your life in Canada?

Host Language Proficiency/Development:

3. Purpose: To understand how language proficiency influences these individuals' adaptation to Canada and integration into the Canadian society.
  - Tell me about your English ability when you first arrived in Canada?
  - How well were you able to speak English and understand the English language when: speaking with friends; when speaking on the phone; when speaking with strangers; and, in other situations?
  - How has your English ability changed during the entire time you have been living in Canada? For example, how has it changed/improved/stayed the same?

- i. Tell me about any programs/opportunities in [name of small/town or city] that was offered to help you with your English development.
- How did your ability to speak English affect your employment, your socialization, and your communication with others who speak English fluently?
- Currently, how satisfied are you with your ability to understand, speak, read, and write in English?
  - i. If relevant, how would you approach developing your English proficiency differently if you had the chance to do it all over again?

Employment/Underemployment:

4. Purpose: To gain knowledge of their experience of obtaining and keeping employment in their settlement location.
  - Tell me about your experience of finding work soon after you arrived in [name of small/town or city]?
    - i. What challenges did you face when you were trying to find work? (Prompt: For example, did you notice whether language influenced the types of work you were considered for or were denied of?)
    - ii. How satisfied were you with the jobs you were able to get during the first few years in [name of small/town or city]?
    - iii. Were there any community and government support offered to help you find work? (Prompt: For example, did you receive opportunities for education/job retraining?)
    - iv. If there was, tell me about how you utilized these resources. (Rationale: to understand what they thought of as helpful resources, to see if and what resources they did access, and how this compares to the resources that were made available by government agencies to help this group – i.e. English classes, vocational training)
    - v. If you did not utilize these resources, please tell me about your decision to not do so.
  - How did your prospects of finding employment change in [name of small/town or city] as time went by? (Prompt: For example, how did these prospects get better/improved/stayed the same?)
    - i. If relevant, tell me about what you had to do to on your own to improve your work opportunities. (For example, did you have to move to a bigger city to find more work opportunities?)
    - ii. How has your socioeconomic status (i.e., employment or major source of income) changed since you have been living in Canada?
  - Having had these experiences, what do you think were critical resources that should be made available in [name of small/town or city] to better help newly arrived Vietnamese (and possibly other) immigrants to find work when they first arrive?

Challenges/Resources associated with Resettlement Location:

5. Purpose: To isolate the key challenges/limitations and resources/supports that were present in the settlement location. To gain insight into how they addressed them.
  - Please describe any significant challenges or limitations that you faced in [name of small/town or city] that hindered your adjustment to living in Canada.

How did you deal with these challenges? What resources/supports did you need at that time to deal with these challenges better?

- Please describe important resources and supports that you received in [name of small/town or city] that helped you to adapt to living in Canada?
- If relevant, how has your family (i.e., spouse, children, parents) influenced your ability to cope with the challenges of adjusting to Canada?

#### Community Support:

6. Purpose: 1) To gain insight into the types of community support that this group have access to in their resettlement location, and 2) To understand the degree of satisfaction or lack of satisfaction with social support from family, friends, and ethnic & non-ethnic community.

- Can you describe to me what your social support system was like before leaving Vietnam? (Prompt: for example, whom did you turn to for support when you were living in Vietnam?)
- How has your social support system changed after you arrived in [name of small/town or city]? (Prompt: In a new country, such as Canada, whom did you turn to for social support since you can no longer go to the same community of Vietnamese people that was available in Vietnam?)
  - i. Who did this new system consist of? (Prompt: for example, did they include friends, family, sponsors, Vietnamese ethnic enclave, host community, agencies, etc?)
  - ii. How did you find these individuals and communities helpful?
- How did your location of settlement influence your ability to access a community of Vietnamese people? How important is it to you to be surrounded by a community of other Vietnamese people that share your cultural values and language?

#### Cultural/Ethnic Identity as a protective health factor:

7. Purpose: To understand how the participant's cultural identity shifts with their adjustment to Canada. To understand how they coped with challenges of cross-cultural conflicts and discriminations.

- Currently, how do you identify yourself culturally? (Prompt: For example, do you identify yourself as Vietnamese, Canadian, Vietnamese-Canadian, etc?)
  - Can you describe to me the process of how you came to identify yourself this way?
- Can you describe some cultural conflicts that occurred as you learn to adapt to living in the Canadian society? How did you deal with them?
- How have your feelings and attitudes changed towards living in the Canadian culture now compared to when you first arrived?
- Can you describe how you participate more (if any) in the Canadian culture and activities now compared to when you arrived in Canada? Canadian activities can consist of celebrating local/provincial/national holidays (i.e., Canada's day), attending community events (i.e., parades, fireworks), and being part of a community sports team (i.e., playing hockey, soccer, football, etc...) where you are interacting with other Canadian citizens in your community.



- Did you encounter any form of discrimination in the community that you lived in? How did you handle/cope with it? Were there any community or government support systems in place to help you deal with this discrimination?

Mental Health/Counselling:

8. Purpose: To understand possible psychological concerns that this specific group could have faced and how they coped with them personally and/or professionally. To understand how they accessed mental health support systems with respect to their location of resettlement.
  - Can you tell me about how your current mental and physical health is compared to when you first arrived in [name of small/town or city]?
  - There are cultural differences in how mental health concerns, such as depression, are experienced. Can you tell me about the stresses (relating to mental health concerns) that you may have experienced during your resettlement in [name of small/town or city]?
    - i. How did you cope with these stresses? (I.e., stress of living in Vietnam where you are familiar with the language and physical environment to living in a new environment in Canada).
    - ii. How did this coping style compare with how you usually coped with previous stress/difficulties when you were living in Vietnam?
  - Were there any professional services, such as counselling, offered to you and your family after you arrived in [name of small town or urban city]? If they were, can you describe this to me?
  - Can you tell me about how and when you feel it is culturally appropriate to seek support outside of the family? (For example, if someone in your family experiences anxiety, grief/loss and/or depression, how do you know if and when this family member should go to a professional for help.)
  - Having gone through the stress of leaving Vietnam, living in a refugee camp, and facing additional challenges (i.e., finding work once you have arrived in Canada), did you ever seek help from formal counselling or other professionals to help you cope with these stresses?
    - i. If you did seek counselling, how did you do this? How did you find the experience of receiving counselling? (I.e., How did this process help you?; How did it not help you?).
    - ii. If you did **not** seek counselling, please describe your reasons for not wanting to access this service?
    - iii. Based on your own experiences of resettlement in Canada, what kind of services do you think should have been provided to promote your abilities to cope better?

## Appendix F.

### Sample of Coding

Participant: Tuyet	Adaptation Process  (e.g., What are they <u>doing</u> ? How are they <u>feeling</u> about it?)	Conditions/ Context/ Social Conditions  (e.g., What are they <u>doing to engage in</u> this process?)	My Interpretation
Topic: Reasons/Motivations for Leaving Vietnam			
<p>(1) Stanza title: Unique circumstance</p> <p>Mine was a special, very special case. My country. It was a poor country. So when is communist coming, everyone wants to have freedom.</p>	<p>"everyone wants to have freedom"</p>		<p>Narrator is emphasizing her experience is unique.</p>
<p>(2) Stanza title: To gain freedom/Starting over</p> <p>So that's why we just escape Vietnam to find the freedom. At that time, I never think about the experience in my country. Just come to the new land and have freedom. I think [to] myself, "We start at the beginning again".</p>	<p>- Escaped Vietnam to gain freedom</p> <p>- Required to start over again</p>	<p>Willing to leave only homeland she's known</p>	<p>This is hope #1: to gain freedom. The word 'escape' suggests a desperate need to leave an oppressed situation. Here, I noticed she used 'we', which suggest that many other people share this collective belief and desire.</p>

<p>(3) Stanza title: No expectations for resettlement</p> <p>So with me when I leave Vietnam, I don't think about bad things, about experience to come to Canada. Only myself, I believe I can work with my hands [and] with anyone. But important. [p] [was] Freedom! That's my case.</p>	<p>Desperate to gain freedom</p>		<p>Bartering flexibility for freedom</p>
<p>(4) Stanza title: Comparing her situation with current immigrants' situation</p> <p>Yeah, because you know I am not one to think about change the job or find a new life in a new country and with experience, look like anyone now. They wanted [to be] landed immigrant to Canada or the United States because they want to change their life over there. So they have experience.</p>	<p>Current immigrants leave Vietnam to gain a different life experience</p>	<p>Engaged refugee migration to Canada in 1980s as a unique &amp; entirely different process; it cannot be compared with the same experiences faced by current immigration process</p>	<p>Here, narrator is emphasizing her 'refugee' identity &amp; explains how this status is a very different experience compared to the current immigrants resettling in Canada. Mainly, she is emphasizing the difference in context and suggests that the current immigrants chose to immigrate, whereas she and her husband at the time had no choice, but to escape Vietnam.</p>

## Appendix G.

### Participant Demographics

Participants	Gender	Refugee Camp	Length of Time at Camp	Age of Arrival and Current Age	Years in Canada	Secondary migration within Canada and Reason
Tuyet	Female	Malaysia	3 months	Arrival = 22 years old; Now = 55 years old	33 years	Yes; to find work
Minh	Male	Thailand	3 months	Arrival = 18 years old; Now = 51 years old	33 years	Yes; to find work
Van	Male	Singapore and Philippines	13 months	Arrival = 30 years old; Now = 60 years old	30 years	No; remained in resettlement locale
Ngoc	Female	Thailand	14 months	Arrival = 34 years old; Now = 67 years old	33 years	Yes; for daughter to attend post-secondary education
Lan	Female	Malaysia	5 years	Arrival = 35 years old; Now = 59 years	26 years	No; remained in resettlement locale
Hong	Female	Malaysia	2 months	Arrival = 19 years old; Now = 52 years old	33 years	Yes; to find employment & for husband to attend school
Mai	Female	Malaysia	7 month	Arrival = 27 years old; Now = 58 years old	31 years	No; remained in resettlement locale; able to pursue school & work opportunities

Participants	English Ability before Arrival	English Ability After 5 years and Reason	English Ability After 10 Years and Reason
Tuyet	I could not understand, speak, read or write English	I could understand and speak English with other people in a conversation, but I cannot read or write English	I could understand, speak, read and write English
Minh	I could not understand, speak, read or write English	I could understand, speak, and read and write English	I could understand, speak, and read and write English
Van	I could understand basic English when other people are speaking to me, but I could not speak, read or write English	I could understand and speak English with other people in a conversation, but I could not read or write English	I could understand, speak, and read and write in English, but not at a high level
Ngoc	I could not understand, speak, read or write in English	I could understand and speak English with other people in a conversation, but I could not read or write English	I could understand English when other people are speaking to me, but I could not speak, read or write English
Lan	I could understand, speak, and read basic English, but I could not write English	I could understand and speak English with other people in a conversation, but I could not read or write English	I could understand and speak English with other people in a conversation, but I could not read or write English
Hong	I could not understand, speak, read or write English	I could understand, speak, read and write basic English	I could understand, speak, and read and write English; English improved from continuing ESL training
Mai	I can understand, speak, and read and write basic English	I can understand, speak, and read and write English; English improved from additional ESL classes and vocational training	I can understand, speak, and read and write English

Participants	Current English Ability	Current Employment
Tuyet	I can understand, speak, read and write English	Goldsmith
Minh	I can understand, speak, and read and write English	Self-employed business of making metal railings for homes
Van	I can understand, speak, and read and write English	On disability
Ngoc	I can understand English when other people are speaking to me, but I cannot speak, read, or write English	Retired
Lan	I can understand and speak English with other people in a conversation, but I cannot pronounce well. I cannot read or write English.	Unemployed; single mother
Hong	I can understand, speak, and read and write English; English improved from working socializing with co-workers and friends	Casino employee
Mai	I can understand, speak, read and write English	Community Settlement Worker