FORGOTTEN NEED: EXPLORING A SENSE OF BELONGING WITH A LOCAL REFUGEE COMMUNITY

by

ANGELINA LEE

B.A., The University of British Columbia, 2010
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The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, the dissertation entitled:

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Examining Committee:

Dr. William McKee, Educational and Counselling Psychology, & Special Education, UBC
Co-supervisor

Dr. Cynthia Nicol, Curriculum and Pedagogy, UBC
Co-supervisor

Dr. Samson Nashon, Curriculum and Pedagogy, UBC
Supervisory Committee Member

Dr. Ali Abdi, Educational Studies, UBC
University Examiner

Dr. Thomas Schanding, Educational and Counselling Psychology, & Special Education, UBC
University Examiner

Abstract

This dissertation study explores a fundamental human need of belongingness, identified during the researcher's immersion in a local refugee community in Vancouver, British Columbia. The purpose of this study was to collaboratively explore and understand the ways in which the community members conceptualized and experienced a sense of belonging in Canada. The use of a mixed qualitative methodology, Participatory Critical Incident Technique (PaCIT), and the Photovoice method engaged the community members as participant researchers (PRs) in processes of transformative social change and knowledge creation. To begin with, this community-university engagement research project involved two years of building relationships, developing research questions, and planning the research project with the community leaders and members. For data collection, analysis, and validation, over the course of one year, a team of 15 PRs and the primary researcher held research meetings to engage in group discussions about markers and indicators of a sense of belonging, factors and processes that facilitated or hindered the experiences of a sense of belonging in Canada, and reasons or goals for participating in the project. The final step involved planning for actions and dissemination of findings.

A thematic and Enhanced CIT analysis of the data revealed six categories of Social Connection and Interaction, Helping Others, Cultural Identity and Values, Positive Mindset, Status and Rights, and English Language Proficiency. The outcomes of this study include PRs' enhanced sense of belonging and agency, a publication of a Photovoice booklet to share their knowledge with a larger audience, and the formation of social circles for the community. Findings contribute to the emerging refugee literature as a doctoral dissertation grounded in community partnerships and provide a framework with specific examples to inform policies and practices that facilitate refugee settlement by addressing the fundamental human need to belong.

Lay Summary

This research study examined an often overlooked but fundamental need in refugee settlement and integration: a *sense of belonging*, identified during the researcher's extensive engagement with a refugee community in Vancouver, British Columbia. The purpose of this community-university engagement project was to explore meaning and experience of a sense of belonging, collaboratively with the community members as co-researchers in the research process. In group discussions and analysis, the lead researcher and 15 co-researchers together identified markers of belongingness and factors that facilitated or hindered their experiences of belonging. Findings are categorized into the following themes: Social Connection and Interaction, Helping Others, Cultural Identity and Values, Positive Mindset, Status and Rights, and English Language Proficiency. As a result of the study, the researchers reported experiencing an increased sense of belonging and created a photo booklet to share their knowledge and experiences with other newcomer communities and the general public.

Preface

The dissertation is original unpublished work conducted by the graduate student, Angelina Lee, under the supervision of Drs. William McKee and Cynthia Nicol. Dr. Samson Nashon served as a member of the supervisory committee and provided input on the study and this manuscript. This thesis characterizes the collaborative work of Angelina Lee, as the lead researcher and author, and 15 participant researchers from a local refugee community. This research project was approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board, under the certificate number H19-00940.

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List of Abbreviations

AR	Action Research
CI	Critical Incident
CIT	Critical Incident Technique
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
ECIT	Enhanced Critical Incident Technique
MCC	Mennonite Central Committee
PaCIT	Participatory Critical Incident Technique
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PR	Participant Researcher
PSI	Public Scholars Initiative
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
UNHCR	United National High Commissioner for Refugees

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Most importantly, this research would not have been possible without my mentors and co-researchers from the community. I would like to acknowledge their invaluable wisdom, knowledge, and insight, and express my deepest gratitude for teaching me how to conduct research in respectful ways, as well as for providing me with a sense of belonging.

Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

Canada is recognized for its long tradition in refugee protection and liberal approach to international humanitarian relief. Government-funded agencies and non-profit community organizations have played a key role in resettling refugees and addressing their basic and material needs, including housing and access to language classes, employment, education, and healthcare. However, a more meaningful, fundamental human need has been overlooked in the provision of resettlement services: a sense of belonging. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR; 2013) defines integration as "a dynamic two-way process that places demands on both the refugee and the receiving community" and underlines the responsibility of the receiving country and civic society in supporting refugees "to achieve long-term economic stability and adjust to the new society, including fostering a sense of belonging, and encouraging participation in their new communities" (p. 8). Building connections in communities is included as one of the services aimed to be provided by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC; 2016a) through specialized Service Provider Organizations to facilitate integration into Canadian society. Similarly, in their assessment of the early outcomes of the 2015-16 Syrian Refugee Initiative, IRCC (2016b) provides perspectives on Syrian refugees' development of social network connections within their communities and with broader Canadian community, as well as their sense of belonging to Canada. While belongingness is recognized as an aspect of refugee settlement and integration in Canada, it is unclear how this need is being addressed. Much more attention and efforts are needed to understand how a sense of belonging is experienced by individuals and families with refugee backgrounds and how to best support this essential need.

According to Ager and Strang's (2008) conceptual framework of refugee integration, social connection mediates the markers and means of settlement (i.e., employment, housing, education and health) and the foundational principles of rights and citizenship, and this process of integration is facilitated by language, cultural knowledge, safety and stability. In addition, psychosocial well-being and positive settlement outcomes of refugee youth have repeatedly been found to be associated with indicators of belonging, such as perceived social support, community engagement, family and school connectedness, and religious commitment (Betancourt et al., 2015; Carlson et al., 2012; Edge et al., 2014; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Sujoldzić et al., 2006; Weine et al., 2014). These findings affirm the importance of a sense of belonging for successful refugee integration. For people whose identity and attachment to their home have been disrupted by forced displacement and challenges associated with migration and acculturation, re-establishing their sense of belonging is critical for their successful resettlement. The current dissertation research examines this often disregarded need of belonging, identified during an extensive engagement with a local refugee community in Vancouver, British Columbia. The subsequent section depicts the context in which this research project was conducted and its early stages with the community. Of note, pseudonyms are used for the names of the church and the community members.

Beginnings and Contextualization

It is about 8:30 A.M. on another rainy Thursday morning in Vancouver. I begin my 45-minute commute on public transit to the Vancouver Mennonite Church to volunteer at the refugee foodbank. I take the SkyTrain, transfer to Bus #49, and take a 10-minute walk in the rain. The church is not the easiest location to travel to by public transit. As I find myself becoming irritated with the commute, my mind is visited by Mateo, a young man from El

Salvador, and Juan, a gentleman from Colombia, who travel for two hours on the SkyTrain and take two buses to the church. I wonder why some people travel so far to come to this particular foodbank. Mateo does not take any food supplies. Juan uses his wheelchair to travel. Mateo and Juan both fled from gang violence in their home country. A few other volunteers and I once visited Juan and his wife Wanda at their home and saw rows of medals hung up on the wall of their living room. When I asked about the medals, Juan and Wanda proudly shared photos of Juan playing basketball and javelin, competing for Colombia in the Paralympics.

Vancouver Mennonite Church, located in South Vancouver, was founded in 1965. The congregation was originally made up of emigrants from the Soviet Union, Germany, and other countries in South America. Since 1970s, a group of volunteers from the church have operated the refugee foodbank in partnership with the Refugee and Newcomers Office of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a global non-profit organization of Anabaptist churches. The foodbank is open every Thursday morning and is hosted by members of different churches in Vancouver and former clients of the foodbank. The current community that has formed through the refugee foodbank consists primarily of people from Latin American countries, including Colombia, Mexico, El Salvador, Cuba, and Nicaragua. More recently, people from Syria joined the community. While the foodbank mainly supplies groceries to registered clients with refugee status or refugee backgrounds, anyone who enters the door, regardless of their status or religious beliefs, is welcomed and offered bread, second-hand clothing, and miscellaneous household items. In addition, on the first Thursday of every month, volunteers and former clients prepare a warm meal for everyone to enjoy. Of note, although the foodbank is based out of a Mennonite church, I have not witnessed any discrimination against people of other religious backgrounds or pressure placed on anyone to convert to Christianity. Most importantly, the foodbank provides a

safe place of gathering to socialize and have conversations over coffee, tea, and baked goods. The current research study is conducted with this community of the MCC Refugee and Newcomers Office and the Vancouver Mennonite Church foodbank clients with refugee backgrounds.

I approach the church building and open the small white door that leads me to the basement of the church. In the hallway to the pantry, I am greeted by Thanda, one of the most reliable and dedicated volunteers. Thanda migrated to Canada with her husband, Hasan, to escape religious persecution and political violence. Thanda identifies as Buddhist, and Hasan identifies as Muslim. Thanda was a schoolteacher back home in Myanmar. Hasan, who is originally from Turkey, used to teach as a university/college instructor. They met while they were teaching in Thailand. I remember meeting Hasan for the first time when he would visit the foodbank as a client; I was inspired by his wisdom, courage, and gratitude for life as he shared his story with me. Despite having lost every penny that he had saved, Hasan said with a smile, "Everything is going to work out." Given their teaching backgrounds, Thanda and Hasan quickly established themselves working as after-school teachers in Canada and became invaluable members of the community.

It is now around 9:30 A.M. I walk around the large basement space and greet the volunteers setting up the space. I see former-client-turned-volunteers. Alejandro, the head chef, who cooks monthly meals for the community. He greets me back with a welcoming and loud "Hola!" Marisol, the life of the party, makes party favours and decorates gifts for community events. She greets me with a warm hug and a kiss on each cheek. Then I see the community photographer, Beth, who offers free family portraits to clients and takes photos at community events. She has volunteered at the foodbank for many years while taking care of her father, who

struggles with depression, and managing her own mental illness. She openly shares her experience and helps raise mental health awareness in the community. Most of the lead volunteers are retired professionals and members of the Vancouver Mennonite Church or another Mennonite church in Vancouver. Thanda and Hasan once invited me and some of the lead volunteers to their home for home-cooked Burmese dishes and Turkish tea. During this special time, the lead volunteers shared the stories of their parents' or grandparents' migration to Canada as refugees from Europe. I also see Eagle, dressed casually and chatting with the community members. Eagle is the community pastor of the Vancouver Mennonite Church and the founder of the No Man Is An Island ministry. In his outreach work, he provides financial and emotional support to the individuals and families who visit the foodbank. Ricardo is also here today, meeting individually with some of the clients. Ricardo acts as a liaison between the Vancouver Mennonite Church and the MCC Refugee and Newcomers Office and provides legal aid to refugee claimants. Both Eagle and Ricardo share Latin American and migrant backgrounds with the foodbank clients and play key roles in the community as friends and points of contact.

Researcher Positionality

Many of the volunteers, including myself, share with the clients a family history of refugee or migrant background. My maternal grandparents and aunts fled North Korea for South Korea after the Korean peninsula was divided. My oldest aunt has repeatedly told the story of how they escaped. My grandfather was skilled in brickmaking, and the family heard about a potential job opportunity at a brick factory across the border. On the night before their escape, the extended family members had somehow figured out that my grandparents and aunts were leaving, although no word was spoken about it to keep it a secret. Before dawn, they set out to make their perilous journey south. As they crossed the river between North and South,

surrounded by armed border guards, my grandparents were going to drown my second aunt, who was an infant at the time, had she started to cry, in order to save the rest of the family. Fortunately, the baby did not cry, and my two aunts live to tell the story. Resilience flows through my veins as I recollect the stories of my grandparents' escape from North Korea and my parents' survival through absolute poverty to be first-in-family to attend university. Growing up as a female middle child in the Confucian patriarchal society of South Korea in the 1990s, I was subjected to issues of gender inequality and male chauvinism and exposed to the military culture and nuclear threats from North Korea. I recall studying the *Meyongsim Bogam*, a textbook of Confucian and Taoist teachings, participating in air-raid drills, and singing the Korean reunification song at school.

At age 12, I involuntarily immigrated to Canada with my immediate family, for my father's new business. This move from South Korea to Canada changed the socioeconomic status of my family drastically, as we lost social capital and financial stability. I experienced a complete culture shock when I started attending a Dutch Christian Reformed school where I was one of the few visible ethnic minority students in the entire school, and I barely spoke or understood the English language. I also struggled with intergenerational cultural dissonance, or an increasing cultural gap between myself and my parents, as they expected me and my siblings to assimilate into mainstream Canadian culture as quickly as possible, while we continued to speak Korean and follow Korean traditions at home. They strongly discouraged us from having any non-White friends and forbade us from visiting Korea indefinitely. At school, the few East Asian students gave me odd looks as I avoided them and followed around White students. During this *conformity stage* of my racial/cultural identity development (Sue & Sue, 2013), I developed shame and self-deprecating attitudes toward my own Korean identity and desperately

wished that I were White. While the conformity allowed me to quickly learn English and become part of the dominant group at school, I experienced extreme psychological distress during this stage, as my parents faced their own mental health challenges. In the midst of hardships, I held onto my family values of resilience and perseverance and gravitated toward peers who shared marginalized identities and similar experiences. I inevitably became conscious of the systemic influences that affected me and my friends, some of whom have died by suicides and drug overdoses. I chose a path out, toward earned privilege through education.

Accordingly, my family history and personal experiences fuel my passion for working with the refugee community and commitment to social justice beyond a charitable cause. Although I have never been in a refugee position myself, I relate to the experiences of oppression, forced displacement, estrangement from extended family, loss of cultural identity and status, racial discrimination, language barrier, and above all, social isolation and loss of a sense of belonging. It was not until my young adulthood that I began to accept my Korean cultural background, explore my hybrid cultural identity, and attend to issues related to diversity. It took me many years of inner conflicts and discomfort before reaching the integrative awareness stage (Sue & Sue, 2013), where I developed a sense of security in my ethnic and bicultural identity and an appreciation for certain aspects of Korean, Canadian, and other cultures, living in a multicultural society. My own experience of longing to belong sparked a particular interest in working with immigrant and refugee populations using culturally-grounded and strengths-based approaches. My initial contact with the refugee community occurred in 2015 when I was presented with a volunteer opportunity at the foodbank while recruiting participants for my master's thesis. For my master's thesis research, "Post-Migration Experiences of Refugee Children in Canada: Strengths and Resilience," I used an arts-based, narrative method called the

Tree of Life with refugee youth to explore the meaning of strength, protective and resilience factors in their post-migration experiences. These youth and their families were referred by Ricardo from the same community associated with the foodbank. In this study, *belongingness, empowerment*, and *secure cultural identity* were identified as critical elements of resilience in the post-migration experiences of refugee youth (Lee, 2016). I had also pursued professional experiences providing psychological services to immigrant and refugee children and families in community, hospital, clinic, and school settings during my clinical training in graduate school. Consequently, my personal background and previous research and work experiences together positioned me as both an outsider and an insider to this community and enabled me to establish genuine and trusting relationships with community members in a formal and informal sense.

Research Problem Identification

For my master's thesis project, as a beginner doing research with a refugee community, I took the approach of "go[ing] in and tak[ing] out" knowledge with little involvement of participants in the research design or process (Myer & Fels, 2009, p. 277). This "data-mining" approach (Bringle et al., 1999, p. 9), commonly used in conventional qualitative research, has been criticized in the field of community psychology as exploitation of communities as "pockets of needs, laboratories for experimentation, or passive recipients of expertise" (Kloos et al., 2012, p. 81). After completing my thesis, I was left with a sense of guilt and responsibility in my privileged position as an academic. In March 2017, I resumed volunteering at the foodbank to give back to the community and find a new way to do research that would directly benefit the community. I had stayed in touch with Ricardo and contacted the Director of Programs of MCC to formalize my volunteer position. We discussed how I could apply my education and training as a scientist-practitioner in the field of psychology to further contribute to the community. The

original idea we came up with was to create a doctoral specialty practicum for me to provide individual counselling under supervision to people in the community. I also thought about providing educational consultation and *pro bono* psychoeducational assessments to families and developing an after-school program for children and youth. However, counselling and after-school services already existed in the larger community, and not all families had school-aged children, and if they did, school psychology services did not seem to be a priority for them. In addition, for my dissertation research, I was interested in examining how refugee families from different cultural groups conceptualize mental health, which derived from a literature review I conducted in my "academic bubble," or sheltered position of privilege, removed from the lived realities of the members of the community. I then challenged myself to take a step back and think of a different approach that would directly benefit the community.

Thereafter, I spent a year observing the strengths and needs of the community and its available resources and "[a]ttending to unheard voices [to begin] research from the standpoint of the less powerful individuals within social systems – the people who are most affected by the practices of social system(s)" (Kloos et al., 2012, p. 79). I visited the foodbank weekly to help with various tasks and have conversations with individuals and other volunteers. I also assisted the community pastor, Eagle, with other members of the church in organizing social events and delivering groceries to people's homes during holidays and sometimes led an English language class for the community. From this experience of community immersion, I learned that, for the volunteers, a goal was to reach out to individuals and families in need to serve their basic needs, such as food and clothing. The clients, though they may have initially registered for the basic support, travelled long distances and showed up regularly for something more – to connect with others and to be part of the community. This longing for social and emotional connection was

evident in my interactions with community members and explicitly stated by many individuals I spoke with. For example, when Eagle, other volunteers, and I visited Juan and Wanda during Christmas time, they expressed that the loneliness they were experiencing was so unbearable that they were thinking of moving back to Colombia even if it meant risking their lives. Other community members indicated that they were commuting to this particular foodbank to meet people and make friends. Pastor Eagle also raised concerns regarding social isolation or lack of social support in the community. The current research project emerged on the basis of these findings from the field and as part of my personal journey with the community to address the collective interest. In discussions with the community leaders, Eagle and Ricardo, the need for social connection, as observed in the field and articulated by the community members, was operationalized as *a sense of belonging* for the research problem.

Refugees in Canada

From 2007 to 2016, Canada resettled nearly 300,000 refugees and protected persons as permanent residents (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2016). In Canada, the term *convention refugee*, as defined in the UNHCR 1951 Refugee Convention (2010), refers to "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (p. 3). According to Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, a separate category exists for *protected persons*, who are individuals in refugee-like situations and in need of protection (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2010). The two major types of refugees in Canada include government assisted refugees and privately sponsored refugees, who are identified by the UNHCR for resettlement prior to entering Canada, and refugee claimants, who apply for refugee status upon arrival in Canada. Refugees identified

outside of Canada must go through an interview, a medical examination, a criminal record screening, and a security check before their arrival in Canada. If they pass this laborious process, they obtain a permanent residency status upon their arrival in Canada and become eligible for resettlement assistance from the government or private sponsors. For individuals who claim refugee status inside Canada, the resettlement process is more complicated. Refugee claimants must wait for their hearing before finding out whether they will be granted asylum or possibly deported. During this waiting period, which can take several months to a couple of years, asylum seekers live in a state of uncertainty, with limited access to health care and other basic human services. The following sections describe Latin American and Syrian refugee populations in Canada, the two major ethno-cultural groups of the refugee community in this study.

Latin American Refugees

The first waves of Latin American migration to Canada began in the 1970s following changes in Canadian immigration and refugee policies favouring the entry of refugees. At the time, there was an increased public awareness of violence and political oppression in Latin American countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru. The largest flows to Canada were from Chile in the 1970s and from El Salvador in the 1980s (Basok, 1989). Social and political turmoil and economic crisis provoked international population movements seeking asylum in Canada, the United States, and other Western countries (Simmons, 1993). While Canada offered similar safety and economic opportunities as other Western nations, its most attractive feature to migrants fleeing dictatorships and military governments was its open-door immigration policy specifically for refugees (Basok & Simmons, 1993). In addition, Canada was an alternative North American destination to migrants who were unwelcome to the United States and those

who had relatives and migrant social networks in Canada. Approximately 200,000 Latin American migrants and refugees arrived in Canada between 1966 and 1990 (Simmons, 1993).

Latin American refugees have continued to seek asylum in Canada from ongoing violence in their home countries. According to the 2016 Canadian Census, people of Latin American origin made up about 1.3% of Canada's total population (Statistics Canada, 2017). This heterogenous Latin American population shares characteristics of the Spanish language, collectivistic and family-focused culture, and a sense of multiple national identity that enables integrative socialization (Carter et al., 2008; Mazzolari, 2011). As one of the fastest growing ethno-cultural groups in Canada, people with Latin American origins reported having a strong sense of belonging to Canada (82%), as well as to their culture of origin (57%), on the 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey (Statistics Canada, 2007).

Syrian Refugees

The historical roots of Canada's participation in the Middle East peace process and provision of humanitarian relief can be traced back to 1950s. Canada supported the United Nations General Assembly Resolution and subsequently admitted displaced Palestinian Arabs in response to the plight of refugees from the Israeli-Arab conflict of 1948 (Goldberg & Shames, 2004; Raska, 2015). Furthermore, from 1992 to 2000, as the chair in the Multilateral Refugee Working Group, Canada was involved in the efforts responding to refugee crises in the Middle East. Canada also stepped forward to alleviate the global displacement crisis that started in Syria in 2011. Armed conflict that began between rebel groups and the Syrian government forced over 4 million people to flee Syria and seek refuge in the neighbouring countries of Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt, and in Western countries, including Canada (Citizenship and

Immigration Canada, 2015). Since November 2015, more than 44,000 Syrian refugees have arrived in Canada (Government of Canada, 2021).

According to the 2016 Census, the majority of Syrian refugees were living in the census metropolitan areas of Montréal (17.0%), Toronto (16.1%), and Ottawa-Gatineau (6.8%) (Statistics Canada, 2019), which were cities populated by the highest percentage of Canada's Syrian population in 2011 before the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Initiative (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2015). The Syrian Outcomes Survey by IRCC (2019) indicates that, of the new Syrian refugees resettled to Canada in 2015 and 2016, half were children under the age of 18, 46% were adults between the ages of 18 and 59, and 4% were age 60 and older at the time of arrival. In addition, 90% reported having a strong sense of belonging to Canada, despite the 75% self-reporting having no knowledge of Canada's official languages, English and French (IRCC, 2019). Many Syrian refugees speak Arabic, which is the official and the primary language spoken in Syria, in addition to Kurdish and Armenian (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2015). This aligns closely with Syria's ethnic groups including Arabs, Kurds, and Armenian.

The history of Latin American and Syrian refugee movements and resettlement in Canada reveals and illustrates the differences in the origins of groups of displaced people in terms of geographical regions, ethnicity, culture, language, and religion. The group of individuals who found themselves to be part of the refugee community in this study, through the MCC Refugee and Newcomers Office and the Vancouver Mennonite Church foodbank, share these diverse origins and divergent individual pathways that brought them to this community. The primary researcher and co-researchers of this study represent this heterogeneity; our research study reflects the community with its own characteristics and narratives.

Research Questions and Aims

Based on the existing research findings and lessons from the field, the purpose of the current dissertation study was to explore the meaning as well as the experience of a sense of belonging with members of a local refugee community in Vancouver, BC. The following research questions were developed and explored:

1. What does a sense of belonging mean to the members of this community?
2. What do the community members identify to be the critical incidents that facilitate or hinder their experience of a sense of belonging in Canada?
3. In what ways do the community members find these critical incidents to be helpful or unhelpful to experiencing a sense of belonging?
4. What does participation in this project mean to the community members? How does it contribute to their experience of a sense of belonging?

Critical incidents refer to factors, processes, events, behaviours, and activities identified and described by the participants.

The aim of this project is three-part: 1) to generate knowledge to contribute to the emerging refugee literature in Canada, 2) to establish legitimacy and validity of the refugee community members' knowledge and social practices and to promote their agency to achieve sustainable and positive outcomes for themselves, and 3) to provide valuable insight into post-migration refugee experiences in Canada that may inform policymakers, resettlement organizations, and community service providers. Resettlement services and programs should actively involve the stakeholders and the recipients in "develop[ing] culturally appropriate interventions and to foster a sense of ownership and empowerment in refugee communities" (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008, p. 535). In recognition of the importance of co-construction and

shared power in working with this local refugee community, the current study employed the methodology of Participatory Critical Incident Technique (PaCIT; Chou et al., 2016), an integrated approach of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Critical Incident Technique (CIT), as well as the method of Photovoice. These participatory approaches and their philosophical and theoretical foundations are discussed in Chapter Three: Methodology.

As for the remaining chapters, Chapter Two presents a synthesis of the existing body of knowledge on belongingness as it relates to refugee needs during resettlement and integration. In Chapter Four, detailed research procedures, including recruitment and planning, participant researcher descriptions, data collection, data analysis and validation, ethical considerations, and credibility checks, are provided. Data was collected using multimodal methods (visual, verbal, and written) of photographs, audio-recorded group discussions, and my journal entries. The results of this study, along with the photographs and the excerpts from the data set are presented in Chapter Five and discussed in relation to the extant literature on refugee belongingness and integration in Chapter Six. Finally, Chapter Seven concludes the dissertation with the answers to the research questions, contributions and limitations of the study, researcher reflexivity, and future directions.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Definition of Belongingness

In a general sense, *belongingness*, defined as "the state or feeling of belonging to a particular group" (Lexico, n.d.), is conceptualized on a personal or social level, as having social support, connection, network, or capital. In the context of refugee experiences, belongingness is a more complex and multidimensional concept. Displaced from home and separated from family, their sense of belonging may be lost, ruptured, challenged, divided, torn, or disorganized. The word *belonging* can be construed as a compound of *being* and *longing* and applied to characterize refugee experiences as *being* or physically existing in one place while emotionally *longing* for another place (Fozdar & Hartley, 2014). This interpretation reflects the ambivalent and partial sense of belonging for people with refugee backgrounds (George & Selimos, 2019).

Furthermore, Fozdar and Hartley (2014) discuss belongingness for migrants in terms of "civic belonging" and "ethno belonging" (p. 132). Civic belongingness denotes connections to a national identity, or a superficial state of belonging to a nation with membership to a common government and adherence to its laws and procedures. Perceived markers of civic belongingness include participating in and contributing to society and having agency and access to rights and entitlements to health care, education, employment, and social security (Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Fozdar & Hartley, 2014; Wille, 2011). Ethno belongingness centers around a more organic, affective connection with a shared language, culture, ethnicity, traditions, history, or values. A sense of ethno belonging may be developed by encountering personal acts of kindness from mainstream residents, whereas experiences of alienation, such as being identified as a refugee or positioned as an outsider, racism and discrimination, or encountering differences in cultural norms, may hinder the process of establishing a sense of belonging in the host country

(Fozdar & Hartley, 2014). Civic and ethno belongingness with the wider, mainstream society may be particularly challenging to achieve in comparison to a sense of belonging within smaller, ethnic communities.

Sense of Belonging as a Fundamental Need

In the existing literature on human interpersonal behaviour and psychological health, the need to belong is asserted as a primary human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Major influential theories on fundamental interpersonal motives include Sigmund Freud's (1930) filial bonds, John Bowlby's (1958) attachment theory, and Abraham Maslow's (1954, 1970) hierarchy of needs. Following these theories, Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that belongingness is a compelling and critical human need that human culture is conditioned to satisfy. In their critical review, they present the empirical evidence that social deprivation or unmet needs of belonging can have detrimental effects on one's health and cause psychopathology.

Of the belongingness theories, Maslow's (1954, 1970) Hierarchy of Needs may provide a useful framework for understanding the multifaceted needs of refugee populations beyond the basic level of human needs. According to Maslow (1970), "the basic human needs are organized into a hierarchy of relative prepotency" (p. 38). Of note, in Maslow's original work (1954, 1970), the order or satisfaction of these drives is described as overlapping and not mutually exclusive or rigid as it is conveyed in the popular account of his work. The very essential needs at the bottom of the hierarchy include physiological drives and necessities that fulfill appetites and achieve homeostasis. These needs include food, air, water, and physical intimacy, as well as housing and transportation. They are prepotent in that in extreme deprivation of all things, one is most likely to be driven by satisfying one's physiological needs. These needs are critical for survival and stability and thus prioritized in refugee resettlement programs.

Following the gratification of physiological needs, the next level of needs in a hierarchy of prepotency concerns safety (Maslow, 1970). The term *safety* is used broadly to include security, protection, structure, law and order, reassurance, and dependency. These safety needs are critical for people with refugee backgrounds as they seek protection and asylum outside of their country. Even after they arrive safely at a receiving country, for refugee claimants, long-term safety is not guaranteed during the refugee determination process. Even when they obtain their permanent residency, they may continue to experience a sense of instability and insecurity in their integration process. While they may be physically safe from the dangers and harsh conditions they were faced with in their country of origin, they may encounter psychological threats to their sense of safety in Canada, such as discrimination and prejudice (Constantine & Gushue, 2003). Following exposure to a traumatic life event, people with refugee backgrounds may re-experience trauma through intrusive recollections of the event, flashbacks, and nightmares that impair their functioning. They may also feel fearful for their family and friends back home, in refugee camps, or in other parts of the world. Therefore, satisfying safety needs is difficult and complicated for refugees whose need for "a safe, orderly, predictable, lawful, organized world" is thwarted (Maslow, 1970, p. 41).

The third prepotent level of needs, love and belongingness, emerge when both physiological and safety needs are adequately or partially met (Maslow, 1970). In discussing belongingness, Maslow refers to affectionate personal relations with friends, romantic partners, and family members. These intimate relations are threatened by a decrease in face-to-face interactions in modern societies and an increase in global mobility as a result of urbanization and industrialization. People with refugee backgrounds, in particular, must endure the deleterious effects "of being torn from one's home and family, and friends and neighbors; of being a

transient or a newcomer rather than a native" (Maslow, 1970, p. 43). Maslow (1970) views the deprivation of love and belongingness as one of the main causes of maladjustment and pathology.

Criticisms of Maslow's theory of motivation include its representation of the higher needs for self-esteem and self-actualization centered on a Western ideology and failure to account for the needs of collectivistic societies (Gambrel & Cianci, 2003), as well as the broader contexts and processes of refugee adaptation, as other applied theories (e.g., Urie Bronfenbrenner's [1979] ecological theory, John W. Berry's [1980] acculturation model, Derald Wing Sue and David Sue's [1990] racial/cultural identity development model). However, Maslow's theory highlights belongingness as a fundamental human need and provides valuable insight into human motivation for populations who are deprived of their basic needs and rights. In the current project, the aforementioned three tiers of needs, physiological, safety, and love and belonging, were considered. The need to belong was explored as the identified problem in the local refugee community, while considering community members' basic physiological and safety needs. For example, in consideration of the transportation cost to the research location and the unfamiliar research process as potential barriers to participating in the project for people with limited financial means and a threatened sense of security meals and reimbursement for travel expenses were provided to participant researchers to reduce these barriers. In addition, the protection of their privacy and the confidentiality of their personal information were thoroughly reviewed and assured. The use of Maslow's (1954, 1970) theory has been recognized as a practical and important framework for working with refugee clients in social work and counselling psychology practices focused on refugee mental health needs (Lonn & Dantzler, 2017; Mitschke et al., 2017).

Refugee Needs Defined According to Western Perspective: Mental Health

Previous research on refugee resettlement has identified and examined the needs of refugee populations primarily from Western perspectives, focusing on their *mental health* needs (e.g., Fazel et al., 2005; Steel et al., 2009). Lived experiences of individuals of refugee status or backgrounds are often disregarded and rather overgeneralized as *the refugee experience* of trauma and psychosocial stressors (Beiser, 2010; Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011; Colucci et al., 2015; Kaplan, 2009). Exposure to war, violence, and harsh living conditions is the primary reason for which many individuals and families leave their home countries and seek humanitarian relief in neighbouring countries and abroad (Alpak et al., 2015; Kirmayer et al., 2011). Given their circumstances, the prevalence of psychiatric disorders, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), is reported to be considerably and relatively high among refugee populations (Davis & Davis, 2006; Mitschke et al., 2017; Yanni et al., 2013). It is undeniable that people of refugee status or backgrounds experience significantly distressing, life-altering and -threatening events that place them at risk of developing serious mental health problems (Nerad & Janczur, 2000). However, the pathological view of refugee experiences in dominant discourses and the assigned label of "refugee" in a foreign country and its associated stigma confine people to a vulnerable and indigent position.

In research and clinical work with refugee populations, diagnoses of PTSD and other psychiatric conditions are typically given using diagnostic clinical interviews and self-reported scales, according to the criteria in the fourth or fifth editions of the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (e.g., Alpak et al., 2015; Schweitzer et al., 2006). These existing representations of trauma-related disorders and other mental health diagnoses used with refugee populations are based on North

American/Western European norms and biomedical conceptions. The dominant biomedical model of the West defines the majority of modern approaches to mental health around the world including non-Western societies; this model focuses on the etiology and identification of specific illnesses and disorders within individuals and overlooks the influences of socio-cultural factors on health (Beiser, 2005; Bhugra & Jones, 2001; Sharpley et al., 2001). The application of the Western psychiatric and biomedical models of mental illness with refugees is problematic given the limited cross-cultural applicability and clinical utility of diagnoses of Western cultural-bound disorders. For instance, a review of cross-cultural validity of DSM-IV-TR PTSD supports its validity in the terms of the biomarkers, causes, structure of symptoms, and content of experiences; however, there are cross-cultural differences in the relative salience, prevalence, and interpretation of symptoms, specific characteristics of the negative expectations following trauma, and the impact of the meaning of trauma on severity and symptoms expression (Hinton & Lewis-Fernandez, 2011). Immigrant mental health needs have been found to differ from the needs of their native-born counterparts in terms of the expression of psychological distress, identification and interpretation of symptoms, help-seeking and coping behaviours, and response to treatment (Dhooper & Tran, 1998; Ghaffarian, 1998; Kirmayer et al., 2011; Satcher, 1999). If diagnoses can be made with accuracy and cultural validity, the variation in adaptive coping processes and treatment effectiveness across cultures challenges the relevance and usefulness of clinical diagnoses with people with refugee backgrounds.

On a related point, in spite of the high prevalence of mental health problems in refugee populations (e.g., Steel et al., 2009), the rate of their mental health service utilization is much lower than that of the general population (Cristancho et al., 2008; Cuellar, 2000). This disparity is often attributed to a lack of mental health literacy and helping-seeking behaviour in non-

Western populations (Jenkins, 1988; Jorm et al., 2005; Slewa-Younan et al., 2014). Mental health literacy refers to "the knowledge and beliefs about mental disorder which aid their recognition, management or prevention" and the ability to seek mental health information and appropriate treatment (Jorm et al., 1997, p. 184). A common recommendation to address this issue, from a Eurocentric perspective, is to promote mental health education programs with cultural components to increase mental health literacy among people with refugee backgrounds (Este et al., 2017). Alternatively, the low rates of mental health service utilization in refugee populations can be viewed as a result of the shortcomings of Western mental health care systems lacking cultural competence and knowledge about mental health from a global perspective. The limited availability of culturally sensitive and appropriate diagnostic measures and manuals to guide clinical diagnoses of people with refugee backgrounds points to a dearth of research and knowledge in the field.

The gap in applied knowledge of refugee mental health and the failure to consider the socio-cultural context in clinical practice may lead to a reluctance on the part of clients with refugee backgrounds to seek mental health services and mistrust in the efficacy of Western psychiatric treatment and competency of health care providers (Beiser, 2005; Martin, 2009). In particular, suspicion and apprehension around the use of psychotropic medications and potential misdiagnoses have been reported among refugee populations (Simich et al., 2009). Moreover, disclosing one's mental illness may be challenging for refugee parents in fear of having their parenting capacity questioned and their children removed by government child protective services (Simich et al., 2009). The idea of seeking help from a professional who endorses Western cultural values and speaks a different language may seem absurd to those from cultures where personal problems are to be resolved within the family; the stigma associated with mental

illness in non-Western cultures poses another significant barrier to helping seeking (Colucci et al., 2015; Lipson et al., 1992; Martin, 2009). This stigma can have detrimental consequences of social isolation and exclusion in collectivist cultures of many refugee communities where social connections are imperative to an individual's functioning (Este et al., 2017). Concerns of becoming a social outcast and bringing shame to the family may deter individuals with mental health problems from seeking appropriate supports (Corrigan & Watson, 2002; Hansson et al., 2010). Even when people are willing to seek and receive mental health services, they may face challenges related to limited resources, long wait lists, navigation of services, and other procedural aspects, in addition to cultural and linguistics barriers (Colucci et al., 2015; Palmer, 2006). For example, providing personal information on paper during the referral and intake process may be distressing or triggering for those who have been through the rigorous and life-dependent process of claiming refugee status and seeking protection in a foreign country. Furthermore, those who are in most need of mental health support, including refugee claimants, are often not eligible for the level of services available to people with permanent resident status. Therefore, promoting mainstream mental health services to people with refugee backgrounds may be an ineffective and rather insensitive approach to responding to their needs.

The social and structural barriers that people of with refugee backgrounds experience in seeking or accessing mental health support reflect the host society's failure to adapt its civic institutions and social services to its everchanging population profile and ineffective efforts to facilitate the integration of newcomers. Additionally, dominant discourses on refugee mental health fail to consider that the construct of *mental health* may be a Western phenomenon. Este et al. (2017) recognize that "conceptualizations of mental illness are not universal and professionals risk imposing Western understandings of mental health and illness on clients from different

cultural backgrounds" (p. 240). Perceptions and experiences of mental illness and well-being are influenced by culture and language, as well as historical, social, and political contexts (Castillo, 1997; Eshun & Gurung, 2009; Hansson et al., 2010; Holley et al., 2012). Accordingly, a more culturally appropriate and in-depth investigation of refugee mental health is needed to better serve their heterogeneous needs.

Concept of Mental Health Reframed: Holistic View

Across different refugee groups, mental health and illness is commonly understood as an unfamiliar or pluralistic concept (Este et al., 2017; Martin, 2009; Jafari et al., 2008, Simich et al., 2009). Previous studies indicate that, in many cultures, mental health is conceptualized as synonymous with physical health within a holistic framework and achieved by coordinating one's mind, emotion, and behaviour. In a study conducted by Este et al. (2017), the members of Sudanese communities in Canada described mental illness as "the brain problem that will affect your attitude [and] behaviour" (p. 243). In another study by Martin (2009), older Iranian immigrants used the Persian words *hal* and *salamati* to refer to the overall condition of one's biological, psychological, and spiritual health, and the words *dakhil* and *ruh* to refer to one's mind, emotions, and spirit. Participants explained that mental health is experienced in the body (e.g., chest, stomach, and heart), as well as in the spirit, beyond the realm of thoughts and mind, and therefore, they expected medical doctors to treat both physical and psychological symptoms. One participant shared an important cultural perspective on mental disorders: "I don't think that we [Iranians] suffer from depression as much as Americans. Because in our culture, we don't validate it. We don't give it importance. And here [in the United States] it is just a big business…. As a culture, we are strong people and we are very private people" (Martin, 2009, p. 123). Such cultural and generational differences in the conceptualization of health may partially

explain the resistance in people with refugee backgrounds, particularly older adults, to seek western mental health care based on the biomedical model.

These findings indicate that refugee mental health is multifaceted and best addressed by considering individual, familial, cultural, social, and systemic factors. Studies have recommended mutual education or bilateral exchange of mental health knowledge between the host society and newcomer communities, cultural adaptation of mental health services, outreach and collaborative services, and informal, community-based strategies such as recreational activities (Este et al., 2017; Simich et al., 2009). Western health care systems may incorporate varying conceptualizations of health from other cultures in efforts to improve their practices and service delivery in meeting the needs of diverse patient populations. Other studies suggest collaborating with people with lived experience of being a refugee in helping newly arrived refugees overcome their settlement challenges (Miller & Rasco, 2004; Stewart, 2012). Healthcare professionals may also consult with cultural brokers on culturally appropriate ways of providing mental health services (Martin, 2009). In addition, qualitative studies examining the mental health needs of refugees from different countries found that participants preferred group meetings to traditional individual counselling sessions (Behnia, 2004; Mitschke et al., 2017). More specifically, the group structure provided camaraderie, allowed shared decision-making and exchanges of knowledge and ideas, and created a sense of shared community responsibility and reciprocity. The need for more peer-centered and group-oriented integration programs is highlighted (Mitschke et al., 2017).

Refugee Needs Redefined: Belongingness

As part of their participatory action research (PAR) project, Simich et al. (2009) examined concepts of mental health and illness and mental health care experience in Canada

with diverse ethno-cultural communities. In their study, participants from Latin American, Chinese, Polish, Punjabi-Sikh, and Somali communities defined *mental well-being* as the ability to make decisions, manage responsibilities, cope with stress, and adapt to different social contexts. In terms of *mental illness*, participants discussed stress, depression, culture shock, sadness, insecurity, hopelessness, failure, violence, alcohol or drug use, loss of interest, excessive sleep, and avoidance of social interactions. These descriptions are similar to the definition of mental health according to the World Health Organization (2018): "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community" (para. 2). However, in Simich et al.'s study (2009), "the tendency to view mental health as a social experience and as connected with social interdependence" was noted (p. 211); participants identified a sense of belonging and other social aspects, including the ability to maintain healthy relationships, give back to the community, and meet social obligations, as being connected to mental well-being, while mental illness was viewed as resulting from social isolation and loss of family and community. Similarly, in a study by Jafari et al. (2008), Iranian immigrants described the concept of mental health in relation to healthy relationships and effective communication with others. Moreover, in studies with Sudanese refugees in Canada, psychological distress was attributed to familial and social factors, including social isolation and disrupted family relations (Este et al., 2017; Simich et al., 2006), whereas having social support had positive effects on refugee mental health during the resettlement period (Simich et al., 2010).

Refugee post-migration recovery is a complex process that involves multi-pronged efforts on personal, collective, and societal levels, with engagement in meaningful activities, positive outlook, and opportunities to practice autonomy (Marlowe, 2015). As Herman (1992) states,

"[r]ecovery can only take place in the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation" (p. 133). In the context of post-disaster recovery, high levels of social capital have been found to be a key component of resilience, above the amount of damage or aid, socioeconomic conditions, and population density (Aldrich, 2012). Social inclusion approaches with a focus on building social capital are recommended for facilitating refugee settlement and promoting resilience (Peisker & Tilbury, 2003). Taken together, the current literature on refugee mental health and settlement supports the importance of understanding refugee needs from a collectivistic and relational point of view and generating a sense of belonging as a culturally appropriate and effective approach to assist the process of recovery and integration.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The present study used a mixed qualitative methodology, the Participatory Critical Incident Technique (PaCIT), which incorporates the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) into the Participatory Action Research (PAR), and the Photovoice and group discussion as methods. These participatory approaches involved members of the aforementioned refugee community as active participants and co-researchers at every step of the research project, engaging them in the processes of change and knowledge creation. This chapter presents the philosophical and theoretical foundations of the PAR, the CIT, and the Photovoice and the rationale for using these approaches for this study.

Action Research

Action Research (AR), also termed participatory research, human inquiry, or action learning, is a set of mutual learning processes that cogenerates social knowledge and promotes democratic change (Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Reason & Bradbury, 2006). In AR, the researchers, as facilitators, and the stakeholders, as co-researchers, engage in collaborative, unanimous decision-making courses of research design, data collection and analysis, and action planning. AR is defined by action, participation, and knowledge production across different fields and disciplines (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). Action refers to research activity that results in a form of change from the initial state of an organization, community, or group. A key ingredient for this transformation is diversity in knowledge, interests, views, experiences, and abilities. The first large-scale AR in the West began with Kurt Lewin's ideas during the industrial democracy movement in the early twentieth century (Adelman, 1993; Greenwood & Levin, 2007). As a social psychologist, Lewin was primarily interested in producing a specific social outcome through research with participants in natural settings. Lewin conceptualized

social change as sequential, intermittent stages and stabilization of social states through short-term interventions. His work on group dynamics had a significant impact on participatory approaches in organization development in the United States and worldwide, including Great Britain, Norway, Sweden, and Japan, for efficient and effective industrial production systems.

Participatory Action Research

After approximately 20 years of AR in Northern industrialized countries, participatory action research (PAR) emerged in the 1970s in Southern developing countries, out of liberationist movements and other democratic efforts to end structural inequalities, systematic oppression, genocide or ethnocide, colonialism, and exploitation (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). In Latin America, Orlando Fals Borda, a Colombian sociologist, was the first researcher to implement PAR, influenced by a Brazilian educational philosopher Paulo Freire's concept of conscientization (Fals Borda, 2001). Freirean philosophy promotes "self-development initiatives of oppressed groups guided by their own thinking, from a general social concern for promoting popular participation, grassroots self-reliance and broad-based development with a better balance in the distribution of social power and product" (Rahman, 2008, p. 50). Following this implementation, PAR was developed in Tanzania to bridge university research with the nation's practical reality and to shift toward women's studies from the dominant masculine social concepts that had suppressed the knowledge of "ordinary people" (Swantz, 2011). PAR thus emerged as a non-oppressive form of social science that rejected objectivism.

PAR, rooted in liberation theology, neo-Marxism, and human rights activism, has three distinguishing attributes including "shared ownership of research projects, community-based analysis of social problems, and an orientation towards community action" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 11). PAR is distinctive from other research methodologies in that it is a research strategy, to

reform practice, and an evolving act of movement toward liberation (Bradbury & Reason, 2006; Greenwood & Levin, 2007). It challenges traditional understanding of theory and practice and earlier theory testing models of action research. In other forms of social research, it is typically assumed that the researcher possesses the knowledge to plan a research project, collect and interpret data, and produce further academic knowledge. PAR makes this power differential (between research and community) explicit and attempts to balance it. The underlying assumption of PAR is that "ordinary people" have insights about their life situations to improve their settings and practices (Adelman, 1993; Kemmis et al., 2014). It recognizes individuals' capacity to achieve sustainable and effective outcomes for themselves. The role of the participatory action researcher is then to provide the appropriate conditions for the stakeholders to practice autonomy and take action with increased capacity and critical consciousness. Only participatory research allows for a marginalized and underserved community to understand and identify their unique needs, and develop ways to transform their practices to meet such need (Kemmis et al., 2014). Participatory action researchers aim to understand rather than dominate the social world of their participants and focus on conducting research *with* the community rather than *on* or *for* the community. This collaborative approach disrupts the role boundaries of researchers and participants that maintain the top-down hierarchical nature of their relationships (Kemmis et al., 2014; Pain, 2004).

Culturally Grounded Participatory Action Research.

In PAR, participants' ownership over research is maximized (Kindon, 2005). However, this "bottom-up, participant-centered and social change-oriented ideals of PAR" may create apprehension when applied to ethno-cultural refugee communities that may value hierarchical structure (Collie et al., 2010, p. 142). Collie et al. (2010) share their learnings from a PAR-

inspired ethnographic study that, while participants supported the research project, they declined the invitation to work in partnership with the researcher and preferred to follow the researcher's direction. Kaukko (2016) reports similar experience working with unaccompanied girls: "I had to put down my own theory-based assumptions aside… [and] guide the child to participate in a way she finds meaningful, instead of imposing culturally biased ideas of participation" (p. 182). Though this may not be the case for all ethno-cultural groups, certain groups of participants may seek more guidance and structure from the primary researcher than other groups, regardless of their ethnic or cultural backgrounds. For example, for refugee claimants waiting to be granted asylum or have limited understanding of their situations, challenging the sources of oppression and influencing the societal functions through PAR may be an impossible task or an unrealistic goal. People who are living in such unpredictable situations may view the PAR ideas of participation, or having maximum decision power, as uncomfortable or overwhelming. To address these concerns, Collie and et al. (2010) recommend clarifying desired outcomes and from there, working backward to develop appropriate methods and clearly identifying researcher and participant roles. It is also imperative to consider the local sociopolitical context and the specific circumstances of individuals in the community and honour diverse concepts of power and participation.

Critical Incident Theory

The critical incident technique (CIT) methodology explores critical incidents, which refer to events or factors that help or hinder the performance of an activity or the experience of a specific situation (Butterfield et al., 2005). Rooted in a phenomenological research tradition, CIT investigates the lived experiences of participants and "presumes that a participant's assumptions can be inferred from descriptions of a particular phenomenon or event" (Chou et al., 2016, p.

56). The CIT was originally developed in the 1940s as a set of systematic job analysis procedures in the Aviation Psychology Program of the United States Army Air Forces during World War II (Flanagan, 1954). The original purpose of the CIT was to determine specific job requirements for successful performance of air force pilots, or "to gather specific incidents of effective or ineffective behavior with respect to a designated activity" (Flanagan, 1954, p. 328). After the war, the CIT was formally developed by a team of psychologists at the American Institute for Research and widely applied in the areas of performance and proficiency evaluation, job and equipment design, training, motivation and leadership, and counselling and psychotherapy. John Flanagan was one of the psychologists who developed the CIT and the first to establish it as a research methodology.

Since its development in the field of industrial and organizational psychology, the CIT has been adapted and modified for use across various disciplines, including counselling psychology, nursing, communications, education, medicine and social work (Butterfield et al., 2005). Following Flanagan (1954), Woolsey (1986) recognized the utility of the CIT as an exploratory tool in the discipline of counselling to study factual happenings, qualities or attributes, and turning points. It has evolved as a qualitative research methodology, from a critical examination of behavioural incidents or a task analysis to exploration of diverse psychological constructs and experiences (Butterfield et al., 2005). Studies have used the CIT to explore beliefs about roles, perceptions of problems, academic resiliency in African American children, and healing for First Nations peoples (e.g., DiSalvo et al., 1989; Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002; Kirk, 1995; McCormick, 1997). This evolved form of CIT relies on retrospective self-report to examine incidents rather than direct observations of behaviours (Butterfield et al., 2005). The methodology has moved beyond descriptive inquiry to encompass meaning-making

of critical incidents. This involves exploring incidents of personal importance and eliciting thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and ideas associated with critical incidents (e.g., Francis, 1995; Hasselkus & Dickie, 1990; O'Driscoll & Cooper, 1994; Wodlinger, 1990). Participants are encouraged to reflect on their own practices that help promote or detract from an experience with a situation or event. Additionally, the CIT research methodology has departed from its positivist roots to include the researcher's reflexivity and recognize the researcher as the key instrument of data collection within a post-modern research paradigm (Chell, 1998; Creswell, 1998).

Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, and Amundson's (2009) contribution to the CIT evolution further takes the methodology "out of positivistic quantitative tradition and into the post-modern qualitative tradition" (Butterfield et al., 2005, p. 485). This involves the establishment of the trustworthiness and rigour of CIT research with an extensive set of credibility checks that align with Flanagan's (1954) original work. These credibility checks, including audiotaping interviews, assessments of interview fidelity, and efforts to demonstrate validity of findings (e.g., independent extraction of critical incidents, exhaustiveness, participation rates, placement of incidents into categories by an independent judge, participant cross-checking, expert opinions, and theoretical agreement), are discussed in detail in the data analysis section of Chapter Four: Method (Butterfield et al., 2009). Other enhancements to the CIT constitute supplementary contextual questions in the beginning of the interview during data collection as well as "wish list" items related to the situation being studied. Wish list items are factors that were not present in the participants' experience of the phenomenon being studied, but participants wish they would have had or would have found helpful in the situation. This consolidated version of CIT is referred to as the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT; Butterfield et al., 2005, 2009). The CIT/ECIT involves five main steps of: (a) establishing the general aims of the activity being

studied, (b) setting plans and specifications, (c) collecting data, (d) analyzing the data, and (e) interpreting the data and reporting the findings (Butterfield et al., 2005, 2009; Flanagan, 1954).

Participatory Critical Incident Technique

Despite the enhancements toward a constructivist framework, the CIT, as a research methodology developed within a positivist paradigm, is limited in its theoretical underpinnings and capacity to elicit critical reflection and construct meaning from participants (Chou et al., 2016; Hughes, 2007; Sharoff, 2008). Alternatively, the strong philosophical foundation and commitment to social justice of PAR make it an appropriate form of methodology for the current community-university engagement project with a marginalized community. However, AR has been ideologically and institutionally suppressed and misconstrued as a less scientific or rigorous methodology (Belkora et al., 2011; Greenwood & Levin, 2007). In order to address these limitations of the two methodologies, Chou et al. (2016) proposed an integrated approach of CIT within a PAR framework, namely the Participatory Critical Incident Technique (PaCIT). CIT has previously been used in community-based PAR projects (Belkora et al., 2011; Yonas et al., 2013). An integration of these two approaches provides a "dialectic of the critical participatory principles of PAR balanced by the pragmatic and systematic functionality of CIT" (p. 57). PAR and CIT share the purpose of producing action or solutions to address real-life problems, by means of eliciting discrete knowledge and experience from individuals through critical self-inquiry (Butterfield et al., 2009; Flanagan, 1954; Lewin, 1946).

Chou et al. (2016) address the paradigmatic differences between PAR and ECIT through a theoretical coherence of adopting ECIT within the constructivist-leaning and critical-ideological framework of PAR. The result is an independent, mixed methodological approach with PAR as the dominant methodology and CIT as the supplementary methodology. This

integrated approach is guided by the PAR principles of critical consciousness, social action, meaningful participation, shared power, and empowerment. To fit with these principles, Chou et al. (2016) outline the steps for conducting PaCIT with modified steps of the ECIT. These include: (a) determining stakeholders, (b) negotiating general aims of the project, (c) recruiting co-researchers and introducing them to the research methods, (d) making collaborative plans and specifications, (e) collecting the data, (f) analyzing the data, (g) interpreting data and reporting, and (h) reassessment and future action steps.

This paradigmatic adherence of PaCIT aligns with my social justice values and interactive role in the research process. As a critical and interpretative researcher, I believe that knowledge is subjective and co-constructed through human exchanges between the researcher and the participant, or in this case, among the primary researcher and co-researchers, within historical and socio-cultural contexts. In this study, the ECIT objective of understanding subjective helping and hindering experiences of the community members contributed to the greater PAR purpose of emancipating and transforming the community. Following the PaCIT steps and the credibility checks of the ECIT, the general aim was negotiated in collaboration with the community members, based on the research problem identified by the community leaders and members, who were involved in the research process at varying levels and stages to explore meaning and experience of a sense of a belonging in Canada.

Photovoice

The method of Photovoice was utilized as an elicitation device in the project to facilitate the process of exploration. As its name indicates, Photovoice, originally termed *photo novella* (Wang & Burris, 1994), allows participants to use photography as their voice to engage in storytelling of their everyday lives and empowers them to make social change (Wang, 2006). In

the participatory process, participants become "potential catalysts for change," using the camera to document their perceived realities (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 369). This participatory research method offers powerful means for expression and creativity to capture the salient experiences of vulnerable populations who may be otherwise reluctant to participate in interview discussions (Allen, 2009; Wang, 2006). A primary goal of the use of Photovoice was to enable individuals to express their needs, facilitate collective learning, encourage critical dialogue about important issues, and inform policy (Strack et al., 2010; Wang & Burris, 1994).

Given its emancipatory potential, Photovoice is recommended as a participatory tool for research and an appropriate complementary method to PAR (Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Hergenrather et al., 2009; Wang & Burris, 1997). The method shares similar theoretical underpinnings with PAR in Freirean philosophy and critical social theory, and provides a means for people to engage in dialogue of issues that they face in their community (Wang & Burris, 1994). Photovoice also adds further reflective and explorative capacity to CIT, as it aims to empower people to think critically about social and political realities reflected in visual images that are produced by themselves. Influenced by feminist theory and documentary photography, Photovoice critiques the masculine bias in participatory research that exploits communities and questions traditional understandings of power, knowledge production, and voice. As a culturally responsive approach to data collection, Photovoice has been used worldwide to enable research with, for instance, rural women in China as well as children, peasants, and others who are often misrepresented or underrepresented in the dominant discourse (Wang & Burris, 1994). Photovoice, with its use of photos and the narratives that the photos stimulate, is consistent with PAR principles in that it contends the concept of marginalized community members as "passive subjects of other people's intentions and images" and places them in the position of experts

(Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 371). The words and photographs produced through Photovoice may be shared with the public and policy- or decision-makers to promote a systemic change.

In summary, the integration of PAR, ECIT, and Photovoice and the multimodal data collection methods (visual, verbal, and written) in this study follow best practices of using participatory and diverse methodological designs in doing research with refugee populations (Marks & Abo-Zena, 2013; Pieloch et al., 2016; Sleijpen et al., 2013). PAR, ECIT, and Photovoice converge as a flexible, exploratory, and empowering approach to render research participation more feasible and approachable, particularly to people who have no or little academic research background. The combined methodological design draws upon the strengths of each methodology or method and enhances the practicality of in-depth and concrete study findings to inform interventions and policies (Dattilio, Edwards, Fishman, 2010). Furthermore, the mixed-methods approach is appropriate for gaining a more holistic understanding of complex constructs, such as *belongingness*, in refugee experiences and is ideal for working with the refugee community in Vancouver as "the act of being involved in research may lead to a sense of belonging in the community, which in and of itself has the potential to promote resilience" (Pieloch et al., 2016, p. 336).

Chapter Four: Method

This chapter describes the research procedures and the application of the PaCIT and Photovoice approaches in the current study. This research was conducted in the following four stages: planning, data collection, data analysis and validation, and dissemination/action planning and review. Specifically, recruitment and informed consent procedures, participant researcher descriptions, ethical considerations, community research meeting summaries, and strategies for ensuring scientific rigour are detailed in this chapter.

Stage One – Planning

Action research evolves as a self-reflective spiral of cycles including planning, acting, observing, reflecting on the process and the consequences, re-planning, and so on (Lewin, 1946). This sequence, when applied, was a non-linear, non-discrete, and fluid process of overlapping stages, with an emphasis on collective (versus solitary) reflection and collaboration, participants' understanding of their social practices and situations, and their sense of change and development throughout the process (Kemmis et al., 2014). Within each stage of planning and implementation, the process of reflecting and re-planning occurred during and in between research meetings "to change social practices, including research practice itself, to make them more rational and reasonable, more productive and sustainable, and more just and inclusive" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 2-3). In this extensive process, a total of 11 research meetings were held with the community members. Table 1 outlines the meeting content and the number of adults and children who attended the meetings.

Participant researchers (PRs), or co-researchers, for the present study were recruited from the local refugee community that I had been involved with since 2015. This community had formed through the Refugee Foodbank at the Vancouver Mennonite Church over several years.

Prior to recruitment, I spent over a year observing and documenting the community's strengths, resources, and needs, liaising with the community leaders, and building relationships with community members. During this process, the research topic, *a sense of belonging*, was developed based on the issues of social isolation and the need for social connection identified by the community leaders and observed in the community members. A detailed description of this initial fieldwork in the community is presented in the contextualization section in the first chapter. The following sections focus on the undertakings of the project itself.

Table 1

Community Meeting Content and Number of Attendees

Meeting Date	Meeting Content	Number of Attendees (PRs and non-PRs)
Mar. 30, 2019	Information and PR Recruitment	15 adults; 7 children*
May 18, 2019	Information and PR Recruitment	15 adults; 7 children*
Aug. 31, 2019	Informed Consent Procedures	18 adults; 5 children
Sept. 28, 2019	Data Collection – Photovoice	13 adults; 3 children
Nov. 16, 2019	Data Collection – Photovoice	12 adults; 3 children
Nov. 30, 2019	Data Collection – Photovoice	8 adults; 1 child
Dec. 21, 2019	Data Collection – ECIT	17 adults; 5 children
Apr. 11, 2020	Data Analysis – Member Checking (virtual)	9 adults
Apr. 25, 2020	Data Analysis – Member Checking (virtual)	6 adults
May 16, 2020	Dissemination/Action Planning; Review (virtual)	6 adults
Jul. 4, 2020	Dissemination/Action Planning; Review (virtual)	6 adults

*estimated numbers

Information and Recruitment Sessions

By the time I officially started the recruitment process, the community leaders, Eagle and Ricardo, had already been promoting the project to community members at group gatherings and individual meetings. With Eagle and Ricardo's help, I organized information and recruitment sessions for community members to learn more about the project and participate in the initial planning of the project. These sessions were held on March 30th and May 18th, 2019 at the Vancouver Mennonite Church. Approximately 15 adults and seven children attended each

session, with about a half of the attendees from the first session attending the second session. At the sessions, I presented the tentative research questions and the general aims of the project that I had prepared based on my fieldwork with the community and literature review on the research topic (i.e., a sense of belonging in the refugee context). I proposed potential data collection and analysis methods and study outcomes and explained my positionality and role. All attendees spoke English or Spanish, and bilingual members of the community assisted with the interpretation. During and after the presentation, people asked questions and put forward their ideas for planning the project, including its design and desired outcomes. Some people spoke up and echoed the messages from my presentation, highlighting the significance of the research for this community and other refugee communities. Others listened attentively and endorsed the project. At the end of the sessions, people were asked to provide their contact information if they were interested in attending a follow-up meeting; every attendee provided their information.

Having these information and recruitment sessions allowed me to confirm the community's interest in the research topic and obtain their input in planning the project, while I prepared a research proposal for a formal review and approval of the research by the supervisory committee at UBC. The community members' endorsement of the research was evidenced by their engagement during the presentation and agreement with the research purpose. Some people even began to share their experience of a sense of belonging at the sessions. Ricardo later informed me that in his individual meetings with those who attended the sessions, they continued the conversation on the research topic and asked when the next community meeting was going to be. While people willingly and passionately contributed to the discussion at the sessions, they asked for more direction from me in planning the details of the project. This corroborates previous PAR experiences with migrant and refugee communities and asylum-seeking children

and youth, who preferred to follow the researcher's direction and guidance (Collie et al., 2010; Kaukko, 2016). Limited co-researcher participation in PAR studies does not indicate a weakness (Chou et al., 2016); rather, a strong PAR study avoids imposing "participation" based on Western contemporary understandings and attends to participants' ideas of their own role and participation in the research process (Kaukko, 2016). In this study, I adjusted my approach throughout the self-reflective research process in attempts to respect various levels and conceptualizations of participation and to consider any contextual influences that may limit the decision-making powers of the community members. All PRs were invited to participate fully or partially at each stage of the research, with opportunities built in for their voluntary participation in the study design, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, credibility testing, action planning, and dissemination of the results.

Consent Procedures

After the research proposal was reviewed by the supervisory committee and approved by the university's behavioural research ethics board, interested community members who had provided their contact information were invited to a follow-up community meeting, on August 31, 2019, for informed consent procedures. A total of 18 adults and five children attended this meeting. All information about the project, as much as determined at the time, was reviewed and explained in detail: its purpose, direction, and format; potential outcomes and action; anticipated benefits and risks of participation; expectations of participation (length of the project, time commitment, activities involved, voluntariness and freedom to withdraw at any time); confidentiality and privacy; and potential future use of data. Prospective participant researchers (PRs) were also provided with information on how to withdraw from the study and whom to contact if they had any concerns about the study. I suggested that the outcome or the "action"

part of this project may involve collaboratively developing a community-based program that targets a sense of belonging or showcasing the final product to the public (e.g., wall mural, art show, photo booklet, conference presentation). All information communicated during the meeting was interpreted into Spanish by a professional interpreter, to ensure Spanish-speaking community members' full understanding of the content. When the consent form (Appendix C) was distributed, some people signed the form at the meeting, while others took it with them. A brief questionnaire (Appendix F) was attached to the consent form to collect demographic information (e.g., country of origin, date of arrival in Canada, current refugee status). This questionnaire was optional for people to complete and did not affect their eligibility for participation. At the end of the meeting, people who wished to participate in the study were asked to bring a photograph to the subsequent meeting for a practice Photovoice activity and were informed that the session would be audio-recorded. After the meeting, a follow-up email with a copy of the Photovoice group discussion questions (Appendix I) was sent out for people to review before the Photovoice session.

Inclusion Criteria

No strict inclusion or exclusion criteria were set for eligibility to participate in this study to respect the inclusive nature of the community. All community members were invited to participate in the study. Individuals who had expressed interest in the study but did not formally provide their consent to commit to participation, or "non-PRs," were also invited to the research meetings to listen and offer their ideas, but their reports were excluded from the data. The presence and participation of non-PRs were accepted by the PRs, with the community's consensus for the study being a community project open to everyone in the community. While most community members had refugee backgrounds, people were invited to participate

regardless of their status, including citizens and permanent residents. Community members were eligible to participate if they were able to provide informed consent for themselves or have the intellectual and mental capacity to make informed decisions. Although minors were not intentionally excluded from participation, all PRs ended up being adults. At in-person meetings, PRs' young children were often present and part of the social space before and after the working sessions, but they played nearby, in the same room or in another room with a volunteer who provided childcare (with stipend), and did not actively participate in the group discussions given their young age. Formal volunteers or administrators of the foodbank were purposely not invited to participate in the study to provide a safe and confidential space for the voices of the PRs. This conscious decision was made in consultation with the community pastor, considering the obvious power imbalance between the Canadian-born volunteers who oversaw the foodbank services and the members of the refugee community, some of whom were foodbank clients. The community pastor, Eagle, and the legal aid service provider, Ricardo, were included in the study as active participants despite their leadership positions, as they shared a refugee or newcomer background and had trusting and more informal relationships with the community members.

Participant Researcher Descriptions

The research team was composed of 15 PRs with different age groups, residency statuses, living situations, and cultural backgrounds. PRs included six women and nine men in their 30s to 50. At the start of the project, seven people had claimed their refugee status and had been in Canada for approximately one year, six people had obtained their permanent resident status or Canadian citizenship, one person had lived in Canada for approximately two years with a protected person status, and one person was a Canadian-born citizen. Some were living alone or with roommates, while others were living with their spouse and child. Most people did not have

extended family in Canada. Of note, nearly half of the PRs were waiting for their refugee hearing. Out of the 15 PRs, all but three were from Latin American countries, including Cuba, Peru, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Two PRs were from Africa. One was born in Canada. For all PRs but one, English was a second language. Given that the community in this study is based on a religious organization, many, but not all, of the PRs identified as Christian or Catholic. While these PRs willingly talked about their faith or spirituality, in general PRs were not specifically asked about their religious affiliation or identity, in consideration of any history of religious persecution and to avoid potential conflict among PRs. Pseudonyms are used to protect PRs' identity; some PRs chose their own pseudonym. Refer to Table 2 for a summary of descriptive information of PRs.

Table 2

Descriptive Information of Participant Researchers

Pseudonym	Role in the Community	Primary Language	Country of Origin	Year of Arrival in Canada
Eagle	Community Pastor	Spanish	Cuba	2014
Ricardo	Legal Aid Service	Spanish	Peru	2001
Alex	Member	Edo	Nigeria	2011
Emmanuel	Member	French	Cameroon	2018
Juan	Member	Spanish	Colombia	2017
Luna	Member	Spanish	Nicaragua	2018
Sol	Member	Spanish	Nicaragua	2018
Danielle	Member	Spanish	Nicaragua	2018
Antonio	Member	Spanish	Nicaragua	2018
Esther	Member	Spanish	Mexico	2018
Alberto	Member	Spanish	El Salvador	2017
Organic	Member	Spanish	El Salvador	2011
Maria	Member	Spanish	Colombia	2011
Cristina	Member	Spanish	Venezuela	2018
Sandra	Member; Community Photographer	English	Canada	N/A

All PRs were linked to the Vancouver Mennonite Church refugee foodbank or the MCC Refugee and Newcomers Office as former or current clients. There was also a wide variation in

terms of the length and level of their involvement with the community. Some individuals had known each other for many years, while others were new to the community. The community leaders, Eagle and Ricardo, helped me navigate the relationship dynamics in the community and maintain regular contact with the PRs.

Ethical Considerations

The vulnerability of the refugee population in general and this particular community was considered at every step of the research process, especially given that some of the PRs were refugee claimants. I was also cognizant of the power differential, the language and cultural barriers, and blurred boundaries between myself as the researcher and a volunteer and the PRs. In addition to the standard informed consent procedures (i.e., informing PRs that participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any point without any consequences, assigning a pseudonym to protect privacy, and ensuring that their decision to participate does not affect any services they receive in the community), I repeatedly engaged in careful planning, observations, evaluation, and self-reflection of my position of privilege and biases to attend to PRs' needs and respect the circumstances in which they were living. I selected participatory research methodology and methods with the intent to engage people as co-researchers in the research process and to foster their agency. As previously stated, I developed the research questions based on the identified needs of the community and held information and recruitment sessions with community members to confirm their interest in the research topic, to provide transparency about my positionality as a researcher and intellectual inquiry, and to involve them in the planning. Furthermore, I sought ongoing supervision from my research supervisors and regularly consulted and debriefed with the community leaders as cultural brokers and liaisons. Eagle and Ricardo's strong support for the study is evidenced by their participation throughout the research.

Risks. The extensive time and efforts spent throughout the research period to build and maintain trust with the community and to involve PRs in every stage of the project significantly contributed to minimizing potential risks of participation for members of the community. The following safeguards were implemented to minimize harm to PRs. First, it was acknowledged that the time, travel, and mental commitment required to participate in the project might have been taxing for PRs, particularly those who live far away from the research location and have other commitments such as English classes, employment, and family obligations. In consideration of these challenges, no commitment was required of PRs to attend all research meetings. In addition, travel reimbursement in the form of public transit passes were offered to enable PRs to travel to the research location. Another obstacle to participation was the language barrier. To address this issue, Engle had suggested hiring an interpreter within the community; however, this became burdensome for the person who was bilingual but had no prior experience with interpretation. Therefore, we hired professional interpreters who provided their services at a low cost for the community project.

Second, it was anticipated that participation in the research activities may evoke emotional responses as PRs engaged in a close examination of their realities. In anticipation of this risk, I took a trauma-informed approach in facilitating group discussions to provide a safe and supportive environment for PRs and to minimize negative psychological impact. This involved a number of strategies and considerations, referring to the Trauma-Informed Practice Guide (Poole et al., 2013), developed by researchers, practitioners, and health authorities, and applying my clinical skills: clarifying my role as a researcher, informing PRs in advance of the meeting agenda, establishing group rules regarding privacy and respect, communicating with openness and transparency, trying to equalize power imbalances in the room, providing

opportunities for choice and collaboration, facilitating social connections among PRs, identifying strengths in the stories shared, being mindful and watching for any triggers or signs of psychological distress, validating each person's feelings and experiences, seeking and welcoming feedback, and creating room for silence for processing of emotions felt. Additionally, a list of free and low-cost crisis and counselling services was provided at the time of consent. In the course of counselling or psychotherapy, it is common for clients to experience temporary lows as they discuss issues related to relationships and feelings and become more aware of their presenting problems (Day et al., 2013; Weinberg, 1996); emotional experiences are accepted and validated as part of the therapeutic process (Greenberg, 2017). PRs appeared to have similar experiences of awareness and change as they discussed their own circumstances and broader social issues. Many reported having a valuable and helpful experience participating in the project, as discussed in Chapter Five: Findings.

Third, there were issues of confidentiality and privacy encountered in the group discussions and photographs of human subjects as data. These concerns were explicitly communicated to PRs in the beginning to consider the impact of others listening and processing the content shared by an individual. PRs had the option of having one large group with small breakout group discussions, or two separate, small groups of five to eight people. No concerns were raised regarding this risk, and there was no need for breakout groups, as conflicts in PRs' schedules naturally resulted in smaller numbers of people attending the series of meetings. With regard to the use of photographs, separate consent and acknowledgement of release forms were distributed to state potential uses and obtain permission from both the person taking the photograph and the subject of the photograph. There was also a risk of the outcomes of the project not being as impactful as expected and thus disappointing to the community. However,

the many advantages and gains offered by the project, as described in the subsequent section and evidenced by PRs' reports during the project review sessions, considerably outweighed the risks and benefited individual PRs, the community, and me as the researcher.

Benefits. During my engagement with the community, I noted community members' efforts to seek, develop, and maintain a sense of belonging in their social practices. Whether they were new clients of the refugee foodbank or former-client-turned-volunteers who had been around for several years, people demonstrated their desire to connect with others by staying for coffee/tea and conversations with others at the foodbank and attending community gatherings outside of the foodbank hours. Eagle organized and kept people informed of community events, which included annual beach barbeques, camping trips, Christmas parties, and other holiday or religious events. These existing ways of bringing people together were successful but difficult to sustain due to limited resources or funding and a lack of initiatives. While some community members were more actively involved in assisting Eagle with the events, most people seemed to live in social isolation as they waited for the next social gathering. In recognition of this need, the research project formed a new set of community gatherings, which were more formalized with a structure and objectives, and provided additional socialization opportunities. A social space with coffee and tea, snacks, and lunch was deliberately created at each research meeting to contribute to the attendees' sense of belonging, and the doors of the meeting location remained open as long as people wanted to stay after the meeting.

Another major benefit of participation was having the opportunity to actively take part in transformative practices through a funded community-university engagement project. The community members had a chance to work with each other and the community leaders to produce local knowledge that had the potential to inform social practices and services, in

partnership with me as the researcher who facilitated the conversations and assisted in transforming their knowledge into action and academic knowledge. Through PaCIT and Photovoice, the PRs were provided with a safe communicative space to engage in critical reflection and analysis of their own circumstances. It was anticipated that by working collaboratively toward a shared goal of social change, PRs may develop a better understanding of their individual and community functioning and may experience an increase in their sense of belonging to the community and their self-esteem (Palibroda et al., 2009). Another goal was to legitimize the community members' social practices and extend an opportunity to communicate their perceived realities with a larger audience of their choice to engage in self-advocacy and foster their civic sense of belonging to Canadian society. Other potential benefits included increases in understanding of one's rights and the influence of social, political, and economic factors in their lives, ability to use verbal and nonverbal means of expression, agency to engage in decision making and planning, and accessibility to influence the practices of social systems that affect their lives (Blackman & Fairey, 2007). For me as the researcher, the use of participatory approaches and methods provided access to PRs' insight into important issues from their perspectives and lived experiences (Palibroda et al., 2009).

Research Materials

Accompanying documents used in all major aspects of the current research project are included in the appendices to the dissertation. Refer to Appendix A for a list of materials, equipment and services required for the project, Appendix B for an outline of the budget, Appendix C for the letter of invitation/informed consent form, Appendix D for the acknowledgement of release of photographs form, Appendix E for the photography consent form for human subjects, Appendix F for a list of free and low rate counselling services, Appendix G

for a handout on Photovoice (Palibroda et al., 2009; United for Prevention in Passaic County, 2012). Also see Appendix H for the demographic questionnaire, Appendix I and J for the focus group facilitation guide for Session Five and Six (Butterfield et al., 2009; Lykes, 2001; McIntyre, 2003; Wang, 1999), Appendix K for a credibility check guide, and Appendix L for a table for tracking the emergence of new categories (Butterfield et al., 2009).

Stage Two – Data Collection

Data was primarily collected through group discussions during community research meetings, as well as informal conversations with PRs outside of the meetings, and supplemented with field notes and reflexive journal entries documented throughout the research period. A total of four data collection meetings were held, including Photovoice and ECIT group discussions, from September to December 2019. Each meeting consisted of a two-hour working session and social space before and after the session. All sessions were audio-recorded with the permission of all PRs to be transcribed for data analysis. In terms of the meeting location, the Vancouver Mennonite Church and Mennonite Central Committee Refugee Office buildings were recommended and arranged by the community leaders as the most appropriate and convenient places for community gathering, as PRs were already familiar with the locations. These spaces allowed for PRs' privacy and sense of comfort. When provided with the options of having a large group discussion or smaller group discussions, PRs indicated that they preferred to get together as one large group. The procedures and outcomes of each meeting are detailed below.

Photovoice "Practice" Session – September 28th, 2019

At this meeting, we discussed the meaning and the experience of a sense of belonging in relation to the photographs that PRs brought to the meeting and shared with the group. The Photovoice activity was originally intended to be a practice session; however, given the

authenticity and depth of the content shared, the transcript from this session was included as valuable data. Sandra, the community photographer, was invited to provide us with a brief lesson on photography. She volunteered first to share her photographs and experience of a sense of belonging. I also shared my own photos and experience as an example and referred to the facilitator's toolkit from the United for Prevention in Passaic County (2012) and the manual from the Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence in Winnipeg, Manitoba (Palibroda et al., 2009) for more examples of Photovoice and discussion questions. Initially, only a few of the PRs had sent me their photographs and presented them; however, as the session continued, the first few stories inspired other PRs to share, and we ended up running out of time. 13 adults, including 11 PRs and two interested community members, and three children (of PRs) attended this meeting. At the end of the session, a Photovoice handout with suggested instructions, ethical considerations, informed consent, and tips for photography were distributed. PRs had the choice of using their own camera or a digital camera provided for their use. Most PRs indicated that they preferred to use their own phone for taking photos. They were asked to send me two to three photographs of their choice to present at the subsequent meeting.

Extended Photovoice Sessions – November 16th and 30th, 2019

We resumed the Photovoice activity in the following two meetings. 12 adults, including a new PR, and three children attended the second data collection meeting. Eight adults and one child attended the third data collection meeting. I started each session with introductions and asked people to share what they expected from the research project or what the project meant to them. I mindfully reiterated my introduction as a graduate student from UBC and acknowledged the privilege I was given to work with the PRs. I tried to reduce power differentials and increase PR's agency by stating my role as the facilitator and recognizing PRs as the experts of their own

social practices and life situations. Following the introductions, we reviewed the objectives of the session and the timeline, purpose, and next steps of the project. We discussed confidentiality, group rules, the risk of emotional triggers, and the importance of setting limits and appropriate boundaries while sharing stories and listening to others during the sessions.

All PRs brought photographs that they had previously taken rather than taking new ones. Some of their photographs had been taken in Canada, while others were from when they lived in their home country. While this changed the original research method of taking new photos, bringing existing photos that represented a sense of belonging for PRs may have allowed for more authentic experiences of looking through their photographs and reminiscing about times and places associated with their sense of belonging than trying to fabricate photographs that represented a sense of belonging. As PRs shared, I positioned silence as a strategic response to expand the space for further understanding, expression, and reflection outside of comfortable territories (Derrida, 1992). I also employed facilitative skills and strategies that I had obtained through my clinical training in individual and group counselling. I used reflection and validation and applied containment, commonly used in psychotherapy to help maintain clear, safe boundaries and allow clients to express and explore emerging feelings and experience in a collaborative, dialogical environment (Finlay, 2015). The following excerpt is an example of such facilitative response from the transcript:

> I can't imagine what it would've been like for you in Hong Kong. That must've been exhausting. It delayed your right. It delayed the whole adult process. It closed all the possibilities for you. I like how you compared your sense of belonging process in Hong Kong to that here. I picked up a few things there in that story…. Having a common

> language gives you a sense of belonging… and maybe what's unhelpful is being a visible minority. Is that correct? Is that, am I interpreting that right? (2019, December 21)

Moreover, I called attention to the similarities and differences across PRs' experiences, checked for accuracy of my understandings, and frequently thanked PRs for their participation and contribution.

ECIT Session – December 21st, 2019

This last data collection meeting had the highest attendance of 17 adults, including 12 PRs and five interested community members, and five children. The other interested members participated by mostly listening to the PRs, without committing to the project. The group session focused on generating ECIT data, or critical incidents and wish list items that helped or hindered PRs' experience of a sense of belonging. I started the session by summarizing some of the themes that emerged in the Photovoice discussions. PRs were then asked to identify and describe critical incidents, or events, factors, and behaviours, that had been helpful or unhelpful in developing, maintaining, or experiencing a sense of belonging in Canada, as well as wish list items, or events, factors, and behaviours that would have been helpful (Appendix J).

The Photovoice sessions were originally intended to provide contextual information or set the stage for the ECIT session. However, the Photovoice activity was extended as it produced rich information. This points to the effectiveness of Photovoice as a method in eliciting meaningful responses from people. Accordingly, we did not allot as much time to the ECIT session as we did for the Photovoice sessions. The ECIT session took an unstructured format which differed from the previous three Photovoice sessions. A few of the PRs dominated the discussion while the other PRs actively listened and related to the stories told. To address the disproportionate participation rate and the limited time we had, I invited PRs to send me their

responses to the question posed during the session in written texts or voice notes if they had more to add, but I received no further responses after the session. In retrospect, an additional ECIT session may have been helpful, but I wanted to respect PRs' time and realized afterward that we already had a robust set of data from the Photovoice sessions alone. The ways in which I addressed the power dynamics among the group of PRs are detailed in the researcher reflexivity section of Chapter Seven: Conclusions.

Stage Three – Data Analysis and Validation

The data analysis process of CIT/ECIT involves (a) determining the frame of reference, or the use that is to be made of the data, (b) formulating categories by grouping similar critical incidents in the data, and (c) determining the level of specificity or generality to be used in reporting the data (Butterfield et al., 2005, 2009; Flanagan, 1954). The Photovoice and the ECIT data collected from the group discussions were analyzed using thematic and ECIT analysis procedures, with the aim of identifying and increasing the understanding of the ways in which PRs experienced a sense of belonging in Canada, critical incidents that facilitated or hindered their experiences of a sense of belonging, and the meaning of their participation in the project. Ideas for potential action informed by the study findings, or the frame of reference, included developing a self-sustainable program or a set of strategies that would help cultivate or maintain a sense of belonging for this particular refugee community, as well as sharing the knowledge produced with the larger public to inform policies, resettlement services, and future research and clinical work with refugee populations.

Transcription and Familiarization

The English part of the four audio-recorded group sessions was transcribed verbatim by professional transcriptionists contracted by an online transcription service company,

www.rev.com. All uploaded files were encrypted at rest and in transit and were accessible only to the extent necessary to perform the transcription work. After the transcription was complete, I read through all four transcribed documents as I listened to the audio-recordings to check for completeness and accuracy, make appropriate edits and corrections, and remove or change all identifying information. I then organized the transcribed data by meeting dates and speakers and prepared them for thematization. The repeated reading allowed me to re-engage and familiarize myself with the data, and provided me with evocative recollections of the data collection experience (Braun & Clarke, 2007).

Extraction and Categorization

The next step involved active reading and open coding of the transcribed data as I extracted exemplar pieces of evidence with the frame of reference and the research questions in mind. These data extracts included interesting or important points and ideas pertinent to the meaning and the experience of a sense of belonging and participation in the project, as well as helping and hindering critical incidents and wish list items. The extracted critical incidents included independent events or behaviours, as well as comments about or references to factors, processes, events, behaviours, and activities that were significant. This procedure was conducted in a systematic manner across the entire data set starting with the transcript from the first group meeting. The identified data extracts were then coded according to their patterns and connections, to form emerging themes or categories in a manner that would be easily applicable and useful for the frame of reference to facilitate action (Flanagan, 1954). This process of categorization and thematization was conducted for the meaning of a sense of belonging, helping critical incidents, hindering critical incidents, wish list items, and the meaning of participation.

Overall, this was an iterative and nonlinear process of multiple reads and rounds of thinking through the data.

Organization and Adjustment

The final step involved dividing a theme/category into multiple discrete themes/categories or merging themes/categories into a broad theme/category. Self-descriptive titles and operational definitions of the CIT categories were written when the category scheme was complete. The level of specificity and generality for reporting the themes/categories was adjusted in ways that served the frame of reference or the intended purpose of the project (Butterfield et al., 2009). The qualitative data analysis software program, NVivo12, was used to organize and code the data and map out the themes. I also referred to my field notes and reflexive journal entries for any relevant information and met with PRs for cross-checking and expert review of the tentative themes/categories, which informed my analytical decisions and provided validation of the results.

Member Checking Sessions – April 11th and 25th, 2020

By the time the data were transcribed, coded into candidate themes/tentative categories, and organized for the PRs to review the resulting framework for credibility and for action planning and implementation, the COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak caused an unanticipated interference with holding in-person meetings with PRs. In response to the global pandemic, a public health emergency and a provincial state of emergency were declared in March 2020. In efforts to contain the virus, physical distancing measures were imposed, and limits were placed on social gatherings. As a result, PRs and I decided to continue community meetings virtually to prioritize the safety and health of everyone. The community pastor, Eagle, provided me with access to a secure licensed account on a cloud-based software platform, Zoom Video

Communications, to host the meetings. Although this change increased the risk of privacy and confidentiality breaches, no concerns were raised PRs, and no cybersecurity incidents were experienced. All virtual meetings scheduled had a specific meeting ID or an invite link under the paid Zoom account. As it was done with the in-person meetings, relevant parts of the meetings (e.g., feedback regarding the data analysis and findings) were audio-recorded, with PRs' permission, to accurately capture their feedback and reflection on the findings. All recorded files and chat texts were saved to a local folder on my personal computer and encrypted. No files were recorded or saved in the Zoom cloud.

A total of nine people, including seven PRs and two community members, attended the first Zoom meeting, and six people attended the second meeting for data validation. A professional interpreter was also present at the meetings. We started off each meeting with checking in, revisiting the adjusted timeline, and reviewing goals or purposes for the project. I then presented the results to the PRs. Of note, the use of the virtual platform made participation challenging as everyone's microphone had to be muted while one person was speaking to eliminate background noises. In addition, poor internet connection and virtual language interpretation may have further limited participation. Nevertheless, people appeared engaged and expressed awe of the overall knowledge produced and strong approval of the themes/categories generated. All attending PRs agreed with the category titles generated and the accompanying descriptions and suggested one category to be added. The visual data analytic process using the NVivo software was screenshared with the PRs, which further legitimatized their knowledge, as the community pastor commented,

> I just want to say this is amazing…. These are very interesting findings. I think we don't fully realize the importance of these findings like it's just the knowledge of the people,

> and how their knowledge is just new knowledge to people in the academy. I think the real, how to say, value of this knowledge comes from the fact that it comes from the people, it's not, you know, from top professors. It's being born from the ground to the academy, and so I think that's what gives this knowledge tremendous power, and tremendous impact, not just now, for the future, for other communities. (2020, April 11)

Stage Four – Action Planning and Dissemination of Findings

Planning and Review Sessions – May 16th and July 4th, 2020

After the data analysis meetings, action planning meetings followed to translate the findings into concrete actionable items. An infographic of the identified helpful and hindering factors (Figure 1) from the findings had been created and emailed out to PRs for their review prior to the meetings. The infographic was presented as a framework for generating an action plan. In viewing the infographic, PRs showed their approval and indicated that they would like to share this information to benefit other newcomers. We then discussed the action part of the project or outcomes and target audience, and how to disseminate the findings using the photographs submitted by the PRs. Finally, PRs were invited to articulate their experiences of participating in the project and provide feedback on how it contributed to their goals and purpose for the project. The community members' responses, feedback, and reflection on the findings emerged and the research process are detailed in Chapter Five: Findings as part of the outcomes.

Scientific Rigour

The reliability and validity of the CIT as a research methodology have been found to be satisfactory (Andersson & Nilsson, 1964; Ronan & Lathan, 1974). Butterfield et al. (2005, 2009) recommend the following procedures as reliability and validity checks to guide researchers in establishing the credibility and trustworthiness of CIT research and to standardize its use,

resulting in the ECIT methodology. In developing PaCIT, Chou et al. (2016) built on ECIT by adding an advocacy step and modifying the credibility checks to honour the co-researchers and their expertise.

Descriptive Validity

Interviews, or group discussions in this case, were audio-recorded and transcribed to accurately capture PRs' expression of thoughts and ideas (Maxwell, 1992). The transcripts were then checked against the audio-recording for completeness and accuracy.

Interview Fidelity

As the primary researcher and the facilitator of the group discussions, I listened to all audio recordings of the meetings to ensure that I followed the CIT protocols, asked appropriate questions, and probed for sufficient detail (Creswell, 1998). I referred to the group discussion facilitation and credibility check guides (Appendix I and K) and looked for any leading questions or evidence of power imbalance (further discussed in Chapter Six: Discussion). I also debriefed the first group session with PRs prior to conducting the following three group sessions and consulted with the community leaders, who were present at the meetings as participants themselves, in between meetings, as well as with a colleague after each session to reflect on my role and influence.

Expert Review

In line with the PAR principles of involving participants as co-researchers and experts of their own social practices and situations, PRs' expertise was honoured for this credibility check. PRs reviewed the emergent categories and endorsed that they met the general aim of the phenomenon being studied, or in this case, a sense of belonging (Alfonso, 1997; Barbey, 2000; Eilbert, 1953; Flanagan, 1954; McCormick, 1997; Morley, 2003).

Exhaustiveness

In the context of CIT, exhaustiveness check refers to extracting preliminary critical incidents and wish list items from the data and placing them into categories until exhaustiveness or redundancy of categories is achieved (Andersson & Nilsson, 1964; Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986). This process ensures an adequate coverage of the domain of the phenomenon being studied. Flanagan (1954) suggests two or three critical behaviours per 100 critical incidents gathered as a guideline. A working table (Appendix I; Butterfield et al., 2009) was referred to track the number of new CIs and categories created and help determine the point at which exhaustiveness was reached. After analyzing each group discussion transcript, preliminary CIs and categories were added, edited, and updated. Given the group format of data collection, new categories were identified from each transcript. A total of 126 CIs were identified from the four group discussion sessions and grouped under 13 helping and hindering factors, forming six categories overall.

Participation Rate

Participation rate is important for establishing the credibility and the strength of a category (Butterfield et al., 2009; Flanagan, 1954). This is typically established by tallying the percentage of individual participants who contribute incidents to a particular theme. The rate is calculated by dividing the number of participants who identified critical incidents that fit into a category by the total number of participants (multiplied by 100 for percentage). In the context of individual interviews, a minimum participation rate of 25 percent is the standard for a category to be considered valid or significant (Borgen & Amundson, 1984). However, given the group reporting format in the present study, individual participation rate did not serve as an effective validity check. Given that group participation transcripts were used, the quality of individual

critical incidents that form a category was considered by PRs as more significant than the quantity of critical incidents endorsed for each category. For example, when critical incidents were excluded from forming a category using the low participation rate criteria, PRs noted this missing information from the overall results. Although participation rate was not excluded as a validation criterion, it was relaxed from a minimum of 25% to a minimum of 20% of participants contributing to a category in this study.

Member Checking and Interpretive Validity

Participant cross-checking was performed at the data analysis meeting with PRs engaged in confirming the categories tentatively created out of the extracted critical incidents (Alfonso, 1997; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Maxwell, 1992). Following the credibility check guide (Appendix K), PRs were asked to ensure that the results accurately reflected their experiences and to provide feedback and suggestions for revisions or amendments as needed. PRs were also asked to sort selected exemplar quotes or excerpts from the transcripts (two excerpts from each PR) into the emergent categories to ensure that they were appropriately thematized. This was done using the polling feature on Zoom. Any discrepancies were addressed to achieve 100% agreement. Interpretive validity was evidenced by not only the unanimous agreement indicated by the PRs, but also qualitatively by their comments in response to the findings presented, demonstrating a sense of accomplishment.

Theoretical Agreement

Study findings, including the helpful and hindering categories, were checked against previous findings in the existing scholarly literature on refugee sense of belonging and integration for supporting evidence, or lack of it (Maxwell, 1992, McCormick, 1997). These comparisons of categories are included in Chapter Six: Discussion. Previous uses of participatory

approaches and visual and narrative research methods with refugee groups are also discussed, providing evidence of validity of the underlying assumptions of the current study and reinforcing the goal of the ethical conduct of research with refugee communities.

Advocacy

One of the final steps of credibility checks involved a reassessment of the community project to determine if the set goals had been met and to establish future action steps based on the study findings (Chou et al., 2016). This step is further detailed in Chapter Five: Findings, as PRs discussed the meaning of their participation in the study.

Chapter Five: Findings

In this participatory action research study, 15 members of a local refugee community in Vancouver, BC participated as co-researchers, or participant researchers (PRs), and engaged in group discussions about their conceptualization and experience of a sense of belonging in Canada. This collaborative research process involved a total of 11 community meetings, from recruitment to action planning, and field work interactions with the community leaders and members between the meetings for an iterative cycle of planning, action, and reflection, including data collection, analysis, and validation. This chapter presents the results from four data collection meetings, including three Photovoice sessions and one Enhanced Critical Incident Theory (ECIT) session, as well as two action planning and review sessions. Transcripts of the audio-recorded group discussions were analyzed using thematic and ECIT analyses and organized into reoccurring themes and categories for data validation meetings with the PRs. The order, timing, agendas, and outcomes of all community meetings are outlined in Chapter Four: Method.

The findings are organized into the following sections: (a) meaning of a sense of belonging, or the identifiers and markers that indicate a sense of belonging; (b) helpful and hindering factors, or the critical incidents (CIs) that facilitated or hindered the experience of a sense of belonging in Canada and the ways in which these factors were helpful or unhelpful to developing and maintaining a sense of belonging; (c) purpose and meaning of participation, or reasons or goals for participating in the project; and (d) community actions, or actions undertaken in relation to the identified purpose or goal for participating in the project. The ECIT analysis of the data yielded a total of 126 CIs, of which 92 were helpful incidents and 34 were unhelpful incidents; these CIs fall under eight helpful and five hindering factors, which are

further organized into six categories (Table 3; Figure 6). Each identified theme or category is described in detail along with a selection of exemplar PR quotes from the transcripts and accompanying photographs submitted by the PRs, and dialogue from the group discussions, if applicable. The excerpts were deliberately unedited and kept in their original state, as spoken by the PRs or as interpreted into English, including any grammatical errors, to maintain the authenticity of PRs' words. Parts of the excerpts containing unintelligible speech or redundant content were omitted.

Meaning of a Sense of Belonging

According to the data from this study, one major marker of one's achievement of a sense of belonging included having reached a point in the integration process where one has the experience, knowledge, and resources to assist other newcomers and to contribute to the host society. In the following excerpt, Emmanuel reflects on Ricardo's account of his establishment of a sense of belonging as a newcomer and ability to empower others in similar positions:

> It take him himself all this while to be in this place where he can be able to help others. And now, he is now at that place where other people can have the help from him… to give us this possibility to be in a place where we belong, and to do something to help others to not go through the difficulties of life. But what he just shared is that we ourselves, to be in that place where we can help others, we also have to walk the walk to be in that position. If not, we won't be able to help others. So it's a personal walk for yourself if you know that place that you belong, you also have to walk it out to that place first. It's going to be hard for you yourself. You are giving, belonging to people, for you first to walk it out for your life, to belong first, and now you can belong, also help others to belong. (2019, November 16)

Another significant indicator of a sense of belonging discussed was the ability to move forward with one's life with a sense of certainty and security. This involved attaining status and rights that provide protection and safety and having the freedom to live in peace and manifest one's religion or beliefs. Evidence of these markers and indicators from the data are presented in the Helpful and Hindering Factors section.

During the Photovoice sessions, the PRs discussed what a sense of belonging meant to them in terms of belonging to the home and/or host culture, country, and society, as well as belonging to a group of people such as a circle of friends or a community. More specifically, PRs discussed the ways in which they identified with their cultural, spiritual, and individual identities, beliefs, and values, while striving to integrate into a new society and adopt multicultural views. This belonging process involved maintaining their native language while learning a new language and drawing on individual and cultural strengths and resilience.

Most importantly, a sense of belonging was further conceptualized on a personal, affective level as feeling accepted by, connected to, and supported by others. For instance, Alex expressed what it meant for him to belong in Canada:

> What I belong is not just to belong to Canada country or whatever. It's to belong to the people. Just like what I said, how can I support who are going through a situation like I was before, and belong to the people, not to the land or to the government. (2019, November 16)

As the PRs presented photographs that represent the meaning of a sense of belonging to them, they discussed the challenges of being apart from their family members and close friends back home, but also reported finding happiness, comfort, and motivation in thinking about them. For example, Juan expressed conflicting emotions about missing his loved ones and teared up as he

described three photos, one of his four daughters, one of his older brother, and one of him and his wife (Figure 1):

> My daughters are here. My greatest sadness is that I can't see them. So much I miss them, but they tell me not to go there. My brother is there. It is both sadness and happiness, and I hope that it can become true, happiness more than sadness, when he is accepted here in Canada, because he is making arrangements to be able to come here…. My only happiness, my wife is there with me. We're celebrating here in Canada; it's a dinner. It's the only thing that keeps me motivated. (2019, November 16)

Figure 1

Juan and His Wife

Similarly, Sol shed tears as he shared a photo of his family members (Figure 2), who were described as a significant part of his sense of belonging:

> In this picture you are about to see the four most important women in my life. To the left my wife. Next to her is my mom. Next to her is my sister, the one that is right under me in age. And the last one is my little sister, although she is not little anymore. That is our last picture together, the last one we were able to take before we came here. It represents what is most important for me. I miss them a lot. I know we are making a big effort to be better. And I am very grateful to every one of you to give me a place here. But I don't stop missing them and loving them so much. (2019, September 28)

Figure 2

Sol and His Family

For Luna, Sol's wife, the photo that symbolized a sense of connectedness was a close-up shot of bright pink tulips (Figure 3), which reminded her of a close friend who supported her during a critical point of her life.

> This picture, it represents someone really special to me. It's my best friend, more than a friend, she's s a sister to me. I met her at university, and she loves this flower. It makes me remember how hard it was for me all my time through university. Study by day and work by night. In order to be able to pay my university. But this person never left my side, and she helped me so much. And thank God I was able to fulfill my objective and graduate. (2019, September 28)

Figure 3

Luna's Pink Tulips

In addition to family members and friends, the PRs also shared photos and stories of their family pets. Sandra, the community photographer, excitedly showed me the photos that she had taken of her new puppy at the beach where she introduced her to other dogs for the first time. Due to her mental illness, Sandra was not able to make it to the rest of the meetings after attending the first one to provide us with a photography lesson, but I had an opportunity to sit down with her on a Thursday at the foodbank. She shared with me that her puppy had become a source of support for her, helping her feel more uplifted. Sandra emailed me the photos to share them with the group (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Sandra's Puppy

Sol and Luna also brought photos of their dog (Figure 5), whom they had to leave behind in Nicaragua, and described how they continued to feel connected to her:

> It is a female dog that you're looking at there. It's our daughter. Since we got married, we haven't been able to have children, but we had found in this dog our own sense of maternity and paternity. I could be myself with her. I felt the joy that no matter what was

> happening, she gave me that happiness when she greeted me. I know that right now I can't be with her, we have to leave it behind, but I can feel happy when I see another dog like her on the streets because I know each and every dog that belongs to that race on the streets can give happiness to any family here. I would like her to be with me, but I can't. (2019, November 16)

Figure 5

Sol and Luna's Dog

After listening to Sol and Luna's accounts, Juan expressed being able to relate to their pain and sadness in leaving their dog behind:

> What sadness that I wasn't able to say goodbye to him. I got somebody to take him to my mother's house. I didn't see him, and I left. My wife went to say goodbye, and that moment was very, very sad. He was just laying down. That is very painful for me to remember that. (2019, November 16)

Juan reminisced about how his dog would greet him on his way home and follow him around. Others from the group commented on how the love and loyalty that pets provide contribute to people's sense of belonging. Ricardo offered his insight on family pets:

> There are some things that are repeated by people who have pets that the love they express to me is unconditional. I don't need to justify anything. It is unconditional love that you cannot find among humans. Because humans, like our relatives, they love you, or they love you but under certain conditions. Instead, cats and dogs, or pets, they express unconditional love to you. This is the strength that people draw from that relationship, that gives a sense of belonging. (2019, November 16)

Ricardo's remark in the following excerpt highlights this value of intimate relationships in one's sense of belonging:

> I think there is something very very basic that I can tell that even if you have permanent residence, even if you have citizenship, even if you accomplish a diploma, you can still feel the vacuum. It's really complex. I don't think we would answer here, but I like to maybe bring something: human relationship. It doesn't matter, like [Emmanuel] said, he now feels belonging here, unlike Hong Kong. Why? Because I think he found human relation much more, I don't know, friendly, approachable, that welcome you, right? Now that is very basic, but I think the most important thing is family relationships. I know common people if you want really to develop a sense of belonging who here have family. Even if you don't have real family, maybe be adopted as a part of family. If you know anyone here who don't have family, I recommend people who have family here adopted them and give them love. I think that is the key to have a sense of belonging. (2019, November 16)

As such, PRs discussed the meaning of *a sense of belonging* in terms of being able to help others and contribute to society and having a sense of certainty and safety to enjoy life and make decisions about the future. PRs also identified having established a cultural and personal

identity and feeling connected to friends and family as important aspects of their belongingness in a new country. In the subsequent section, factors, processes, events, behaviours, or activities that facilitated or obstructed PRs' experiences of a sense of belonging are explored in depth.

Helpful and Hindering Factors

From the analysis of the transcripts of the Photovoice and ECIT group discussion sessions, a total of 126 CIs (i.e., factors, processes, events, behaviours, activities) were identified, of which 92 were helpful incidents and 34 were hindering incidents. Based on similar topics and shared experiences related to belongingness, the CIs were organized into 13 helpful factors and five hindering factors, which were further categorized under six categories encompassing one or more of the factors. Table 3 summarizes the number of helpful and hindering incidents (not mutually exclusive) under each category and the number of PRs who endorsed the CIs. When talking about helpful incidents, people also broached unhelpful incidents. Figure 6 displays an infographic originally created to present the findings to the PRs in a reader-friendly manner for member checking. The infographic provides a summary of the six categories with the helpful and hindering factors identified. The order in which the categories are presented is not relevant. Each CI, factor, and category carries an equal weight of importance to the general aim of the project.

Table 3

Number of Critical Incidents and Participant Researchers Contributing to Each Category

Category	Helpful		Hindering		Total CIs
	CIs	PRs	CIs	PRs	
Social Connection & Interaction	25	10	14	7	39
Helping Others	11	5	--	--	11
Cultural Identity & Values	10	6	6	3	16
Positive Mindset	27	9	--	--	27
Status & Rights	12	8	9	3	21
English Language Proficiency	7	6	5	4	12
Total CIs	92		34		126

Figure 6

Infographic of Helpful and Hindering Factors

Social Connection and Interaction

The Social Connection and Interaction category refers to incidents of the formation or disruption of meaningful relationships, as well as day-to-day encounters with others as helpful or hindering experiences of a sense of belonging. These include family relations, friendships, and interactions with authority figures and professionals, such as a government official, lawyer, judge, police officer, family doctor, and mental health professional, as well as organizations. A total of 39 CIs, including 25 helpful CIs and 14 hindering CIs, fall under this category.

The helpful incidents include newly established support networks and positive experiences with or formal and interpersonal treatment by individuals in positions of authority or in helping professions in Canada. In terms of new connections, PRs described incidents in which a group of people or a community received them with open arms and made them feel like a family, supporting them during challenging times in a new country. Examples of these helping behaviours included inviting them to events and gatherings, celebrating holidays together, and raising money to bail them out of jail. Emmanuel described his experience as he presented a photo of himself enjoying Thanksgiving dinner with people from his church (Figure 7):

> The first picture was a 10-year anniversary of the church. So, the church organized a dinner for their own members. This is my friend, David. We are on the same table. And the second picture is a Thanksgiving picture. So, this, I become friends, they just got kind of, "Where are you going to go this day of Thanksgiving?" I told them, "Man, I will just stay home and maybe cook something and eat." Then they say, "Come and join us." Oh, I was so happy. So, they were all surprised, they were just eating, eating, but me, I wanted to take a picture. I wanted to keep that memory, and today I'm so happy that I'm sharing it here because this is so deep into my heart. (2019, November 30)

Figure 7

Emmanuel at His Church Thanksgiving Dinner

Emmanuel shared this story with excitement, as if he was taken back to the moment in the photograph with the members of his church. As a group, we discussed how holidays can heighten one's experience of social isolation and loneliness, particularly for those who are not able to be with their family and friends, and what it means to have a place to go to celebrate with others and feel at home. Emmanuel's follow-up expression captures this meaning, "That make me kind of, 'Ah, I can live! I have a place! I am welcome! I am invited! I am invited!'" The profound impact of social connections on one's refugee experience is further illustrated by Alex's account of how the members of his church, or his "church family" gave him a life-altering gift during an adversity:

> So, the church, I have been going to this church for five years now…. They are the one who helped me out to get my permanent resident in this country…. I was just coming from work, and the police arrested me…. He took my working bag. I have my tools, everything…. Because they're going to take me to immigration detention, so if that is with me, it's going to cause me a problem. I'm not supposed to work. So, he went with the

> bag. So, then I was put in the prison four days. So, this is where my church came in. They all did donate some money and get me out, $6,500. So, they get me out. When I came out and then I have an opportunity to apply for Humanitarian and Pre-removal Risk Assessment. Then one of them was approved, which is the Humanitarian. (2019, December 21)

These newly built human relationships were described as particularly helpful for people who had been estranged from their family back home or people who do not have family in Canada. This was the case for Emmanuel, who had been rejected by his family because of his Christian faith:

> For me in my home country, the sense of belonging was kind of denied to me. Because for me, I think that the outcome to a time in our lives that we have the courage to decide what we want in our life. But at that time at the age of 19 years old, my parents did not accept it, my, what I wanted to become in life. They didn't accept my interest. And that really destroyed me at that time. So, I had to flee my home country to go to Hong Kong. (2019, December 21)

Emmanuel explained how he continued to feel alienated while living in Hong Kong for 15 years and moved to Canada where he finally found a Christian community to which he feels belong. Alex also described his search for belongingness, “It took me eight years to belong to this society, this country. I went through a lot of things in life. My home country, I wasn't belong with my family at all. I left my family when I was 10 years old (2019, November 16).” I could relate to Emmanuel’s experience of being invited to a place of belonging versus being denied a sense of belonging at home, as I shared in the following excerpt and photo (Figure 8):

I have two photos here. The first photo is a couch in my living room. This represents a sense of belonging to me because on that couch so many of my friends have sat and socialized. So when I thought about, okay what helps me feel a sense of belonging, I had this idea of space, having space, having a common space that you can call your own…. I think that really creates a sense of belonging for me. Being able to gather in a space where you feel comfortable and safe with each other…. The second photo is Thanksgiving this year. It's at my friend's place. She hosts an orphan Thanksgiving. People who don't have a place to go or don't have a family to celebrate with, she invites over. This means a lot to me because I'm actually estranged from my family. So every holiday I get very anxious and that's when I feel loneliness more than ever because I have close friends, but every holiday they go to their own family, and I get anxious that I won't have anyone to spend it with. So when she creates this space for me to go to and I can rely on that every Thanksgiving, every Christmas that makes me feel like I have a place where I belong. (2019, November 16)

Figure 8

Angelina's Thanksgiving Dinner at Her Friend's

Family estrangement impeded or delayed the progress of gaining a sense of belonging in a new country. Esther's remark illustrates the loss and discovery of belonging in refugee experience:

> With the pain of losing, I found people and I found solidarity around me through this community, support from sensible people. I want to finish up with something I read yesterday about a Mexican journalist that has been persecuted in my country too. That says that "a hug in a foreign country sometimes is your home." (2019, September 28)

PRs also recalled CIs in which they were treated with compassion, provided resources, and connected to a support system. They discussed how these incidents facilitated their integration and adaptation in Canada. For Alex, a referral from his family doctor allowed him to move across the country and find his place of belonging, as he explains in the next quote:

> The next day my family doctor called my phone and said, "[Alex], come. I want to see you." I went there, and she said to me, "Do you want to live in Canada?" I said, "Yeah." But she said, "I'm not going to help you, but I will link you to someone who can help you to stay in Canada." And she truly did connect me with people. And I met with someone who was chatting with me one-on-one…. And she asked me, "Do you want to stay in Montreal?" I used to live in Montreal. I said, "No, I want to come to Vancouver." She said, "Oh, I have somebody, a friend in Vancouver." And she gave me her number. And I called. She didn't pick up. I start crying like a baby, right? In five days, she called back, "So, I listened to your voice message [Alex]. I'm very sorry I was busy." We spoke, and she gave me all the information or the day that I could come to Vancouver. I came here, and she put me in her friend's house…. And she connect me to a church. (2019, December 21)

This small act of kindness opened a world of possibilities and opportunities for Alex as he started out a new life in Canada. His story demonstrates how a single point of contact can connect an individual of refugee status to a network of people. The court of law was another important setting in which friendly gestures made a difference during the refugee claimant and hearing process, as illustrated in the following excerpt, spoken by Alberto:

> I found it very helpful that all the authorities, even the judge and the lawyers and the attorneys that were taking care of my case were very sympathetic with me. For me, in every interview I had, they all welcomed me, so that made the transition to adapt to the country way easier. It made me feel very comfortable. (2019, December 21)

These encounters were indeed critical incidents that set the stage for building a sense of belonging during the first year of living as a refugee in a foreign country. While some PRs described similar experiences, others described hostile and unhelpful behaviours displayed by government officials and others in the community. These negative interactions were identified as hindering CIs that caused emotional distress. Organic recalled the callous comments by authority figures and how they made him feel:

> I was very mistreated by the authorities in this country, the immigratory authorities. I will never forget the day when they made me leave the plane because they said that my case was going through an appeal and that it was not going to work, so. They say that, that's the regular process, but for me, it was like torture and I cannot forget the officer telling me like, "How do you feel about going back to your country today?" And for me, that was torturous. They asked me, "How do you feel? What are you going to do?" The only thing I could say it's, "Nothing. I'm just going to go back and act according to the law because I cannot break the law. I don't want to break the law." And with a very harsh tone

> of voice, they were telling me, "Do this. Do this. You have to do this." At that point I felt defeated. I felt like I had lost five years of my life. (2019, November 30)

For Alex, a lack of understanding, sensitivity, and cultural competence from a mental health professional exacerbated his depression,

> When I first came to Canada, it was a little difficult for me and I felt like I don't belong anywhere. It was complicated. But I do everything to make myself happy. But this wasn't really not me happy anymore, but I tried. I was really very depressed…. My family doctor have to link me up with a psychologist. I'm from Africa from Nigeria. The system here and Nigerian system is not the same. The psychologist guy, what he was presenting: he asked me to read books, he asked me to watch TV, and he asked me to go out and make friends. But the problem was I cannot read…. He said to me, “Don't worry. If you go to your country, you will be fine.” And I said, “I don't think I will be fine. I think I’m going to die.” And if possible, I can even hang myself, kill myself, just like commit suicide. It's better for me to commit suicide, kill myself here than going back there. (2019, December 21)

For some PRs and their family members, adverse experiences in their home country caused pervasive anxiety and fear and deterred them from seeking belongingness in Canada. This was the case for Maria’s children:

> I had to explain my children and make them understand that all these people, these authority figures were there to help us. This was particularly difficult because from where I come from, we were actually fleeing from these people, from the authorities. It was through time, I cannot say it was a couple of months or something, I think it could be even a year. It was all this time that took my children to actually feel that they could go to

> the street and just be free. For them, it took like a year. They could see a cop on the street and not feel like it was the enemy, not be afraid. They would turn white and just feel like really bad when seeing them. They believe that the authority was the enemy, and it took them really a long time to get over this to understand that here you can believe in the authority and that they were going to be respected. (2019, December 21)

Alternatively, Eagle and his family were turned away by an organization that they had thought they could seek comfort and belongingness from after their arrival in Canada:

> When I first came here, I have a couple of very bad welcoming experiences in different churches. There was this big church I went, and they had this prayer meeting at 7:00 PM, and I say, "Well, I want to be part of that." And when I get to the door they say, "Well, it's eight dollars for the meal for each person." And I said, "Really?" For me, 25 dollars back then are like 200 dollars nowadays…. It was really for me, big. So I said to my wife, "I think we cannot go to these gatherings." (2019, December 21)

These examples highlight the direct and long-term impact of social connections and interactions on PRs' sense of belonging as they strived to settle in a new country. In sum, 10 PRs endorsed newly established support network and friendly interactions with authorities and professionals as helpful factors and seven PRs endorsed disrupted social relationship and hostile or unwelcoming treatment as hindering factors.

Helping Others

Helping Others was identified as another helping factor category that fostered a sense of belonging. A total of 11 CIs were reported under this category. Eagle's story, as continued below, well-characterizes this theme of helping others:

> And then I said to her, "You know one day if I have an opportunity to serve in this country, one day the church or being a leader in the church, I will never charge someone who comes for a meal."… That was very unwelcoming and unhelpful for me, but out of that something good was born. (2019, December 21)

The group applauded as Eagle shared. Eagle indeed became a community pastor at a local church; through the refugee foodbank and his own ministry, he welcomed and reached out to newcomer families, including the PRs, and others in need. I witnessed and supported his work as he selflessly served the community and encountered conflict with the church board for prioritizing the community's needs over those of the church.

Several PRs also indicated that from their unhelpful experiences, they developed compassion for others with similar challenges. After describing his challenging encounter with the immigration authorities, Organic added, "So whenever I get the chance to help people in this type of organizations, I like to take it (2019, November 30)." Other PRs reported being inspired by helpful individuals to pay their kindness forward. Esther spoke about Ricardo's helping behaviour motivated her to give back, "He inspires me because he helps me think I'd also like to help others, that I'm living through this, and I can be a tool to assist them adapt to this new environment (2019, November 16)." In both instances, PRs expressed that they would like to share their experiences with other refugees or newcomers so that they may relate to and learn from them and have an easier time adjusting to their new life in Canada.

Some PRs had sought out opportunities to volunteer at different non-profit or charitable organizations, whereas other PRs, like Maria, contributed to this particular community by building relationships and providing a place of belonging for others:

> I don't do volunteering, but I do receive people that come here because I know what they've been through. And I try to receive them with love, and make them feel welcome because here, the friends are actually family. And summing up, I feel blessed. (2019, December 21)

To add to this meaningful discussion, Eagle explained that shifting his attention from himself to toward others when they need help also helps him feel better and shared his collectivist worldview in contrast with the dominant individualist culture in Canada:

> For me, one of the things that has really helped me when I feel down or I feel depressed or whatever, it's to turn my attention from myself towards others. For example, sometimes, I meet someone that has a problem, or is facing a challenge, and all of a sudden, I do something for that person. And it's like my brain switches, and I stop thinking of my own problems. I know it's about someone else's problem, but it's really helping me too. I don't know why, but it's the truth. That's something I really wish people would get it here because I think we are living in a culture, "No, no. Just invest in yourself. Do more for yourself and focus on yourself. Don't care about the rest." But I think there is something beautiful about caring for other people and not just about our own things. (2019, December 21)

I identified with Eagle's experience of helping others and contributed to the discussion:

> I think that act of giving tells you that even when you feel like you have nothing, you have something to give. So it's empowering for yourself. You're not nobody in this country. When you can help each other, you have so much to give, so much to offer. And that's why we are here. Look at all the knowledge we have in this room. We are able to share and learn from each other. (2019, December 21)

In sum, five PRs identified opportunities to help others as a facilitator of their sense of belonging. In fact, helping others was one of the main reasons that PRs provided for participating in this research project, which is further discussed in the third section of this chapter.

Cultural Identity and Values

The Cultural Identity and Values category represents processes whereby PRs undergo changes in their cultural identity and values through intercultural contact, and the impact of these acculturation processes on their belongingness. Overall, 16 CIs, including helping and hindering factors, contributed to this category. PRs reported that the preservation of their home culture helped them maintain their sense of belonging associated with their country of origin. The following excerpt illustrates Danielle's reaffirmation of her Nicaraguan identity and worldview, as well as her appreciation for Canadian traditions. She reflected on her sense of belonging, as she shared two different photos of her daughter (Figure 12), one of her wearing a Nicaraguan folkloric dress on Independence Day back in Nicaragua and the other of her wearing a bear costume for Halloween in Canada:

> I chose these pictures because I think my daughter is always going to belong to two countries. Because even though she came here when she was very little, she got the time to learn a lot about all the tradition and cultures from Nicaragua. But now she's taking and learning all the Canadian traditions. And when I see these two pictures, I acknowledge that I am going to always belong to Nicaragua. Because everything that I am, all my culture, my traditions, everything that I am, I learned it there. I know I live here, but I keep looking how to keep those traditions and the way my life, it's built, it's around this way of life. I live here, I have a life here, and I am building a future here in Canada, but I will always be from Nicaragua. All my friends, my contacts are from

> Spanish speaking countries, so even though, all of them are from different Spanish speaking countries, we all have the same way of seeing life in a very happy and joyful way. They make me feel at home. I'm not saying that I don't love Canada, I love Canada. I know that I'm building my life here and that I will stay here, and that I'm going to live here, and I'm going to get used to and do the same, live under the traditions and customs here, but I will always belong to my country, so I will always do those traditions too. (2019, November 30)

Figure 9

Danielle's Daughter in Nicaragua and in Canada

Esther also shared how she learned from her child about the importance of preserving their native language and Mexican culture:

> Children teach us a lot, and now that I want to learn the language and my son has already learned very fast, one time I told him, let's talk in English. He started crying. He said, "That's not my language. My language is Spanish." His teacher told me he worries because he doesn't want to forget Spanish. He remembers his history even though he is very small. He remembers, for instance, our president, and he says, "My name is Benito Juarez, the Mexican president, and I'm going to cut my hair like Benito Juarez did." Now

> I hear that, and it seems to me he's very important…. I've seen my son adapting here and keeping his roots. (2019, November 16)

In relation to this critical factor, I shared my personal experience of the detrimental impact of losing cultural identity on my well-being and sense of belonging as an immigrant youth:

> When I first came here, my parents said I was not allowed to do anything Korean…. I was not to have any Korean friends. I couldn't speak Korean at school, of course. I couldn't watch any Korean TV shows, and I was not allowed to go back to Korea at all. So actually, my roots were taken away, and I fell into depression because I didn't know where I belonged anymore. So, as a child who was still developing her identity, that was very traumatic for me because I didn't have an identity anymore. (2019, November 16)

There was a variation across PRs in terms of their level of acculturation or cultural identity. For Ricardo, who left his country, Peru, nearly two decades ago, Canada had become his new home. He described the development of his dual belonging:

> I've been trying to re-encounter myself with my history, my family, my roots. That's where I understood the sense of belonging. I still belong to Peru, the culture, the history. I have roots here in Canada, too. It's been 18 years, so I can no longer say that I belong completely to Peru or to Canada. To reconcile my being and in my head, I have to belong to both. That's what I've chosen. (2019, November 16)

In other cases, a strong attachment to the home country interfered with the motivation to seek a new sense of belonging. For example, in the following excerpt, Maria explains how the culture shock hindered her from adapting to a culture drastically different from her own:

> It's just simply different, and you learn how to survive with different ways of living. In a country like mine, for example, I come from a little province where we have the second

> largest carnival in the world except from Brazil. It's just such an effervescent culture like… coming here and seeing how plain people and simple are is just, for me, it has been very very bad, it has hit me very bad. (2019, December 21)

Another PR, Luna, described her conflict with belonging. As she shared a photo that she took at the Vancouver International Airport with her husband while waiting to find out the outcome of their refugee protection claim, Luna recalled feeling apprehensive about their situation:

> It's very hard for anyone to get a sense of belonging for a country or for whatever, and we are very used to this place. But it's even harder to make aside the sense of belonging to actually start belonging to somewhere else. I think everyone had the sense of belonging before, came here. Now we're starting to have a sense of belonging for this new place, but we don't want to leave, or disregard the other sense of belonging…. I think fear and the sense of belonging to our countries, made us doubt at that moment. (2019, November 30)

Esther referred to a quote she heard in a meeting, "The worst enemy of an immigrant is your own recollections (2019, November 16)." For PRs carrying painful memories from their home country, detachment from the culture of origin facilitated their integration and development of a sense of belonging in Canada, as exemplified in the next excerpt by Alberto:

> One of the reasons why we don't adapt so good is because we're very patriotic and because we are indoctrinated or schooled into certain ways. In our country, they teach us that we belong to that country. But with their own laws and system, they discriminate us. When we leave our country, if we don't get rid of these perceptions and we get used to this new life, then it's not useful…. I think it's really important to leave your patriotic side in your country and come here and adapt the ways here. I have lived in many countries

> and I do not miss a thing from El Salvador. Perhaps I miss my mom, my wife, but life starts from zero as she said, and we need to start over here. (2019, December 21)

He further elaborated on his acculturation process of letting go of unhelpful beliefs and adopting a transnational identity:

> I don't feel like a refugee. I'm one more…. I'm not that patriotic. I was born in El Salvador, but El Salvador hasn't given me anything. I'm a descendant from indigenous people and Spanish people. The Spanish Invasion killed the majority of my people. It was named Cuzcatlan. When the Spanish came and killed my people, in the memory of that blood loss, it was called El Salvador. Why am I going to be identified, why am I going to identify myself with that manslaughter? So now I am a citizen of the world. (2019, September 28)

Furthermore, Canada's outward endorsement of multiculturalism and commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples encouraged PRs to feel belong in a new country. Specifically, Emmanuel reported feeling less alienated living among other newcomers of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds:

> We can see different culture here. Nobody can say that this is my country here. There's no kind of a dominant culture or character. You will see all type of races here…. This kind of gave me this feeling that I belong here…. If I'm here, I'm here also; this is my country. (2019, December 21)

Alberto expressed similar sentiments as he shared a photo taken at his worksite in northern BC of himself among his coworkers:

> These people, Italian descendants, Jamaica, Canadian, El Salvadorian apparently… and French descendant. Who is the immigrant here? Everyone…. We are all immigrants. And

> we cannot use or wear a flag saying that we are refugees because we are human beings…. Don't identify yourselves as refugees. Identify yourself as human beings because we are not here to ask. We come here to live. And integrate this society. And this group, this community is going to be very helpful to integrate ourselves and leave behind the insignia of a refugee. (2019, September 28)

Some PRs had lived in other countries before resettling in Canada. For example, Ricardo reflected on other unique aspects of Canadian culture that allowed him to find a sense of belonging, which he was not able to achieve while living in Europe. He shared, "What does Canada have? That I feel at home. So the answer, I think, is related to this talk about reconciliation that we have here in Canada (2019, September 28)." Given his indigenous descent and experience of persecution, Ricardo related to the injustices suffered by Canada's Indigenous peoples. In the next excerpt, he shares with the group the tragic story of Chanie Wenjack, an Anishinaabe boy who ran away from his residential school at age 12 and died attempting to walk over 600 km home and reunite with his family:

> As a newcomer, I identify myself with this story, and I feel solidarity…. This story really hit me a couple of years ago when I heard it…. I saw this documentary, and it really shook me and I thought that for the first time it was very probable that Canada and Canadians are going to start healing themselves. Because Gordon Downie was the first one to acknowledge out loud that Canada had made harm to all First Nations. He said that Canada needs to heal within the next 100 years. We need everyone that arrives to this country, we need to be conscious about this. (2019, September 28)

These examples illustrate the dynamic processes by which PRs negotiated and constructed their cultural identity and the bearing of their sense of belonging to a cultural group on their general

feeling of belonging. In sum, six PRs identified the preservation of their culture of origin and Canada's unique culture as helpful factors and three PRs contributed to the hindering factor of a strong attachment to home country.

Positive Mindset

The Positive Mindset category encompasses 27 helpful enhanced CIs where personal attributes of resilience, individual coping strategies, and internal processes of adaptation helped achieve a sense of belonging in Canada. This category emerged as a key helpful factor with the most incidents reported after the Social Connection and Interaction category. PRs indicated that adopting a positive mindset allowed them to seek a sense of belonging in their new environment. They described how they were able to maintain a positive outlook on life and stay hopeful during times of uncertainty and adversity, despite the hindering experiences of discrimination and marginalization.

When asked about helpful individual attributes and ways of coping, Danielle replied, "Perseverance…. It's because while we're here, we have to persevere, we have to wait, we have to fight for what we want. It's a quality not to quit that gives you the strength to keep on going (2019, December 21)." Following Danielle's comment, Maria identified "faith" as something "that gives you the strength, the perseverance, the ability to fall and stand up again and again." Similarly, Emmanuel emphasized that his faith in God and the act of worshiping provided him with a sense of belonging and fortitude:

> I wanted to share with you for me, image of belonging is the place where people are worshiping. When I am worshiping, I feel excited. Even if I was tired, I will feel motivated and stronger. Even when I am down, like sick, if I'm just worshiping, worshiping. (2019, September 28)

In the following excerpt, Emmanuel's account of being a refugee in Hong Kong, provides further insight into the day-to-day efforts to belong to a society:

> I'm coming from Hong Kong, where I live this kind of a mental life of adult kind of independence. It was in Hong Kong. So I reflect more of my mind to Hong Kong life. There you will see challenge, challenge, challenge, challenge. So you that are living there for already more than 10 years, you're still foreigner. Every day, you're still foreigner. So every time once you get into the bus, people are going to judge you like a foreigner in the bus. You have to bear with these feelings every day, to not be angry to people, to help them accommodate you is everyday work. (2019, December 21)

Being viewed as a permanent foreigner, rather than a permanent resident, Emmanuel learned to tolerate discrimination, be more complaisant with others, and "help them accommodate" him in order to adapt in the host country. Being deprived of his adult rights for 15 years did not dissuade Emmanuel from starting over his life in Canada:

> I feel stronger. I feel, "Man, it's not late." Even I can say to myself, "Even at my age, I know it's not late. I can get all these things, no problem. I just have to work hard to go for all of those things." (2019, December 21)

For Esther, cultivating an attitude of gratitude enabled her to cope with her challenges as she searched for belonging in Canada:

> For me, being thankful and grateful. Being grateful, it's something that's helped me a lot. My kid has told me, like the way I would pray for Jesus, people and this other people that helped us, we should pray not for one, but for the whole organization, the whole church. It's also being grateful for being alive. (2019, December 21)

Organic also offered his knowledge, “Patience and tolerance. If we lose our minds, we'll start saying things that make no sense (2019, December 21).” After his refugee claim and appeal were both denied, Organic filed a second appeal, with only 5% chance of it being approved according to his lawyer; the next excerpt demonstrates his perseverance:

> But I learn how to fight, so I never gave up on the last day when they were about to send me back to my country. So one day before leaving to my country, my lawyer found a way to get me to federal court. So my lawyer told me, “If by 3 o'clock today, we don't have a decision, you have to go to the airport.” It was 3:30 pm and I was already in the airport because my lawyer wouldn't call me. 3:45 and I was with the officer at the airport when he received the call from my lawyer. So when I'm there with the officer, he tells me that I'm in very good luck because they were going to review my case again, my process again, through Humanitarian Aid. (2019, November 30)

Other individual attributes and internal processes included setting goals and focusing on them with the determination to resettle in a new country and the willingness to adapt and learn from others’ experiences. For example, Esther expressed her desire to be part of Canadian society:

> I want to contribute to society. I know things. I worked hard in my life. I know I can do it. I know I can learn the language, and I know I have something to offer to this country. I know I can recover my identity in this country. (2019, September 28)

She identified her son’s happiness and safety as a priority and a source of her strength and reassurance, as she shared a photo of him smiling (Figure 9):

> This is one of the first pictures that I took when I arrived here in Canada. That is precisely what reminds me what was my first motivation to stay in this country. When I

see his resiliency, when I see his happiness to live, his thrill to find out and discover new things and the ability of him to put beside, behind him everything that we have to go through, made this walk a little bit more easier for me. While I'm adapting to a new language, to new people, to new culture, the way he integrated into the community is contagious to me. And it's this that has pushed me through to be able to do it by myself too. This picture is all that happiness and all that resiliency that has motivated us. And it's what makes me strong. (2019, September 28)

Figure 10

Esther's Son in Canada

Alberto also presented a photo of his children and another photo of a landscape (Figure 10), representing his purpose and appreciation for life:

My daughter and my son. This is the reason why I came here. I need a better life for them. My life is not dependent on myself. It depends on them. I need to make better human beings for the planet. That's why I am here. My country is full of violence and insecurity, and it's a very poor country. I got here. And I live this. What is it? I'm not

there. But it's about enjoying the moment even if I'm alone. A coffee, a cake, and a beautiful view. It's enough to enjoy each moment because you are fighting for different people, your descendants. This a day today, even if you are alone, you have an objective. And you have to enjoy that solitude because it will be enough to fulfill your life if you have an objective. (2019, September 28)

Figure 11

Alberto's View

Furthermore, PRs discussed accepting hardship as an opportunity for growth and understanding the dialectical nature of life. Ricardo explained, referring to his photo of Inca ruins back home in Peru (Figure 11):

> That photo means that I culminated my project in Canada, and then began a new journey that is not going to be easy because there is darkness. There is cloudiness over. But behind you can see a glimmer of blue sky. That's the light, hope. That's what guides me and where I belong to because life is dual. There's challenges, problems, but there's positiveness and strength, what lies ahead. (2019, November 16)

Figure 12

Ricardo's Journey

Ricardo shared his approach to resilience and belonging in Canada, having spent many years living in Toronto and Vancouver, "If I want to belong to this country, I need to embrace its history, with the good and the bad, and contribute with my work towards this healing that people need so badly (2019, September 28)." For Maria, resettlement challenges in Canada was not her first refugee experience:

> This is the second time I have had to move and start from nothing. It has not been easy. It has been actually very hard this particular time. But you know what they say that life is not easy. It just makes us stronger. (2019, December 21)

Maria and her children were forced to leave their home country, Colombia, and resettle in Venezuela before fleeing again to Canada. Lastly, Emmanuel's comment epitomizes the positive attitudes of PRs, "So there is no way you say that you can only be happy in your home country. You can be happy here (2019, November 30)." In sum, nine PRs discussed the adoption of a positive mindset and the use of individual strengths and resilience as helpful processes/strategies.

Status and Rights

The Status and Rights category comprises incidents associated with PRs' legal status in Canada as hindering and helping factors of developing a sense of belonging in Canada. More specifically, PRs discussed the privileges and restrictions they had in Canada during their resettlement period. A total of 21 CIs were reported for hindering and helping categories.

In terms of hindering incidents, some PRs referred to the long and strenuous legal process they endured while claiming their refugee status or seeking humanitarian protection in Canada. For those who were refused their refugee claims, this process involved being arrested by the police, spending time in jail, preparing piles of paperwork, and experiencing unwelcoming interactions described previously. Alex described his feeling when he was denied refugee status in Montreal, Quebec as "you feel like you are nothing, lost, nothing." He elaborated on his experience of being deprived of a sense of belonging:

> When I came here, this was really not too good for me. I wasn't belong to anywhere. I went to immigration, nothing happens. I was denied. I was asked to leave this country. I went underground, came to Vancouver. So I get to a point that I was arrested by cops. (2019, November 16)

Relatedly, Organic shared that the stress he experienced from the appeal process took a toll on his physical health, as he presented a photo of stacked boxes in his closet (Figure 13):

> We have evidence, appeals, pretty much everything there, federal court, humanitarian court. I can only show you these boxes, which represent 60% of my case because the other 40% I have a friend that has them. I got very sick with stress because that was very stressful for me, because every time I had to send the paperwork, a box of papers, I would

think, “What am I going to do with all this paper? What's going to happen?” (2019, November 30)

Figure 13

Organic’s Boxes of Paperwork

Other PRs discussed the ordeal of living in a state of uncertainty and fear of deportation. Of note, about half of the PRs were waiting for their refugee hearing at the time of the data collection. I witnessed Esther’s apprehension as I checked in with her closer to the court date, as well as the gratitude and excitement she expressed after she and her 7-year-old son were accepted. Danielle related to Alex’s story and articulated the process and the meaning of obtaining permanent resident status:

> For me, it's like taking away uncertainty because he spent eight years, and he lost his home, he was asked to leave the country. That's something that prevents you from moving forward. So sometimes, if we take this badly, it can make us, as we would say in Spanish, move backwards. When he gets his permanent resident card, he can continue on with his life and take off that veil of uncertainty, what am I going to do now? But what is left for him is to move forward. (2019, November 16)

The possession of legal status in Canada was identified as a major helping factor that represented belongingness and granted rights and increased access to services. Even the designation as a protected person or a refugee brought a temporary sense of relief and security, as Luna expressed, "Our fears and doubts just were over because since that moment, we were accepted as refugees (2019, November 30)." For Emmanuel, who had been deprived of basic rights as an adult, the advantages of being a refugee claimant included the opportunity to work and earn a living and the possession of a credit card and a driver's license. He delightedly responded to the question, "What has helped you experience a sense of belonging?" posed to the group:

> The fact that refugee claimants are allowed to work and earn their living while their cases are being processed. Because for me, for 14 years in Hong Kong, never having the right to work, and being in a country where you're not even like one year as a refugee claimant, you're already been given the right to work…. You know it's a little bit funny, but things like a credit card. I never had a credit card, but I have it now. I never know how to drive a car. I just had my learning driving license few days ago. There are things that I just kind of start now because I have the possibility to go for it now. (2019, December 21)

As refugee claimants, PRs could also participate in educational programs and access resources in the community; these included English language classes, childcare services, and extracurricular activities. Esther indicated how these supports facilitated her and her son's transition from Mexico to Canada:

> My son has been able to participate in different activities such as football, taekwondo, for example. And the fact that we have access to these activities have really helped me. I think it's this what has helped him not to feel the changes so much. (2019, December 21)

Most importantly, PRs highlighted that gaining permanent resident status substantially contributed to finding a sense of belonging in the host country. For instance, Alex described a photo of himself smiling and holding up a card (Figure 14):

> Sharing this picture today to everyone here today, as you can see, I'm very happy…. May of this year I got my permanent residence, and I was so excited. I felt joy in my heart. Now I start going to school in my age…. It's my PR card. I just want to show it to everyone. I can't keep it to myself. (2019, November 16)

For Alex, this card signified inclusion and provided him with a feeling of "totally belonging to the country."

Figure 14

Alex's Permanent Resident Card

Esther's follow-up remark validated Alex's experience and highlighted the importance of one's legal status in the ability to feel belong and integrate into a society:

> I believe that there are certain ways of belonging, and this is very important, so that we can move forward in spite of anxiety, uncertainty, when we have the permanent resident card. It is important to feel that one is a part of, one belongs somewhere. It allows you to integrate yourself into society. Even though you may not have the certainty that you will

> stay here forever, you have that time to move forward and take advantage of that. Getting close to a community where you feel integrated, that is the first thing when one first arrives here. And once you have that happen, having permanent resident status, that means that you already took some steps to becoming adapted to a new society, and of course, that gives you a sense of tranquility and you can plan your future. That's a difference from when you came and started to integrate, so it is easier, then, to move forward, and this makes it easier to think, well, what are my goals? What's my next step? (2019, November 16)

After years of alienation, Organic also obtained his permanent resident status, which allowed him to access health care to treat his vision condition, pursue education, and "be able to say, 'I have rights.'" In sum, eight PRs contributed to the helping factor of having status and rights and three PRs identified their difficult resettlement process as an unhelpful factor.

English Language Proficiency

The English Language Proficiency category encompasses incidents related to one's ability or lack of ability to use English to communicate orally (and in writing) as a facilitator or a barrier to one's achievement of a sense of belonging in Canada. Speaking English was identified as a critical skill that allows one to express oneself and function as an adult in the host society. Overall, 12 helping and hindering CIs were discussed under this category.

PRs' English proficiency levels varied widely. Given his linguistic and racial minority status, Emmanuel indicated that not knowing how to speak Mandarin or Cantonese further impaired his sense of belonging in Hong Kong:

> In Hong Kong I didn't belong as well. Because one, the language, they speak Mandarin. They speak Cantonese, and I don't know nothing about their language, I can't really, to

> belong there, it was just, I was falling out always. For the last 14 years in Hong Kong, I just find my way to make myself be there. (2019, December 21)

His experience changed significantly in Canada where he was delighted to learn that English was the most spoken language. Emmanuel speaks French as his first language and English as his second. He shared, "Once I arrived here in Canada I really felt like, 'Wow! This is the place that I should have been all this time. Everyone speak English'… What gave me the sense of belonging here is the language (2019, December 21)."

However, the majority of PRs spoke Spanish as their native and only language, and for those who were relatively new to Canada, their limited English proficiency acted as "the greatest barrier" to belonging and integration. For instance, Organic described incidents where he faced difficulty describing his physical symptoms to a medical doctor, felt the pressure to quickly learn a new language amid his immigration process, and missed out on social opportunities due to the language barrier:

> For example, I have had trouble with my doctors. They were, my English was not perfect, so they were giving me diagnosis that was not exactly accurate. It was very frustrating, and people kept telling me like, "You're young. Why don't you learn the language?" But only like oneself know how stressful the situation is and how process are…. I was telling the doctors that I don't know anyone that wouldn't like to learn English. I would love to learn it, but I have this problem with my vision, and I find it really hard to focus, and I'm going through this immigration process that does not allow me to get any courses or study English. It's a social thing because when you start talking to someone and you see that, like you don't speak English perfectly or you're slow, they just get frustrated and they just leave. I think the most important thing is language because once you learn the

> language, then as they say in my country, no one is going to be able to fool you. (2019, December 21)

Esther also articulated her endeavour to learn English while awaiting her court date and explained that the language barrier caused a setback in her integration process:

> For me, it is very important. Personally, when I first got here from my country, I have a master's degree in different courses, and I felt like I was a kindergarten kid, like a disabled person because I am not able to communicate, I cannot move forward, so it is a very important thing for me…. I participated in workshops and courses, and I know the subject, but it just feels horribly incapacitating because I cannot speak about it. It's just very hard for me because I don't really know the language. (2020, April 25)

Other PRs indicated that being proficient in English would help them feel belong and allow them to obtain and share knowledge with others. This was particularly important to Ricardo as he continued to pursue his studies in human rights law with hopes of assisting other newcomers in Canada. He described the ordeal of having to learn English while maintaining Spanish language and connections:

> The first few years here are a very big struggle because we don't know how to live. We have to learn a new language. We have to accommodate ourselves into a new system. We have to pay bills, rent, etc. It's very challenging for everybody. I came here because of my studies in university. I wanted to transfer the credits over, and when comes here as an adult it's not easy. Where you start like a four or five-year-old with language skills, it's like climbing a very high mountain. People say to you, can you reach that high up there? Maybe not. Maybe never…. As Angelina says, "Where do I belong? In Canada or in Peru?" You pull your hair when you're learning English because you may even be

> forgetting Spanish. You have to tell your friends, “I'm sorry. I'm busy. I can't talk to you.” In order to learn the language, you have to be dedicated. It is painful, too, because friends don't understand you, because they believe that you're arrogant and proud, and you don't want to talk to them. (2019, November 16)

These accounts demonstrate a number of ways in which the language barrier caused limitations in PRs’ ability to navigate the healthcare, legal, and social systems in Canada. In sum, six PRs endorsed learning English as a helpful factor and four PRs endorsed the language barrier as an unhelpful factor.

Wish Lists

Overall, PRs identified a considerably high number of helpful CIs (92) in comparison to hindering CIs (34). This pattern is consistent with their positive attitudes and gratitude mindset expressed during data collection meetings and throughout the research project. Similarly, in terms of wish list items, there were minimal discussions as people were generally accepting of and grateful for their experiences, whether they were helpful or hindering. Discussions were more around how people overcame unhelpful incidents, what they learned from them, or what they are now able to do than what they wish they would have had or how things could have been different for them. As a result, the data analysis yielded only four wish list items, which were categorized under two themes. These included wishing that they would have found a community to belong to earlier in the resettlement process. PRs also wished for expedited refugee determination and protection to reduce the length of time they endured significant stress associated with the legal process.

Purpose and Meaning of Participation

This section of the study findings presents the reasons for which PRs decided to take part in the community research project or the goals that they wanted to achieve with this project. At the start of each data collection meeting, we reviewed the collective purpose for the project, as well as individual motives for participation. PRs were asked to share what they expected or hoped to gain from participating in the project. Their responses with regard to the purpose, from the introductions and throughout the discussions, are categorized into the following: to explore the meaning of a sense of belonging, to help others find a sense of belonging, and to achieve one's own sense of belonging.

First, PRs expressed their genuine curiosity and personal interest in the project to explore meaning and experience of a sense of belonging for themselves and other people. In particular, Ricardo advocated the project and encouraged people within and outside of the community to attend the meetings. In the next excerpt, he articulates the significance of the project for himself and his work with newcomer families:

> I think in the last 10 year because my research, my study, and my own experience, I seen and I witness how people have been becoming isolated, even though you can live in Toronto, Vancouver with five, six million people. And I think the same, different cosmopolitan cities…. It puzzled me and say what happened with people, they became an island. Each of us like a robot, just running with goals, and there is no sense of community any more here. If you see around you, if you go around you and then even in Vancouver, people in Canadian, who were born here, they say it's very hard to find community here. So when I talked to Angelina about this project, said this is very

> significant project. And then because my work also, and I have had chance before to think about that. So I say, so yeah, I would really like to participate personally.
>
> In the way I have a chance to meet you, who came at this moment, I really appreciate. It doesn't have material value. I think we have an opportunity, unique opportunity to talk openly. Whether that mean to be in Vancouver in 2019, trying to find a sense of community. How? Do we find it or no? If we haven't found it, how we can build it? How we? So, I think that's really important thing, so I'm very excited to, I don't know where it's going to take us, but I really like to put my time. (2019, November 16)

PRs communicated their appreciation for the social space to have open discussions about issues that they felt strongly about, as further exemplified in the following quote by Organic, who had been invited by Alex to the second community meeting:

> What I like about this group is the experience I can get because this type of workshops are not given everywhere. For me, it's very important to stay update. So that tomorrow I can make a decision and know where to move forward and how to do it. Yeah, because a lot of people think when you talk about mental health, that you are crazy, when it's not. We are always thinking on taking care of our physical body, but we often forget that it's very important, as much as important to take care of our mental health. So this is the reason why these workshops are so important for me because they give me a platform where I can speak freely and say whatever I think. Because often, when you speak about this type of things with other people, that are not familiar with the subject, it is misinterpreted. So for me, it's very refreshing to be able to join this group. (2019, November 30)

After attending the meeting, Organic regularly attended subsequent meetings and actively participated in the discussion, even though he was originally not part of the community, and he had missed the initial information sessions. Another keen participant, Emmanuel was also new to the community. He explained what drew his interest to the topic of a sense of belonging:

> The project is so valuable to me because for about 15 years of my life, I've been looking this place where I belong. So I've been looking this place where I can find peace, where I can live my life, which is the reason why I fled my home country in the beginning. I was not free to live my life the way that I wanted. Once I listened to this project, sense of belonging, it just kind of, yeah, this is something that is into my heart. The word talked to me a lot. Because this is what I been looking for so long up to today. I've been looking for a sense of belonging. Where am I belonging? Where can I sit down and live my life? I'm very excited to the project, to see how we can make this be real, a place of belonging. What is your sense of belonging? How can you have to live somewhere in your life, the way that you like? To have peace and to enjoy your life. (2019, November 16)

Emmanuel elaborated that he would like other people to benefit from the outcomes of the project:

> So I would like that we come out from this project with a structure, something that we can rely on for directing people, for giving to people, “You belong here! You belong here!” So that we cannot help people straight all over in all, in their life, but guide them to a place where they can be fulfilled and have their own life. (2019, November 30)

The majority of the PRs indicated that their reason for participating in the project was to discuss and generate ideas for helping other newcomers find a sense of belonging and alleviate their hardship during the adaptation process. This purpose is in line with the theme of Helping

Others as a helpful factor and a marker of a sense of belonging. Cristina, although she could attend only one of the data collection meetings, showed her appreciation for the humanitarian aspect of the project:

> What I love most about this project is how it helps us understand and it orients us to the people that are moving in from other countries about what's happening here. I like Angelina's counsel, and I hope this project lasts a long time. (2019, November 30)

Danielle indicated similar expectations in her introduction:

> What I expect from this project is that everything that we say comes out. Angelina can put it altogether, and perhaps a new project can be born out of what we learn here, so that this new project also help people that come here. Because I know that each one of us is a tool to help other people that are recently arriving, so that they have less difficulties at the time of their own adaptation. (2019, November 16)

Ricardo, who had informed both Cristina and Danielle of the project, provided two reasons for which he felt hopeful about the project and its potential impact, one professional and one personal:

> The first reason is my work. During the last seven years I've been working in an office that offers legal assistance for refugee families. I've seen and I've witnessed how recent arrived families have an expectation of being in a community here. I've seen the sadness, how difficult it has been for them to find a sense of community in Vancouver. This is the reason why I've seen them participate in this project. Because I'm not from this country, I wasn't born here, so my second reason is personal. Finding a sense of belonging, a community, this is why I'm here and I'm participating in this project, to share with all of you and you'll find a sense of belonging here. (2019, November 16)

Lastly, PRs expected to further gain a sense of belonging from the community as a result of participating in the project with others in similar positions. This motive is illustrated in the following quote by Luna:

> I believe that all of us have the need to belong to this place and make it our own. I believe that this project is going to help us greatly to find our sense of belonging and have more reasons because we will have a new opportunity for all our lives. (2019, November 16)

Most, if not all, PRs shared personal endeavours in finding a sense of belonging and looked forward to connecting with others from the community. For many of the PRs, the community, including its leaders, other members, and the physical space of the church basement, was the main source of their sense of belonging, as Esther stated, "I also want to share with you, that this is place, this physical place, is the first place where I actually came to, when I first arrived here. [Ricardo] was one of the first people I met here in Vancouver (2019, November 30)." The research meetings offered additional opportunities for the community members to get together and have meaningful conversations. In the following except, Sol, Luna's husband, expressed his appreciation for the community and the opportunity in relation to his search for belonging:

> We're participating in this project because we are very hopeful. As Latinos, I've found that we are alone here. Because even though there are other Latinos, and other people who speak your language, there isn't always a community that receives you with open arms and help when you need. We have been very lucky to have met you in this community. I believe that all of us who are here looking for something or be free from some things. We need and deserve the opportunity of having some help. (2019, November 16)

The project prompted PRs to reflect on their own sense of belonging and provided a platform for recounting their stories while engaging in knowledge production. For example, Esther describes what it means for her to participate in the project, "A feeling of belonging, what we were talking about. It's very important to me to be here because it allows me to find the way to be here and share my experience (2019, November 30)." The subsequent section further presents PRs' experience of participating in the project and the ways in which their participation contributed to their own a sense of belonging as an outcome of the project.

Community Actions

Two courses of action were produced as the outcomes of this participatory action research: a transformative social change during the process of participation and concrete action items informed by the findings. The transformative effects of participation and critical reflection on the PRs' enhanced sense of belonging were evident during the community meetings, as well as voiced by the PRs at the end of the project. During the discussions, one person's account of a CI evoked similar sentiments or recollections in others. As one related to another's experience, it provided a validating and supportive space, strengthening the existing relationships in the room and creating new connections. For most PRs, individuals who helped them during the resettlement process – the community leaders, Eagle and Ricardo – were sitting among them and participating in the project with them. During one of the discussions, Esther expressed her gratitude toward Ricardo and spoke of him as a source of inspiration and motivation:

> I would truly like to thank Ricardo for his help. I admire his personality, his human elegance, his wisdom that he shares. That has helped me. It has encouraged me. He talks about everything he has to go through in order to be able to help others. It's a long road

> without losing his identity. This is a great motivator because I'm an older person and I left a lot behind, but it is possible when you have a goal. (2019, November 16)

Ricardo, who was once also a newcomer, provided legal assistance for refugee claimants and connected them to the refugee foodbank. He had become a trusted friend to many of the PRs and others in the community. Furthermore, the social space enabled rich dialogue among people from different cultural groups who previously had limited interactions with each other due to language barriers. These processes illustrated the action of social transformation occurring during the data collection phase.

This social change was further demonstrated in one of the data analysis cross-checking meetings where we engaged in reflection with the following questions in mind, "What does participation in this project mean to you? How does it contribute to your experience of a sense of belonging?" I created a collage of the photographs submitted by the PRs and presented it to the group to elicit responses. Following this presentation, Alex teared up as he expressed his emotions attached to the photos and the camaraderie he felt with other PRs:

> Seeing all these people and pictures, I just feel like I already belong to them, they already belongs to me. I feel like I'm just like a family I miss right now. Even though we are seeing them in person, but my picture around that place and just feel like you are part of me right now, so the way I'm just feeling my emotion. Yeah, it's really good. Thank you for doing that. I feel like I want to cry, I'm sorry. (2020, April 25)

Emmanuel echoed Alex's sentiment and described how participating in the project, particularly the Photovoice activity, amplified his voice and enabled knowledge to be articulated:

> For me, this project mean that I have a value. Even though I cannot speak like experts, I cannot express my thoughts… maybe because of education, maybe no knowledge of how

> to do that, something like that, but the picture says it all, what I couldn't say the pictures say. This project means for me that I have value and that my voice is so important, is so valuable. This project give me the opportunity to voice it out. The pictures are just this thing that I couldn't say, so I'm so thankful for this project…. This is what we are dreaming for. These things that on the picture, we just hope that we can have it over and over, having this moment, this possibility, this virtue, this positivity to make it, and to be with family, to be with friends, to have a sense of cultural of our country here, and to help others who just came. It is all just like [Alex] was saying he wants to cry, it's so true. It's so true. (2020, April 25)

Similarly, Esther indicated that the participatory process of having the space to express herself was therapeutic during a critical time of her life going through a refugee hearing and how it allowed her to recognize her strength:

> I believe this is an opportunity to express my thoughts. It was a crucial point in my life here in Canada through the process of being accepted. So this has been really a therapy for me to be able to express my thoughts, my fears, my dreams. I discovered how strong I was, and now I am excited to belong to this society, and I know I can help others that are going through this same process. (2020, April 25)

Organic also explained how participating in the project allowed him to examine and accept his lived reality and benefited his mental health:

> This has meant a new experience for me. During my life in Canada, I participated in different types of workshops, but I have never participated in something like this, which I think is so important for mental health…. If I had any doubts in the past, this has certainly helped alleviate them. This has helped me to analyze the good side and the bad

> ones because certainly you cannot live only from the positive ones. You need to know also the bad part, and this has helped me know how to cope with it. Observing these pictures means to go in the past but in a way that you have the ability and as stronger now. I think if I would have seen those images in the past, I would have probably just gone back running and just been broken. (2020, April 25)

As the PRs shared their experiences of participating in the project, the virtual room was filled with emotions. At the end of the meeting, Eagle provided a summary statement legitimizing the knowledge produced through the project and underlining its value, not only to the community itself but also to the larger society:

> Angelina, I think it's really good…. This is great knowledge. Especially I think you asked the question, "What does this project mean to you?" before. I think what I see most of the people saying, it's touched the value of community and relationships that we have the opportunity to view. In particular, the relationships I think, we meditate on the importance of the relationships and the little really and honestly that our western society give to it. This project is something that is really needed – the knowledge, the project in itself – and we as a community, because wherever you go now with this knowledge, with this experience, you can't leave this out. I think this is the most important thing that we all do and should do because… it's not that we just learn these things, but we have to put them into practice and act on some of these truths that we have learned here. (2020, April 25)

Eagle's endorsement of the project and its impact on the community gave me an enormous sense of relief and validation as I strived to benefit and avoid exploiting the community through this action research project. He provided me with guidance and direction throughout the research

process; with the community's best interests in mind, he did not hesitate to call me out for my insensitive mistakes and suggest ideas to better meet the community's needs. For example, at the end of a community research meeting, when I suggested reserving the non-perishable leftover food items for the subsequent meeting, instead of giving them away, Eagle gently yet firmly chided me for being parsimonious. "This is not how we do things in this community" – his words reverberated in my mind throughout the rest of the project. Through these transparent and respectful interactions, Eagle and I were able to develop a stronger community-university partnership and a meaningful friendship. Doing this research also strengthened my personal relationship with the community, as I continued to work with Eagle in his ministry work of serving the community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In terms of action produced as an outcome of the research project, we had discussed sharing the knowledge produced with other similar communities, the academy, and the larger public with the hopes of informing policies, resettlement services, and future research and clinical work with refugee populations, as well as developing a self-sustainable program or a set of strategies that would help cultivate or maintain a sense of belonging for this particular refugee community. At the action planning meetings, PRs reiterated their wish to share the information with other newcomers with the intent to support them and alleviate their suffering during their resettlement and adaptation process. Alex posed the question, "How am I going to reach out to others?" One of the ideas that I came up during a meeting with my supervisors was producing a storybook with anonymous characters, pseudonyms, and deidentified photographs or cartoon pictures to protect the PRs' identity. When I proposed this idea, the PRs were initially in favour of showcasing and publicizing their individual stories. As we further discussed what this might look like, one person after another expressed that they would like to use their actual photos and

display their faces with their real names. While considering those who may not feel comfortable disclosing their identity, PRs indicated that their accounts would hold more truth if their real names and photographs were used. In line with this point, Eagle affirmed that we should not hide our past. Juan stated that he was not ashamed of his struggles and that he did not want anyone to suffer the way he and his wife did when they first arrived in Canada:

> With my wife, when we got here, she cried every day, every day and all day, my wife, she's very white and she looked like a tomato from crying. I was so worried as I thought she was sick from worrying, she was even shaking. These are the things that when you write in a book others are not going to believe, but if there is a video or photo where you see a person saying what he has been going through, I have to believe it. I had to in my personal experience, I had to adapt to the language, the climate, the behaviour, even the food, which is very different from the one in our countries. I had to adapt, and it was very cruel and very hard to adapt with my wife. I cannot say that I am 100% used to living here. We needed support, and we need to support newcomers right now. Thank god I had good luck to be guided to the church when I met [Eagle]. He was such great support. He gave me his shoulder and his hand. The church is still helping me and guiding me, so I have to give something back for what they've done for me. So yes, we need to show the pictures. (2020, May 16)

The discussion became heartfelt, as others concurred that they were not afraid to share their struggles with others and that including their real names and photos would be a more effective way to reach out to others in similar situations. Therefore, we collectively and unanimously decided to create and publish a Photovoice booklet using the PRs' real names and photographs including their faces.

As for the second part of the action to benefit this particular community, during the research process, the idea of having smaller group gatherings had come up as a sustainable way to address the issue of social isolation. We revisited this idea at the action planning meeting with the research findings in mind and discussed forming social circles with shared interests or hobbies or small support groups that meet regularly. Examples included: having an English conversation group to practice speaking English with each other; pairing up with a "support buddy" to go for coffee or a walk together and check in with each other; engaging in small group activities such as cooking, Bible study, book club, and sports; and organizing play groups for families who have children. Alex showed his approval of this idea and commented on the importance of keeping our focus on the goals of the project and following through on them:

> I can say our goals or dreams is to keep on going, and the idea of moving forward is to the way you come up with ideas and how we can move forward in this relationship of this community, which is a great idea because that was the beginning of what we dreamed of – how we can support this community and others outside. I think that is what we are going to build upon, how we started home, and our home, which we started, and is here to complete. Even though the home is completed, we need to live in our home. We can't just build a home and then disappear. So the home which we built is where we are going to live. Another way we want to live in our home, whether it is by group or whether it is by apart, but we still live in the home, so we are not being away from the home. Nevertheless, not everybody who's done building the home, some people want to leave as well, don't want to stay in the home and they want to look outside of the home we have built, which I think is all wise. What you come up with is wise, by separating each

other and look into categories of where each person would fit, and that is wonderful. (2020, May 16)

Some of the PRs expressed their interest in forming an English conversation circle, while others indicated that they would like to be part of a cooking club. Eagle added that Sandra, the community photographer, had already started a photography club. He suggested that people take the initiative to form or join a group:

> We are all gifted. The leaders cannot do everything. You are all gifted, and you all can contributed in unique ways. I want to encourage you to think about, "What is your gift and how you can use it to empower others and empower yourself?" (2020, May 16)

I concluded the meeting by encouraging people to think about the type of circle or activity group they would like to develop or join based on the skills or knowledge they would like to offer or teach others or learn from others.

Chapter Six: Discussion

In this chapter, the aforementioned study findings are discussed in the context of the existing literature on refugee integration and sense of belonging and in relation to relevant refugee statistics and policies. In addition, the implications for policymakers, program developers and service providers, as well as other refugee communities are provided.

Findings of Study in the Context of Current Literature

Meaning of a Sense of Belonging for Refugees

In this study, PRs identified a marker of a sense of belonging as being able to move forward in life with an increased sense of security and certainty and contribute to Canadian society. It was discussed that this state of belonging is achieved by earning status or membership in the host country and having rights and access to social services. PRs also described belongingness relationally and affectively, in association with family members or people who treated them like a family, or even family pets who provided unconditional loyalty. These findings are consistent with Fozdar and Hartley's (2014) conceptualization of civic and ethno belongingness for migrants. In recent literature, granting access to civil and social rights and fostering civic participation have been suggested as means to enhance refugees' sense of civic belonging that is foundational to successful refugee integration (Ballard, 2017; Namer & Razu, 2018). Belonging is also defined as feeling at home or at ease and achieved through attachments to people and social institutions and participation in decision-making processes of society (May, 2013; Reitz & Banerjee, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 2006). This feeling of belonging is not limited to human relationships and also attached to companion animals (Franklin, 2016; Johnson & Bruneau, 2019). Taken together, the findings from this study and the existing literature support the civic and relational conceptualization of refugee sense of belonging, which adequately

captures the complexity of their experience and highlights the importance of addressing both aspects of their belongingness.

Social Connection and Interaction

Social support has been well acknowledged in the refugee literature as a key factor that facilitates successful settlement and integration (e.g., Drolet & Moorthi, 2018; Elliot & Yusuf, 2014; Lamba & Krahn 2003). Social connection, as the most prominent theme in this study, affirms the importance of social relationships and interactions in the experience of a sense of belonging for individuals and families with refugee backgrounds. Findings from this study provide a further understanding of the nature of these relationships and interactions and how they may be helpful or unhelpful for a newcomer seeking a sense of belonging. A recent study with Syrian refugees resettling in Alberta, Canada found that social ties and relationships were built around their settlement needs and that ethno-cultural communities and community organizations were critical sources of social support (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018). Similarly, PRs in this study found their social connections from settlement and charitable organizations and community centres that supported their material needs as well as their social and emotional needs. They developed a sense of belonging from connecting and interacting with other newcomers, religious community members, people who share similar ethnic, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds and professionals of the mainstream society within their socio-cultural community. Some PRs had developed close ties with a church group who provided unconditional support. In immigrant and refugee literature, faith-based groups and communities have been recognized as significant community stakeholders in local integration and settlement services, in partnership with government-funded organizations (e.g., Janzen et al., 2020). Together findings of this study and existing research highlight the key role that local communities and non-mainstream community

organizations play in providing a supportive context and promoting a sense of belonging in refugees through participation in social and leisure activities, interaction with volunteers, and shared experiences with other newcomers (Herslund, 2021; Makwarimba et al. 2013; McAreavey & Argent, 2018; Riaño-Alcalá & Goldring 2014).

Conversely, loss or disruption of social connections, including being uprooted from their existing social life and losing regular and spontaneous contact with lifelong friends and relatives, interfered with PRs' achievement of a sense of belonging. Furthermore, PRs identified being mistreated, discriminated, or considered as outsiders by members of the mainstream society as a challenge to building a sense of belonging. In the refugee literature, the loss of family and social support networks following migration and the experiences of discrimination and social exclusions have also been found as factors that impede refugee experience of belonging and identification with the host culture (e.g., Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2009; Mude & Mwanri, 2020). PRs further explained that the hostile or unwelcoming ways in which they were treated by authorities, service providers, or organizations in day-to-day interactions or times of crisis caused significant psychological distress and feelings of rejection. Their accounts add to the existing literature by providing specific examples of the magnified impact that people from the mainstream society or in positions of power can have on the lives of refugees who are struggling to find their place in a new environment.

Helping Others

Altruistic behaviour has been found to be linked with physical and mental well-being, including enhanced meaningfulness, perceived self-efficacy, and longevity, particularly in older adults in the general population (Midlarsky, 1991; Krueger et al., 2001). According to recent research on the neurobiological effects of prosocial behaviour, the act of providing targeted

social support is associated with reduced amygdala activities, resulting in a decrease in fear and stress levels (Inagaki & Ross, 2018). In addition, providing social support to others has been found to be more beneficial for one's mental health than receiving help (Brown et al., 2003; Schwartz et al., 2003). Similar benefits of helping others are observed in refugee populations. For example, helpful and prosocial behaviour in refugee children settled in Sweden was linked with fewer mental health symptoms (Daud et al., 2008). For African refugee youths settled in Australia, the concept of *opportunity* was regarded as a special privilege to be used for giving back to the host society and finding their sense of belonging (Mude & Mwanri, 2020). In addition, community programs that provided refugee children with leadership opportunities helped them adjust to their new life (Edge et al., 2014; Hopkins & Hill, 2010). Likewise, in this study, the ability or the opportunity to help other newcomers going through similar challenges was reiterated as a helpful factor that contributed to an increased sense of purpose and belonging in Canada. Specifically, PRs articulated their desire to reciprocate the support they received when they first arrived in Canada and to repay individual acts of kindness to others in the community. They elucidated that helping others also benefited themselves by diverting their attention away from their own problems and allowing them to connect with people whose life experiences they could relate to.

A refugee by definition is viewed as a displaced person who needs protection. This categorization of refugees as the vulnerable and indigent can further disrupt their sense of self during migration as they struggle to find their place in the world. The findings from the present study, in line with the previous research evidence on the benefits of helping others, corroborate recognizing refugees' assets and presenting them with opportunities to contribute to the host

society as effective strategies to support their mental health and accelerate the process of achieving a sense of belonging in a new country.

Positive Mindset

In a review of research with refugee youth of diverse cultural and ethno-racial backgrounds, a positive outlook, faith, a sense of hope, meaning, and future aspirations have been identified as aspects of individual characteristics that promoted resilience (Pieloch et al., 2016). Similar individual coping strategies and internal processes were described and demonstrated in the findings of this study. Patience, perseverance, and toleration were identified as important qualities to have in the face of adversity and through experiences of discrimination and marginalization. PRs elaborated on their goal orientation, participation in educational and social activities, and contribution to community as their attempts to make social ties and become productive members of their new society. They articulated how they were able to seek out and make effective use of opportunities available in the community to achieve a sense of belonging and positive outcomes for themselves. Furthermore, they expressed gratitude and acceptance of hardships as part of life. This ability to stay positive, grateful, and hopeful and move forward with a new life is a common theme of strength and resilience that has emerged across many studies with migrant families (e.g., Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Kelly et al., 2016; Lenette et al., 2013; Mude & Mwanri, 2020; Nsonwu et al., 2013).

Of note, in this study, PRs with a child or children indicated that providing a safer environment for their child motivated them to build upon their existing sense of belonging, whereas individuals and couples who moved to Canada by themselves experienced a higher level of loneliness and conflicting feelings of belonging. Specifically, PRs who are parents reported seeking a sense of belonging through children's well-being and educational opportunities.

Children providing meaning and a sense of purpose during resettlement is documented in the review of research on the experiences of migrant parents (Merry et al., 2017). The consideration of children's well-being and future may urge refugee families to hold a positive attitude toward both the source and the host countries and instill the determination to learn new ways of living and permanently settle in a new country without losing their existing cultural identities (Atwell et al., 2009; Lenette et al., 2013; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). A recent analysis of three newcomer narratives on belonging – of a mother with a skilled worker status, a single man with an international student status, and a father with a refugee status – suggests that the harsh conditions of pre-migration life may set the stage for refugees to view Canada as a place of safety, stability, and opportunity, particularly for their children, compared to their counterparts (George & Selimos, 2019). Findings from the current study reinforce the optimism and motivation that children bring to the lives of refugee parents and put forth the adoption of a positive mindset as a facilitator of establishing a sense of belonging in their new environment.

Cultural Identity and Values

In the refugee literature, it has been widely recognized that a strong culture of origin identity has protective effects against mental health problems and facilitates psychosocial adjustment; moreover, the ability to maintain the heritage culture while participating in the host society and adapting to its culture has been identified as an acculturative strategy for successful integration and settlement outcomes (e.g., Berry et al., 2006; Kovacev & Shute, 2004; Poppitt & Frey, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2010; Weine at al., 2014). PRs in this study varied significantly in their degree of attachment to their source country. Some PRs described that being able to retain their cultural identity and traditions and native language allowed them to maintain a sense of belonging to their home country while forming a sense of belonging to Canada. This dual

belongingness appeared to develop more easily for couples with a young child in Canada as they watched their child adopting both cultures and adapting to their new environment. In a synthesis of qualitative literature on the parenthood experiences of refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants, passing down cultural values and language to children is found to be associated with family resilience (Merry et al., 2017). Other PRs experienced conflicting feelings of belonging between their country of origin and Canada and difficulty establishing a sense of belonging to both home and host cultures. This state of being torn between physical and emotional places and having to constantly accommodate different cultural values and practices demonstrates one of many acculturative challenges that immigrants encounter (Mude & Mwanri, 2020).

While the preservation of their heritage culture benefited some PRs, in other cases, overattachment to the source country hindered the process of belonging to Canada. Relatedly, a study using data from the Statistics Canada's General Social Survey found that maintaining a sense of belonging to the source country was linked to a low level of well-being for refugees, as opposed to contributing to the well-being of immigrants from the same country (Beiser & Hou, 2017). The complex links between cultural belonging and settlement outcomes can be explained by examining pre-migration experiences and source country attributes. In this study, detachment from the country of origin was identified as helpful in developing a sense of belonging in Canada for some people who suffered oppression and violence in their home country. This finding is in line with a Canadian immigrant study finding that low civil liberties and life satisfaction in the source country was associated with the assimilation outcome of having a strong sense of belonging to Canada and a weak sense of belonging to the source country (Hou et al., 2018).

According to Hou et al. (2018), the majority (93%) of a national representative sample of immigrants in Canada from over 100 countries reported having a strong sense of belonging to Canada, irrespective of their sense of belonging to their source country. Sixty-nine percent of the sample were found to have a strong sense of belonging to both Canada and their source country, in comparison to only 3% with a strong sense of belonging to the source country and a weak sense of belonging to Canada. In the same way, most of the PRs in this study reported having developed a sense of belonging to Canada. They perceived Canada as unique in its open multiculturalism policy and progressive society, which allowed them to feel more belonging after having tried to resettle in other, more homogenous societies as newcomers. Canadian multicultural discourses have been criticized in the anti-racist literature for diverting the attention from the construction of a Canadian national identity based on colonialism and racialization and failing to address the issues of structural oppression and marginalization (Dei, 2011). In this study, PRs' stories and descriptions of the critical events provided several examples of the impact of systemic exclusion and discrimination. Nonetheless, PRs in this study appreciated Canada's endorsement of multiculturalism and acknowledgement of the need for reconciliation, whether these messages may be ostensibly conveyed in the national narrative.

Status and Rights

PRs in this study identified having residence status and rights as a critical factor that contributed to their sense of belonging in both symbolic and practical terms as they started a new life in Canada. The acquisition of a legal status as a permanent resident granted membership to the host society, along with civil and social rights. This change in one's status denoted safety and permanent protection, relieved the stress and anxiety associated with deportation, and enabled progression with their life. Critical incidents in this category also involved privileges or

restrictions related to accessing medical treatment, employment, language classes, and community programs. Entitlement and access to basic human needs and services, such as housing, healthcare, education, and legal representation, have been found to be linked with successful integration outcomes (Ferris, 2020; Hopkins & Hill, 2010). Rights afforded to people with refugee backgrounds upon settlement provide the opportunity to fulfill personal needs and goals in ways that may not be possible in the country of origin (Mude & Mwanri, 2020).

Consequently, when PRs experienced significant challenges or delays in gaining their status and rights, it naturally compromised their feeling of belonging in Canada. PRs described the detrimental effects of long wait times, experiences of rejection, immigration detention, and threat of deportation on their physical and mental health. In their research agenda for refugee mental health, Namer and Razum (2018) elaborate the negative consequences of encountering barriers to residency status and rights:

> Post-displacement conditions, repatriation status and the stage of conflict in place of origin (where one fears returning) moderate refugees' mental health. Immigration detention is found to significantly contribute to posttraumatic stress and depressive disorders, and this effect appears to persist for years after release. Asylum interviews can also impact trauma-related symptoms… causing "emotional paralysis." One advocate indicated in addressing the asylum waiting process, "People have lost their human dignity." In terms of Baumeister and Leary's conceptualization, the message of detentions and interrogative asylum interviews, with the threat of deportation always present in the room, is that of punishment by exclusion, a clear statement of not belonging.

The importance of secure residence status and rights for post-migration refugee well-being and belonging is evidenced in the literature (e.g., Lamkaddem et al., 2015). Permanent residency or citizenship itself provides basic recognition as a human and a sense of stability and rootedness, which are fundamental aspects of one's sense of belonging (George & Selimos, 2019). Furthermore, having analogous access to healthcare, employment, residency, and public life as residents of the host country is an indicator of inclusion and belonging for people with refugee backgrounds (Namer & Razum, 2018).

English Language Proficiency

In the current study, limited proficiency in the English language was identified as a major obstacle to belonging for many of the PRs, who spoke Spanish as their mother tongue. The language barrier posed challenges in all aspects of integration, limiting the ability to effectively communicate their wants and needs and express their ideas. This hindering factor is in accordance with previous research that examined the integration of immigrant and refugee populations. According to the results of a national longitudinal survey conducted with the immigrant and refugee population in Canada (Xue, 2007), lack of proficiency in English or French was claimed as the most significant difficulty encountered during the initial 4 years after arrival. Learning English was reported as one of the basic needs to be met for refugee youth to facilitate their adaptation in the United States and Australia (Earnest et al., 2005; Weine et al., 2014). In a Canadian study with newcomer female youth, speaking English fluently was identified a marker of self-esteem and self-confidence that allows them to actively participate in conversations and share opinions (Khanlou & Crawford, 2006).

These findings from the present study and the literature foreground language acquisition as a critical determinant of newcomers' sense of belonging. Proficiency in the official language

of the host country facilitates access to health care, education programs, and the labour market, and enables the acquisition of citizenship (Fasani et al., 2018; Ferris, 2020; Xue, 2007). Another Canadian study of immigrant adults indicates that lack of pragmatic language skills, in particular, limits the civic participation and social and economic integration of immigrants (Derwing & Waugh, 2012). Their research highlights the importance of informal dialogue and networking opportunities with English-speakers for people with refugee backgrounds. In a comparative analysis of refugee integration policies in 11 developed countries, Canada is recognized for its provision of free language training to refugees, with many programs offering free childcare and transportation to access the language classes (Ferris, 2020). PRs in this study sought out such programs in their communities and prioritized learning English as a goal for successfully navigating their environment. This category was linked to other helpful and hindering factors, as English language proficiency affected their ability to seek belonging through social connections and interactions, share their knowledge with others, shaped their cultural identity, and access resources and services in the community.

Implications at Policy, Service, and Community Levels

In line with previous research, in this research project, the members of a refugee community in Vancouver, BC highlighted the importance of establishing one's sense of belonging to one's well-being and successful adaptation during resettlement. PRs' narratives illuminate challenges faced by people with refugee backgrounds during the prolonged resettlement period and their efforts to make social connections, negotiate their cultural identity and values, acquire residence status and rights, and learn English while helping others and keeping a positive mindset as they search for a sense of belonging. The findings demonstrate their acts of resilience in adapting to and accommodating the host society against its institutional

and systemic barriers. Findings assert that refugee integration needs to be a two-way process of belonging that involves mutual responsibility and accommodation from both the people of refugee status to adapt to their new communities and the host government to integrate refugees into their society with their policies (Ager & Strang, 2008). The study has significant implications for policy makers, program developers, service providers, and other refugee communities in Canada.

Immigration and Integration Policies

The host government's immigration policies and integration measures prefigure refugee integration outcomes and influence public opinions toward refugees, which in turn shape their sense of belonging to the host society (Callens & Meuleman, 2017; Ferris, 2020). Aleinikoff and Rumbaut (1998) refer to this process as a "self-reflexive story of belonging and incorporation that law and sociology meet" (p. 2). Inclusive government policies and positive public attitudes toward refugees contribute to refugee well-being and sense of belonging (Callens & Meuleman, 2017; Hynie, 2018). The ways in which the receiving country welcomes and values refugees as prospective members of its society constructs a foundation for integration and promotes successful resettlement.

Canada adopts an interventionist integration policy, with public assistance, government-funded language education, and employment support, which facilitates the process of becoming naturalized citizens for immigrants (Bloemraad, 2006). However, refugees in Canada are more likely to have difficulty finding secure employment, earn lower incomes, and be overqualified for their jobs relative to their Canadian-born or economic immigrant counterparts (Hyndman & Hynie, 2016). George and Selimos (2019) draw attention to the racialized and colonial dimensions of Canadian policies that evaluate immigrant education and skills according to

European cultural and social standards and favour "Canadian" experiences that contribute to Eurocentric nation-building. Many of the PRs, who had been working professionals (e.g., lawyer, scientist, banker, graphic designer) in their home country, were unemployed or working poor quality jobs at the time of their participation in this study. The long-standing issue of underemployment of internationally educated and trained professionals is highlighted in a recent call to action to mobilize foreign-trained medical professionals in response to the COVID-19 crisis (Atlin, 2020). A recent study published by Statistics Canada (Hou & Schimmele, 2020) indicates a 47% underutilization rate of immigrants educated abroad in health occupations. Internationally trained health practitioners who sit on the sidelines with their willingness to volunteer and alleviate the pandemic burden on current healthcare workers are reminiscent of the PRs in this study who displayed readiness to contribute to the mainstream society and delighted at social opportunities to help others. The non-recognition and devaluing of their non-European credentials and work experience is one example of Canada's exclusionary immigration practices that limit refugees' sense of belonging (George & Selimos, 2019; Reitz et al., 2014; Somerville & Walsworth, 2009).

This dissertation study, not only through its findings but also by its methodology, legitimizes the knowledge and expertise of people with refugee backgrounds as participating researchers of their experiences. Their individual accounts and the emergent categories call for more inclusive policies and public perception that appreciate the positive mindsets, cultural and linguistic diversity, professional skills and experience, and other assets that refugees bring to Canadian multicultural identity beyond nation branding. In fact, one of the most effective ways to accelerate the resettlement process of refugees may be to help them transition from the position of a *helpee* to a *helper* and to promote their agency and autonomy that they have lost in

the process of becoming a refugee. Practical implementation of inclusive integration policies would involve dedicated budget lines for settlement assistance (Ferris, 2020), orientation programs that articulate refugees' legal rights and responsibilities (Ballard, 2017), equitable access to healthcare and career bridging programs (Atlin, 2020; Namer & Razum, 2018), simplified administrative procedures for services, and less coercive legal measures and respect for fundamental human rights. Promoting the civic participation and economic independence of refugees as active contributors to Canadian society is a cost-effective and empowering approach to facilitate their integration (Ager & Strang, 2008; Ferris, 2020).

Program Development and Service Provision

This community-university engagement project drew on multi-level partnerships among myself, a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the university, and a local initiative, the No Man Is An Island ministry, Vancouver Mennonite Church, and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). This study, in conjunction with existing research articles on refugee integration (Ferris, 2020; Herslund, 2021), reinforces the critical role that municipal governments and local organizations play in developing and executing policies and programs, as well as in fostering a sense of belonging in refugees individuals and families. This role involves actions and services that replenish and rebuild personal, material, social, and cultural resources that are lost as a result of migration and becoming of a refugee (Mude & Mwanri, 2020). Collaboration between large government settlement agencies and smaller community organizations would facilitate the access to such resources and enable effective use of opportunities available in the communities. The current study also highlights the importance of engaging stakeholders in decision making and program development and the possibilities of shared power.

In this project, I collaborated with the leaders of the different organizations and went out to the field to meet with my co-researchers from a community with which I had established a relationship. I met the people where they were, literally and figuratively, to study with them a concept that was familiar and relevant to them, *a sense of belonging*, rather than my own inquiry of *mental health*, a concept that was of interest to me as a graduate student in psychology. As it happens, belongingness is a critical aspect of mental well-being and instilling a sense of belonging has been proposed as an important preventive mental health intervention for refugees and asylum seekers (Namer & Razum, 2018). Taking a similar approach, community-based mental health clinics and hospitals may collaborate with non-profit, religious, and charitable organizations in designing and implementing culturally sensitive, evidence-based trauma-informed programs. A collaborative program may be offered through an integrated one-stop shop at a place of gathering in the community, as opposed to a referral-based approach. This extension of mental health services increases accessibility and reduces logistical, social, and structural barriers (e.g., transportation, stigma, wait time, language). Offering outreach services in consultation with community leaders and volunteers at a location where refugee clients have already developed a sense of safety, trust, and familiarity may be the most efficacious way to meet their complex needs. Mental health care practitioners may also provide professional development training and workshop in mental health first aid and crisis intervention. During one of my many meetings with Ricardo, he expressed wishing that he had basic counselling skills to support his clients as he listened to their stories and helped them prepare for their refugee hearing. In addition, while providing free English language classes to newcomers is an important part of settlement assistance, considering that people from non-English speaking countries encounter significant challenges associated with their limited English proficiency, a more

culturally sensitive approach would be to increase the availability of free translation and interpretation services, listed information and materials in multiple languages, and cultural brokers and service providers of diverse linguistic backgrounds. These approaches would maximize available resources and expertise of different service providers while promoting the capacity of existing community support systems.

Refugee Communities

This research study had direct implications on its participants and their sense of belonging by means of their participation in the group discussions and interactions with each other during the project, as well as through community development strategies of forming social circles. PRs demonstrated insight into their own life situations and the commitment and ability to work together to address common issues encountered during refugee settlement and integration. One of the factors that PRs in this study identified as the most helpful for achieving a sense of belonging was a community of people who provide a safe and welcoming collective space and environment. Some PRs expressed wishing that they had found a social support network earlier in their resettlement to ameliorate their pain and suffering of loneliness and social isolation. Findings encourage other newcomers to find a community centre, a local place of worship or a faith-based centre (e.g., church, mosque, synagogue, temple), or a small organization to seek out resources and start building social capital in their new society. More specifically, people may connect with others in similar situations and volunteers of mainstream society, become involved in opportunities to help others, attend and celebrate different cultural and holiday events, learn about services available in the community, register for free English classes and other educational programs, and perhaps even participate in a research project.

Implications for Applied Psychology

Since the seminal work of Baumeister and Leary (1995), the pervasive and compelling need to belong has been generally accepted as a fundamental psychological construct on empirical as well as theoretical levels, beyond social psychology. In addition, in developmental psychology, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory offers a perspective on an individual's belonging to their social contexts and a network of groups and systems (microsystem, mesosystems, exosystems, and macroystems). In cultural psychology, Berry and Hou (2016) describe a sense of belonging to the source country and to the host country in terms of acculturative strategies (assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization) to assess immigrant life satisfaction and mental health. In clinical psychology, Joiner (2005) proposes that the psychological state of thwarted belongingness, in conjunction with perceived burdensomeness, instills a suicidal desire. The current study further demonstrates the importance of a sense of belonging, in the lived realities of the members of a refugee community, embedded within their political and socio-cultural context, and legitimizes their social practices in developing or maintaining a sense of belonging. Findings of this study, in the context of these theories in psychology, suggest that psychological services for individuals with refugee backgrounds should consider the family, neighbourhood, school, community, and culture in which they are positioned and how these systems may interact with their individual characteristics to help or hinder their sense of belonging. For example, psychological assessment may include self-report measures, such as the Sense of Belonging Instrument (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995) or the School Belongingness Scale (Arslan & Duru, 2017), to examine the individual's psychological state of belonging; interventions may directly target unmet belongingness needs as a risk factor.

As for my own field, school and applied/clinical child psychology, sense of belonging emerged as an overarching theme in my master's thesis research examining strengths and resilience of four female adolescents with refugee backgrounds (Lee, 2016). In this study, participants identified school as a source of social network and a place of belonging where they had developed positive relationships with their peers and teachers, participated in after-school clubs or activities, and gained opportunities for volunteering and community involvement. In another thesis study with female refugee adolescents, positive teacher-student and peer relationships, opportunities for involvement in the school community, and availability and accessibility of support services were identified as factors that fostered their sense of belonging (van der Putten, 2017). As such, schools as organizations can play a critical role in helping refugee children and families develop a sense of belonging in a new country. Schools can provide opportunities to create social ties and connections with peers and families from similar ethno-cultural and broader Canadian communities. School personnel, as authority figures and professionals of the mainstream society, can facilitate belongingness of refugee children and families by providing a welcoming, safe, and culturally sensitive environment. In addition, teachers are often the first point of contact or a referral source for refugee children and families to access preventive and specialized services (e.g., assessment, intervention) within the school system, as well as external professional support services in the community (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008; Pacione et al., 2013).

Sense of school belonging itself or perceived school support has been found to be associated with positive mental health outcomes in refugee children and adolescents (Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). In a more recent qualitative study with young children with refugee backgrounds, contributing factors to the children's sense of school

belonging included specific spaces and activities in the school, friendships with peers from similar ethnic, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds, relationships with teachers, and aspects of the school reflective of the children's values and identities (Due et al., 2016). Of note, in the present study, all PRs were adults, and their young children did not participate in the study. Although the PRs did not discuss schools specifically, the helping factors of a sense of belonging identified in this study (e.g., established support network, friendly authorities or professionals, opportunity to help others, preservation of culture of origin, individual strengths and resilience, security and increased access to services) reflect the findings of previous research and can be adapted to further inform this line of research and to provide a useful framework for promoting school belonging in children and adolescents with refugee backgrounds and their families. Still, more research is needed to understand experiences of belonging specifically to school in students with refugee backgrounds.

In the context of globalization and psychology, Carolissen (2012) discusses the notion of belonging as a theoretical framework and calls for deconstruction of psychology and decentering of the academic "who examines and interrogates the assumptions of his or her own discipline through engagement with perspectives of other disciplines" (p. 638). She asserts:

> We need to think imaginatively about different roles for psychology and some of these include thinking seriously about working collaboratively from *within* psychology, as well as working with those outside psychology who share similar values and political ideals for our work as psychologists… In the context of globalization I have suggested, for example, that those psychologists working on citizenship and globalization for social justice are well suited to work together. It is also perhaps important to consider why at a disciplinary level we have community psychology, critical social psychology, political

> psychology, when essentially these are groups of psychologists who primarily work on issues that broadly fall into social change arenas. How do we deconstruct the level of fragmentation that exists *within* progressive psychologies? (p. 638)

This community-based research study extends beyond my specialized field of school and clinical child psychology in identifying and understanding patterns and determinants of belongingness needs of a refugee community to address the issues of social isolation and loneliness in a globalized world. In this deconstructive process, my views and assumptions in psychology were decentered, expanded, and transformed by the local knowledge of PRs as the experts. This privileged opportunity enhanced my competence as a scientist-practitioner and fostered my learning in community-based mental health, culturally competent practices, and qualitative research methodologies, as I provide systemic and comprehensive psychological services in schools and community organizations. In line with my research interests, as a clinician, I take a collaborative and client-centered approach in my practice. I aim to provide a transformative space for my child clients and their families to engage in critical inquiry of their own life situations and achieve effective and sustainable therapeutic outcomes within their social systems.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

The purpose of the present study was to understand and articulate the concept of *a sense of belonging* as described by the members of a local refugee community, as well as the factors, processes, events, behaviours, and activities, or critical incidents, that facilitated or hindered the members' experiences of a sense of belonging during their resettlement period in Canada. The use of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) and the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) as an integrated qualitative methodology and the Photovoice as the method engaged the community members in shared knowledge production, meaningful participation, and social action. This chapter concludes the dissertation by addressing the research questions that provided a frame of reference of this study and presenting the strengths of this study and its unique contributions to the literature, limitations embedded within researcher reflexivity, and ongoing action and recommendations for future research with refugee populations.

Answers to Research Questions

Together we, 15 community members as participant researchers (PRs) and I as the primary researcher and the facilitator, explored the research inquiries of (a) the meaning of a sense of belonging, (b) critical incidents that facilitate or hinder the experience of a sense of belonging in Canada and (c) ways in which the critical incidents are helpful or unhelpful to experiencing a sense of belonging, and (d) the meaning of participation in this project and its contribution to the experience of a sense of belonging. Thematic and ECIT analyses of the group discussion transcripts revealed the following findings in response to the research questions (RQ).

RQ1. What does a sense of belonging mean to the members of this community?

PRs in this study conceptualized the meaning of a sense of belonging, or the markers and identifiers of belongingness, as the following: (a) having the knowledge and resources to help

others and the ability to contribute to the host society; (b) having the freedom to enjoy life, as well as a sense of purpose and certainty to make plans and decisions regarding the future; (c) identifying with a culture, a society, or a nation, and having established a secure cultural or individual identity; and (d) feeling connected to and supported by people (e.g., family members, friends, and pets), a group of people, or a community.

RQ2. What do the community members identify to be the critical incidents that facilitate or hinder their experience of a sense of belonging in Canada?

Based on similarities and parallels across the PRs' accounts and stories, 126 critical incidents, including 92 helpful and 34 unhelpful incidents, were identified. These critical incidents were organized into eight helpful factors (newly established support network, friendly authorities or professionals, opportunity to help others, preservation of culture of origin, Canada's unique culture, individual strengths and resilience, security and increased access to services, and learning English) and five hindering factors (disruption of social relationships, hostile or unwelcoming treatment, strong attachment to home country, difficult resettlement process, and language barrier). From these factors, six emergent categories were derived: Social Connection and Interaction, Helping Others, Cultural Identity and Values, Positive Mindset, Status and Rights, and English Language Proficiency.

RQ3. In what ways do the community members find these critical incidents to be helpful or unhelpful to experiencing a sense of belonging?

For the category of Social Connection and Interaction, PRs described helpful incidents where they felt welcomed and supported by a group of people or a community who treated them like a family and interactions with professionals who showed compassion and helped them find resources and social support. PRs also recalled unhelpful incidents of separation and

estrangement from friends or family causing loneliness and hostile and insensitive treatment by government officials and other authorities causing emotional distress. In terms of the Helping Others category, PRs explained how opportunities to help others in similar positions and volunteer in their community contributed to their sense of belonging. For the Cultural Identity and Values category, PRs reported that the preservation of their cultural identity and traditions helped them maintain their existing sense of belonging, while Canada's multiculturalism and commitment to reconciliation helped them develop a new sense of belonging; however, in some cases, a strong attachment to the home country or painful memories from back home prevented people from finding a sense of belonging in a new country. In terms of the Positive Mindset category, PRs described their individual coping strategies and internal processes of perseverance, faith, tolerance, gratitude, determination, and acceptance of hardships, as well as their children's well-being as facilitators and motivators of achieving a sense of belonging. In terms of the category of Status and Rights, difficulty obtaining refugee status or humanitarian protection and living in a state of uncertainty impaired PRs' belongingness, whereas gaining legal rights and access to services including work permit, health care, and education increased their feeling of belonging. Finally, with regard to English Language Proficiency, while speaking English was identified as a helping factor that allowed PRs to express themselves and share their knowledge with others, limited English proficiency was a significant barrier to having a sense of belonging.

RQ4. What does participation in this project mean to the community members? How does it contribute to their experience of a sense of belonging?

For individual PRs, the opportunity to participate in this community project meant being able to openly discuss with others, reflect on, and learn about their own and others' experience of a sense of belonging. PRs were also interested in engaging in actions to help others in similar

circumstances (i.e., being a newcomer, feeling socially isolated) find a sense of belonging, and addressing their own need to belong by maintaining and developing relationships with other community members. In line with these goals and purpose for the study, participation in the study resulted in PRs' enhanced sense of belonging, recognition of their knowledge and individual strengths, and action items that may further benefit the PRs and the refugee community, as well as others in similar communities.

Research Strengths and Contributions

As discussed in the preceding sections of this chapter, findings from the present study contribute to the emerging refugee literature and inform policies and practices by offering valuable insights into refugee integration and adaptation experiences in Canada and re-conceptualizing refugee needs in terms of civic and social belonging. In addition to identifying the determinants of refugee belongingness that have been documented in the literature, this study explicates the processes by which the identified factors, events, and behaviours helped or hindered the goals, needs, and demands experienced by individuals of different refugee backgrounds. The PRs' personal narratives elucidate

> how social identities, expectations, and aspirations are modified and re-shaped in relation to the barriers and opportunities that inform immigrant belonging,… how immigrant attachments are fostered or truncated, and how exclusionary experiences rupture immigrants' attachments to people and social institutions to shape their self-esteem, identity, aspirations, and life outcomes. (George & Selimos, 2019, p.135)

These study findings provide a framework, with descriptive categories and specific examples, for designing, implementing, and delivering programs and services that facilitate successful refugee settlement by means of addressing the fundamental human need to belong.

Furthermore, this community research project adds to the growing pool of participatory research with refugees and makes a unique contribution to the current literature as a doctoral dissertation study that is grounded in community partnerships and participation from its development to dissemination. First, the use of the recently developed or integrated qualitative methodology of Participatory Critical Incident Technique (PaCIT; Chou et al. 2016) is reinforced as a non-dominating and ethical approach to doing research in collaboration with participants as co-researchers, under the assumption that they have the expertise of their own life situations to make positive changes for themselves. In addition, the incorporation of CIT into PAR provides a structured, concrete, and empirical framework, with systemic steps and rigorous credibility checks, to guide the research process and allow for practical applications of research findings. Of note, the participatory and flexible features of PAR, which are incongruent with conventional research paradigms (Creswell et al., 2007; Dick, 1993; Herr & Anderson, 2005), posed challenges to conducting PAR as a doctoral dissertation project, given the limited resources, time, and institutional deadlines and requirements. For example, the initial stage of the research involved two years of informal assessment, relationship building, and development of the research question and one year of considerable planning and co-construction with the community leaders and members.

During the initial stage, this research was awarded funding from the UBC Public Scholars Initiative (PSI), which supports innovative, action-oriented forms of scholarship that extend beyond the academy and traditional research approaches. The PSI opportunity emancipated me as a doctoral student researcher to undertake PAR for my dissertation research and conduct scholarly research that was personally meaningful and beneficial to the community of which I had become a part. The recognition as a Public Scholar also allowed me to deepen my

relationship with the community and further enhance the community leaders' perception of the value of doctoral research. Moreover, the PSI funding provided the resources (e.g., transportation to and from the research location, meals during research meetings) and the interpretation service to make this research project more accessible to the community members and create the communicative social space for open dialogues while addressing their basic needs.

Finally, the preliminary and supplementary work on relationship building outside of the research activities was a critical component and a major strength of this study. These extensive efforts contributed to creating a sense of safety, familiarity, trust, and *belonging* between the primary researcher and participant researchers, which elicited in-depth descriptive and experiential information. The increased sense of agency and solidarity provided by working on a project in collaboration with other community members also allowed participant researchers to share openly and candidly. In addition, the use of Photovoice as an exploratory and participatory tool elicited rich discussions, enhanced the PRs' narratives, and meaningfully captured their salient experiences represented through the photographs. Taken together, this community-university engagement project demonstrates the potential of dissertation research to conduct research with marginalized communities under true partnerships and shared decision-making power.

Researcher Reflexivity and Future Directions

As I examine my academic and personal journey with the individual members of the community and our research project, the following quote from Ferreira and Gendron (2011) makes me pause and reflect on the ethical implications of my research, again and again:

> Well-intentioned academic researchers may be in a position to take the research findings and present them to the community with suggestions for community empowerment, but

> the distribution of power in this scenario is unbalanced. In this scenario, one must question whether the [research] model is really intact, or whether the privileged are, once again, taking advantage of the oppressed to advance their own career and position of power through research of the oppressed community. (p. 165)

My first reaction to this statement may be to defend my work; I may naively or self-deceptively attempt to further justify my research approach, under the assumption that it is somehow immune from exploiting vulnerable communities. Instead, I let the statement sink in. I sit with the emotions of discomfort and guilt that have provided me with a sense of responsibility for my impact on this community and prompted me to check my privilege during the non-linear cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. These emotional experiences served as an additional guide in addition to my interview fidelity and credibility checks to remain conscious and humble throughout the project. While this research project seemingly had a positive impact on the PRs and the community, it also contributed to the requirements for my doctoral degree and certainly to my distinction as a UBC Public Scholar. I acknowledge that, no matter how well-intentioned my approach, the imbalance of power in this research process was inevitable. In this section, I elaborate on the power dynamics in which the PRs and I engaged in joint knowledge production, discuss further drawbacks and limitations of this participatory action research, and suggest directions for future research with refugee populations, interwoven with my internal processes during this research journey.

Starting this project with the community required extensive groundwork and relationship building on the side. My extended role as a researcher in addition to a volunteer in the community required me to navigate the blurred boundaries and the power differential between myself as the primary researcher and participant researchers, whose refugee background or

claimant status placed them in vulnerable positions. Chou et al. (2016) further discuss the challenges of being a community researcher:

> The lines between professional and community member become blurred as researchers are challenged to reflect upon their position of privilege and may struggle with ethical challenges in maintaining boundaries. The researcher is faced with competing assumptions… to become part of the community; yet conversely, researchers in academia are often required to value traditional forms of knowledge generation—unbiased empirical data. (p. 55)

There are a number of ways in which I attempted to address the power hierarchy between myself and the PRs and balance my positions as a volunteer and a community researcher.

First, I carefully selected and employed strengths-based, culturally grounded, and participatory research approaches and methodologies (i.e., Participatory Action Research, Photovoice) to position community members as experts of their perceived realities and aimed to legitimize, translate, and mobilize their local knowledge on refugee experiences. While PRs willingly and passionately contributed to the group discussions, they expected me as the primary researcher to plan the details of the project and provide the next steps. This is consistent with previous PAR experiences with migrant and refugee communities and asylum-seeking children and youth, who preferred to follow the researcher's direction and guidance (Collie et al., 2010; Kaukko, 2016). However, limited co-researcher participation in PAR studies does not indicate a weakness (Chou et al., 2016); rather, a strong PAR study avoids imposing "participation" based on western contemporary understandings and attends to participants' ideas of their own role and participation in the research process (Kaukko, 2016). In this study, I adjusted my approach throughout the self-reflective research process to respect various levels and conceptualizations of

participation and to consider any contextual influences that may limit the decision-making powers of the community members.

Second, I mindfully and strategically shared my own personal experience of a sense of belonging as an immigrant and a naturalized Canadian citizen, while facilitating the group discussions. Paris (2011) presents Paulo Freire's (1970) work on quest for mutual humanization as a methodological stance which involves "dialogic consciousness-raising and the building of relationships of dignity and care" (p. 138). She asserts that humanization is ethically necessary in doing research with marginalized and oppressed communities, and it increases the richness and validity of data in qualitative inquiry, "as both researchers and participants seek to push against inequities not only through the findings of research but also through the research act itself" (p. 140). The use of this humanizing method allowed me to remain actively engaged and reflect upon my own emerging interpretations and experience as both a facilitator and a participant. Sharing my own experiences and vulnerability may have also put the PRs at ease to tell their stories or express their thoughts, as it seemed to happen during the first Photovoice session where people started sending me their photographs after a couple of the PRs and I presented our photographs. PRs also consistently added comments or responded to my accounts. I witnessed the PRs' impressive "performative expression of self and identity" (George & Selimos, 2019, p. 129). They did not require any prompting; they shared with such zeal, elaboration, and intensity that it seemed as if they had been ready to tell their stories for a while. At times I found myself lost for words, in awe of the depth and power of the stories. Other times, given time constraints, I felt the pressure to redirect and limit one person from taking a long time to share to ensure that everyone had a turn to speak. During the ECIT session at the last data collection meeting, I noticed that I was rushing the discussion due to concerns about not reaching data saturation. I

then reminded myself to let go of my own agenda and respect people's need to tell their stories, which at times derailed but enriched the discussion in the end.

In another session, I noticed the tendency of people with a higher social status in Canadian society impose their opinions on the importance of acculturation on people who were more patriotic toward their culture of origin. To address this tension, I worked to equalize the powers and the volume of the voices in the room by offering validation and acceptance of all experiences. The group format can be viewed as a limitation of this study, as it may have affected how much an individual decided to disclose; however, it also offered a potential advantage of creating an empowering and supportive environment overall (Behnia, 2004; Mitschke et al., 2017). Although there were certain individuals who spoke more than others, everyone seemed to keenly contribute to the discussions by sharing, responding to what was said, or actively listening. The camaraderie conveyed was not surprising given the pre-existing relationships among the community members and the support from the community leaders. As demonstrated in this study, building group cohesion and authentic relationships with personal disclosure, trust, mutual respect, and a tone of informality within the research group is an integral part of successful PAR (Ochocka et al., 2002).

Third, in between the data collection meetings, I continued to volunteer at the foodbank on Thursdays and engaged in additional community service work during holidays to check in with PRs, including the community leaders, and to be available to address any questions or concerns related to the research project. This fieldwork supplemented the data collected during community meetings, as I witnessed action, or social connections being created and expanded and how this process contributed to the community members' sense of belonging. My fieldwork interactions with PRs also strengthened my connection with them and deepened my

understanding of the different aspects of their world, as the following excerpt from my field notes illustrates:

> I checked in with Juan, who was sitting at a table by himself. He took out his phone and showed me four photos that he had selected for the Photovoice activity: one of him and his wife, one of his four daughters in Colombia, one of his older brother, and one of a dismembered corpse of his deceased friend. I paused at the last photo and listened attentively as Juan explained, using Google Translate, that this was the body of his friend who was murdered by gang members for failing to pay them taxes. He said in English, "If you don't pay, you pay." I acknowledged how powerful this photograph was and gently suggested that it may be triggering for other PRs. Juan nodded in agreement with me. He then took my hand, placed it on the back of his neck, and described that the tightness and tension in his neck were the effects of psychological stress.

Later that day, I went for a walk and took another pause, wondering what it might have meant for Juan to share these photographs with me and to communicate the painful realities of life in his hometown.

Limitations associated with the use of the Photovoice method are the difficulty of expressing complex or abstract ideas through photographs and the ethical concerns with taking photographs of human subjects resulting in a limited number of meaningful photographs that capture people (Palibroda et al., 2009). Another challenge was that the apprehension regarding privacy and a threatened sense of security in PRs with refugee backgrounds might have resulted in limited sharing of personal accounts and production of photographic data. However, these issues did not hold back PRs from expressing themselves in candid and evocative ways, sharing their personal accounts and photos of themselves with their family members and friends.

Conducting a narrative analysis of the data from the group discussions would be another equalizing approach to situate participants as the agents or protagonists in their own stories while attending to the socio-cultural and political contexts in which they find and achieve a sense of belonging. In sum, the collaborative and power-sharing nature of the methodologies used, the social communicative space created, and the means of capturing experience through photographs revealed meaningful and rich knowledge and information that may have otherwise been silenced and out of reach in the academic realm.

In terms of other limitations, I am most regretful about any quality or meaning of PRs' accounts that we may have lost in translation. The primary data were not truly "raw" in that they had been processed or interpreted prior to its transcription. Although I was able to build genuine relationships with the PRs notwithstanding the language barriers, I sincerely wish that I could have captured their performative expression in their native language. A re-analysis of the audio-recorded data in the Spanish language would yield an even more authentic representation and accurate understanding of PRs' experiences. In addition, as a qualitative study conducted with a purposive sampling of a small number of participants, findings from this study may not apply to other individuals with refugee backgrounds, though generalization is not a goal of PAR. Alternatively, this study provides an in-depth understanding of the experiences of a sense of belonging of a specific group of people from a local refugee community in Vancouver, BC. Most PRs were of Latin American background and different in terms of their age, marital status, family composition, socioeconomic status from their country of origin, and their refugee status. Despite the lack of generalizability or transferability of the findings, the themes and categories emerged in this research overlap with the factors and characteristics of resilience found in other

research studies with refugees and asylum seekers across various contexts and offer a fruitful avenue for future large-scale quantitative studies.

Finally, this study advocates collaborative scholarship and purposeful social contribution, as opposed to the "helicopter research" approach, in which academics or researchers "fly into" communities to conduct a study *on* their subjects of interest and extract information that feed their intellectual curiosity or knowledge that would advance their career (Bharadwaj, 2014; Ferreira & Gendron, 2011). Future studies with refugees and other underserved populations should consider employing collaborative and participatory research approaches (e.g., PAR, community-based participatory research) as alternatives to traditional research paradigms, as well as mixed methodological designs. These approaches are recommended as appropriate methodologies for exploring complex constructs with participants and by nature promote resilience and a sense of belonging by increasing their agency and involving them as research assistants or co-researchers (Betancourt et al., 2015; Bharadwaj, 2014; Ellis et al., 2007; Pieloch et al., 2016). In addition, the iterative processes of action research may be useful for evaluating interventions and treatment programs for refugee groups.

Since the last community research meeting in July 2020, I have organized and facilitated a weekly virtual English conversation circle with some of the PRs and other members from the community. Every Thursday evening, we get together on a virtual platform and check in with each other, discuss English grammar, idioms, and phrases, work on pronunciation, and share stories – not only to learn and practice speaking English but also socialize with each other and stay connected. This circle has been growing as people invite other newcomers to the group. I have also created a draft of the Photovoice booklet and presented to the group for their feedback prior to its publication, which is in the works. The two products of visual communication, the

booklet and infographic, created from this project will be printed and distributed as appropriate, in discussion with the community leaders and members. *We hope that the real-life stories and authentic photographs of the PRs will provide validation of refugee experiences and reach the lives of other newcomers in similar communities to let them know that they are not alone.* The greatest accomplishment of this PAR project may be the relationships established and strengthened during the research process among the community members as well as between me and the community members. We will continue to make efforts to maintain the relationships and engage in the cycle of reflecting and brainstorming ways to disseminate and make use of the findings for ongoing action.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Material, Equipment and Services Checklist

- ◊ Food and drinks
- ◊ Spare digital cameras
- ◊ Pens and pencils
- ◊ Laptop and projector
- ◊ Consent forms
- ◊ Voice recorders
- ◊ Transit passes
- ◊ Gift cards for volunteers
- ◊ Notebook for journaling and taking notes
- ◊ Group facilitation guide #1 & #2

In addition, make sure to arrange:

- ◊ Childcare
- ◊ Interpreter
- ◊ Community photographer

Appendix B: Budget

Budget Item	**Description**	**Amount**
Interpretation & Translation	$50 per session x 10 sessions	$500
Photographer	Photography lesson for 2 hours	$100
Refreshments	Lunch for community members ($250 x 10 sessions)	$2,500
Travel Reimbursement	Transit passes (30 people x $5.90/roundtrip x 10 sessions)	$1,770
Childcare Stipend	Payment for two sitters during session (2 x $25 x 10 sessions)	$500
Supplies	Name tags, posters/papers, writing materials, handouts	$200
Digital Voice Recorder	For recording sessions	$100
Gift Certificates or Compensation	Acknowledgement for participation in research ($50 x 25 people)	$1,250
Data Dissemination	e.g., photo exhibit, conference presentation, book	$1,580
Total		**$8,500**

Appendix C: Consent Letter

LETTER OF INVITATION & INFORMED CONSENT FORM
(Please keep this copy for your records.)

Project Title:
Forgotten Need: Exploring a Sense of Belonging with a Local Refugee Community

Principal Investigators & Research Supervisors:

Dr. William McKee Assistant Professor Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology & Special Education Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX Email: xxx@xxx.xx	Dr. Cynthia Nicol Associate Professor Department of Curriculum & Pedagogy Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX Email: xxx@xxx.xx

Co-Investigator/Graduate Student Researcher:
Angelina Lee, M.A.
Ph.D. Student
Department of Educational and Counselling
Psychology & Special Education
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX
Email: xxx@xxx.xx

Collaborators:
Eagle Pérez, Vancouver Mennonite Church; Ricardo Alvarez, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Refugee and Newcomers Office; participating members of the MCC Refugee and Newcomers Office and the Vancouver Mennonite Church foodbank refugee community

Sponsor:
This project is funded by the UBC Public Scholars Initiative.

Dear _____,

You are receiving this letter because you have had a chance to learn about the "community action project" over the last few months and expressed interest in participation. You may have attended one of the information meetings held at the Vancouver Mennonite Church. You may have also spoken with one of the community leaders. I would like to formally invite you to participate in the project *Forgotten Need: Exploring a Sense of Belonging with a Local Refugee Community* as a co-researcher/participant researcher.

What are we doing?
Issues of social isolation, loneliness, and lack of a sense of belonging have been identified in this community. In this university-community engagement project, we will collaboratively explore the meaning and the experience of a sense of belonging. We will look at important events or factors that have been helpful or unhelpful in experiencing of a sense of belonging in Canada in hopes of addressing the identified issue in the community.

How are we going to do this?
Participation will involve biweekly to monthly community meetings and sessions where we will have focus group discussions about the research topic. At these meetings, we will have opportunities to engage in socialization over coffee and food before and after the session. Each session will take about 2 hours. In the sessions, you will be asked to participate in a photography activity, which will be explained to you in detail during the sessions. There will be a total of 8 meetings/sessions in addition to the 2 meetings we have already had. With your permission, all sessions will be audio-recorded to be transcribed by the researcher, and 2 out of the 8 session will be also video-recorded for verification purposes. You will be invited and expected to engage in the data analysis process and dissemination of the findings, and therefore, you will have access to selected excerpts from the transcribed data and the study results.

What are potential outcomes of this research?
Project outcomes will be determined by the research findings and your ideas. A possible research product may be a photo exhibit, a wall mural, a photo book, a conference presentation, or other form of public display. Results of this project may lead to developing a self-sustainable community-based program or a set of strategies that would help cultivate or maintain a sense of belonging. Knowledge produced from this research may inform policies, resettlement services, and future research with refugee populations.

When and where is this happening?
These meetings will occur over the course of the next 8 months starting in July. The project may take longer depending on our availabilities and the progress we make. The primary location of these meetings will be the Vancouver Mennonite Church. The location is subject to change depending on your preferences.

What are benefits and risk of participating in this research?
One major benefit of participating in this research is having the opportunity to actively take part in a funded action project to make social changes in your own lives and possibly in others. By working together as a community, we anticipate that the participation itself will lead to an increased sense of belonging and agency. In addition, by better understanding what a sense of belonging means and how it is developed and maintained by important events and factors in our lives, we can inform not only ourselves, but other similar communities and policies. The project legitimizes your social practices and extends an opportunity to communicate your perceived realities with the academic community and a larger audience of your choice to engage in self-advocacy and foster their civic sense of belonging to Canadian society.

In this self-reflective process, topics of sensitive natures may come up, and you may experience emotional difficulties. The nature of the study is strengths-based and empowering, and the likelihood of psychological harm is low. However, you will be provided with a list of free and low rate crisis and counselling services for your needs and resources.

Additionally, in order to address some of the barriers you may encounter in attending the meetings, travel reimbursements in the form of public transit passes, child minding, and language interpretation will be offered.

Confidentiality and Privacy:
It is very important that your privacy is protected. There are limits to ensuring confidentiality due to the group format of the project; we will set group rules and guidelines in the beginning of the project to establish trust and confidentiality with all participant researchers. Your voice and face will be identifiable in the recordings, no individual information will be reported in any written documents. You will each be given a pseudonym and a code number on all written documents for the purpose of data analysis. All physical documents and records of data collected will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secured room at the university. All electronic data files will be password-protected and stored in secure, off-line folders. The video- and audio-recordings will be destroyed with your permission after the study has been completed. However, the photographs may be made available to a public audience; we will need a separate consent for this procedure, which will be discussed in more detail during one of the sessions.

If you decide to take part in this study and have any concerns about your rights or treatment as a participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia by phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX or toll free 1-XXX-XXX-XXXX, or by email at xxx@xxx.xx.

You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences, even after you sign this consent form. You may choose not to respond to any of the questions asked during the project or participate in any of the activities. Your participation is completely voluntary and will not affect any services you or your family receive in the community.

A demographic questionnaire is attached to this consent form to ask your background (e.g., country of origin, date of arrival in Canada, current status in Canada, family status). This is collected for participant researcher description. This is optional for you to complete and will not affect your eligibility for participation.

If you would like to take part in the study, please complete the attached consent form and the questionnaire (optional) and return them to the graduate student researcher, Angelina Lee. Please keep this letter for your own records.

LETTER OF INVITATION & INFORMED CONSENT FORM
(Please complete and return this form to the researcher.)

Project Title:
Forgotten Need: Exploring a Sense of Belonging with a Local Refugee Community

My signature below indicates that I have read and understood the information about the research study *Forgotten Need: Exploring a Sense of Belonging with a Local Refugee Community* as described in the above letter, and that I consent to take part in the study. I allow myself to be audio- and video-recorded during group discussions for data collection and analysis.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date (MM/DD/YYYY): _____

Contact Information: _____

Please take moment to answer the following question:
What do you hope to get out of this project? What would like to see happen with the project?

Appendix D: Acknowledgement of Release Form

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RELEASE
(Please keep this copy for your records.)

Project Title:
Forgotten Need: Exploring a Sense of Belonging with a Local Refugee Community

Principal Investigators & Research Supervisors:

Dr. William McKee Assistant Professor Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology & Special Education Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX Email: xxx@xxx.xx	Dr. Cynthia Nicol Associate Professor Department of Curriculum & Pedagogy Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX Email: xxx@xxx.xx

Co-Investigator/Graduate Student Researcher:
Angelina Lee, M.A.
Ph.D. Student
Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology & Special Education
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX
Email: xxx@xxx.xx

Collaborators:
Eagle Pérez, Vancouver Mennonite Church; Ricardo Alvarez, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Refugee and Newcomers Office; participating members of the MCC Refugee and Newcomers Office and the Vancouver Mennonite Church foodbank refugee community

Dear _____,

You have given informed consent for your participation in the project *Forgotten Need: Exploring a Sense of Belonging with a Local Refugee Community* which include photographs you have taken. You have selected photographs to communicate your stories of the meaning and the experience of a sense of belonging in Canada. This part of the consent form is to ask for your permission to use the photographs for the purpose of the dissemination of the study findings. This will be done through research conferences and the UBC library open collection/repository for theses and dissertations.

If you have any concerns about your rights or treatment as a participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia by phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX or toll free 1-XXX-XXX-XXXX, or by email at xxx@xxx.xx

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RELEASE
(Please complete and return this form to the researcher.)

Project Title:
Forgotten Need: Exploring a Sense of Belonging with a Local Refugee Community

I, _____, hereby give UBC Faculty of Education permission to release and use photographs that I have taken for the purpose of the research project *Forgotten Need: Exploring a Sense of Belonging with a Local Refugee Community*.

I am 19 years of age or older and am competent to sign this contract in my own name.
My signature below indicates that I have read and understood this form prior to signing it.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date (MM/DD/YYYY): _____

Appendix E: Photography Consent Form

CONSENT TO PHOTOGRAPHY & USE OF IMAGE
(Please keep this copy for your records.)

Project Title:
Forgotten Need: Exploring a Sense of Belonging with a Local Refugee Community

Principal Investigators & Research Supervisors:

Dr. William McKee Assistant Professor Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology & Special Education Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX Email: xxx@xxx.xx	Dr. Cynthia Nicol Associate Professor Department of Curriculum & Pedagogy Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX Email: xxx@xxx.xx

Co-Investigator/Graduate Student Researcher:

Angelina Lee, M.A.
Ph.D. Student
Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology & Special Education
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX
Email: xxx@xxx.xx

Collaborators:
Eagle Pérez, Vancouver Mennonite Church; Ricardo Alvarez, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Refugee and Newcomers Office; participating members of the MCC Refugee and Newcomers Office and the Vancouver Mennonite Church foodbank refugee community

Dear _____,

We are conducting a university-community engagement research project that explores the meaning and the experience of a sense of belonging. We are seeking your permission to use the photograph(s) of you and/or your likeness for public display to share the findings from the study. This will be done through (outcome/product of the study) _____.

CONSENT TO PHOTOGRAPHY & USE OF IMAGE
(Please complete and return this form to the researcher.)

Project Title:
Forgotten Need: Exploring a Sense of Belonging with a Local Refugee Community

I, _____, understand that photographs of me and/or my likeness may be used in a public setting and displayed indefinitely.

I hereby give to the photographer (name) _____, the Vancouver community, and the University of British Columbia permission to use images of me or my likeness in perpetuity in any electronic or physical form for the purpose of research and dissemination of findings surrounding the *Forgotten Need: Exploring a Sense of Belonging with a Local Refugee Community* project. Images of me may be cropped, altered, modified or combined with other images or text without notifying me. I understand that my image is being collected pursuant to section 26 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 165, for the Purposes. Any other personal information of me, including my name, will not be collected.

I am 19 years of age or older and am competent to sign this contract in my own name.
My signature below indicates that I have read and understood this form prior to signing it.

Photographer's Name: _____

Photography Taken Date: _____

Photography Taken Location: _____

Your Name (please print): _____

Your Signature: _____

Name of parent or guardian (if under 19 years of age): _____

Signature of parent or guardian (if under 19 years of age): _____

Date (MM/DD/YYYY): _____

Contact Information: _____

Appendix F: List of Resources

List of Free and Low Rate Counselling Services in Vancouver

Although risks of participating in this project is minimal, this resource is provided to you in case you may experience emotional distress. Please feel free to ask the researcher for assistance in contacting the following organizations.

If you are experiencing a crisis (call 911 in case of an emergency):

- Crisis Help Line

604-872-3311

- Access and Assessment Centre, Mental Health and Substance Use Outpatient Services

604-675-3700

If you are looking for free counselling (expect a waitlist):

- Family Services of Greater Vancouver (trauma counselling for children and adults)

604-874-2938

- Little Mountain Neighbourhood House

604-879-7104 ext. 306

- UBC Scarfe Counseling Services

604-822-4639

If you are looking for multilingual services:

- Moving Forward Family Services

778-321-3054

- S.U.C.C.E.S.S.

604-408-7266 or 604-684-1628

- MOSAIC

604-254-9626

- VAST

604-255-1881

If you are looking for victim services:

- Crime Victims Assistance Program (available 24/7)

1-800-563-0808

- Battered Women's Support Services

604-687-1867

If you are looking for low-cost general counselling (expect a waitlist):

- Oak Counselling

604-266-5611

- Fraser River Counselling Service

604-513-2113

- Living Systems Counselling

604-926-5496 ext. 0

Appendix G: Photovoice Information Handout

Photovoice Information

The camera has become an essential and universal tool of everyday life in human interaction with others and the surroundings. In this age of technological growth, every mobile phone has a camera function, allowing people to freely and spontaneously capture life experiences and moments. Photography has become a primary source of self-expression and exchange of information through social media applications such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook. The power of photographs is now greater than ever.

❖ What is Photovoice?

Photovoice is a research method that allows people to use photograph as their voice to engage in storytelling of their experiences and empowers people to make social change. The main goals of Photovoice is to enable people to record and reflect their ideas, to promote critical dialogue and knowledge production about important issues through group discussions of photographs, and to inform policy and systems change.

"Photovoice breaks past language and traditional communication barriers that often prevent members of a group from expressing their concerns" (United for Prevention in Passaic County, 2012, p. 2).

❖ Ethical Considerations

Please consider the following measures to protect your privacy and other people involved:

- Informed Consent:

Informed consent if required when 1) taking a photo of a person who is recognizable, 2) taking a photo of a minor (under age 18), or 3) taking a photo of a personal belonging or personal property. Consent must be obtained to use photographs for group discussion or exhibits. Consent is not needed when taking a photo of public figures, the environment or public settings, or person who cannot be identified. When taking a picture of a human subject or their personal property, ask their permission using the following steps and make sure that the images you take accurately represent the situation:

1) Assess the situation to ensure that you can approach the person safely (e.g., driving, illegal activity).
2) Provide a brief explanation of the project and your involvement.
3) Ask for consent to use the person's images for a group discussion and/or public display.

- Safety:

Refrain from entering dangerous spaces or situations to take photographs. These include physical, financial, and emotional harm of yourself and others. Consider individual privacy, reputation and liberty.

If you have any questions about these measures, please contact the facilitator.

- Instructions

Take seven to ten photographs and out of these, select two of your choice that represent a sense of belonging to you. When choosing photographs, rely on your instinct. Once you have selected two photographs of your choice, send them to the facilitator via email or phone message.

At the community action meetings, you will be asked to share the photos with the group of other participant researchers, explain why you chose the photos, and tell of any stories related to the photos. In these stories, you will be asked to share what a sense of belonging means to you and what helped and hindered you from having a sense of belonging. You may find that other group members will be able to relate to your stories. This process takes great courage and reflection. You may feel vulnerable at times, but also a sense of pride. As Palibroda et al. (2009) state, "This can be a difficult time, but also one of celebration and of survival and strength in times of trouble" (p. 57).

For data analysis, the group will organize all the photos into categories, cluster your ideas, and identify similarities and differences in your experiences through an open dialogue (Lykes, 2001).

- Tips for Taking Photos

Consider the various aspects of taking a photograph and ask yourself the following questions as you take photographs that represent a sense of belonging to you.

- The Image

What are you taking a picture of? Have a clear idea of what you want your image to say. What would "the right photo" look like?

- Focus

Is your photograph clear in what you are intending? Does it stand out? When taking a picture of a small object, make sure to focus on the main message. This can be achieved by focusing on the image with your camera lens or zooming in.

- Colours

What do colours in your photo represent? Whether it is a passionate red, deep dark blue, or black and white, colours offer a way to express your message within your photo.

- Perspective

What is your angle? You can play around with different angles and levels from which you take photos to represent different perspectives.

Appendix H: Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire (Optional)

The following questions ask about your background. This information will be helpful in describing participant researcher demographics for the results section. If there is any question you feel uncomfortable answering, skip the question.

Participant ID: XXX

1. What is your country of origin?
2. When did you leave your country of origin?
3. When did you arrive in Canada?
4. How long have you been in Canada?
5. What is your primary language?
6. What is your current status in Canada?
    - Permanent resident
    - Canadian citizen
    - Refugee claimant
    - Temporary visitor
    - Other/do not wish to disclose
7. What is your family status?
    a. Who lives at home?
    b. Who lives outside of Canada?
8. Do you have any other family members/relatives, family friends, or acquaintances in Canada? _____ Yes _____ No

If yes, please specify: _____

Appendix I: Group Discussion Facilitation Guide

Community Leaders Present:
Participant Researchers Present:
Other Attendees Present:
Date & Time (2 hours):

Contextualization:

Main Questions:

- What do we see here? What is happening in this photograph?
- What does the photograph mean to you?
- How do you see the photograph as reflecting a sense of belonging?

Alternative & Probe Questions:

- What is the relationship between the content of the photograph and how you perceive a sense of belonging?
- What does a sense of belonging mean to you?
- How do you experience a sense of belonging in Canada?
- What are you aspiring to belong to?
- Out of the photographs you have taken, why are these photographs the most significant?
- How would you rate your current sense of belonging on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very low and 10 being very high? (Write your answer on a piece of paper, fold it, and write your individual code on the outside. We will keep it for next session.)
    - What would a person feel if they gave it a 2? a 5? an 8?
    - If you would like to change your rating based on this discussion, please do so.

Appendix J: Group Discussion Facilitation Guide

Community Leaders Present:
Participant Researchers Present:
Other Attendees Present:
Date & Time (2 hours):

"Last session, we discussed the meaning of a sense of belonging in relation to the photographs you have taken. (Please refer to your rating of your sense of belonging from last session as you are reflecting and answering the discussion questions today.) Today, we are going to explore further and discuss incidents or factors that have been helpful or unhelpful in developing, maintaining, or experiencing this sense of belonging."

<u>Helpful Critical Incident</u>

Helping Factor

- What has helped you in experiencing a sense of belonging in Canada? What would be a good image to illustrate this if you were to take a photograph of it? This can be something that someone did, something that happened, or anything else you experienced.
- What does this (event or behaviour) mean to you?
- How do you feel about this (event or behaviour)?

Importance:

- How did this (event or behaviour) help you?
- What was it about this (event or behaviour) did you find helpful?

Example:

- Provide a specific example of how this helped you experience a sense of belonging.
- What led to this? Why did it happen?
- What happened? How did it happen? Where and where did it happen? Who was involved?
- What was the outcome? What was done or said? How was it dealt with? What resulted that made you feel this was helpful for your sense of belonging?

Helping Factor	Importance	Example

Unhelpful Critical Incident

Hindering Factor

- What has made it difficult for you in developing, maintaining, or experiencing this sense of belonging in Canada? What would be a good image to illustrate this if you were to take a photograph of it? This can be something that someone did, something that happened, or anything else you experienced.
- What does this (event or behaviour) mean to you?
- How do you feel about this (event or behaviour)?

Importance:

- How did this (event or behaviour) help you?
- What was it about this (event or behaviour) did you find helpful?

Example:

- Provide a specific example of how this made it difficult for you to develop, maintain, or experience a sense of belonging.
- What led to this? Why did it happen?
- What happened? How did it happen? Where and where did it happen? Who was involved?
- What was the outcome? What was done or said? How was it dealt with? What resulted that made you feel this was unhelpful for your sense of belonging?

Hindering Factor	Importance	Example

Wish List Items

- Are there other things that you wish you would have had in your experience to help you feel a sense of belonging? What would this look like?
- What kind of things would help newcomers experience a sense of belonging in general?
- What else might be helpful to you that you haven't had?
- How would it help?
- What is it about this that you would find helpful?
- In what circumstances might this be helpful?

Wish List Item	Importance	Example

Debriefing

- Before we wrap up, how did the session go for you?
- Did you find it easy or difficult to answer the question?
- If there is anything you would like to discuss with me individually, please do not hesitate to connect with me either right after this meeting or at a later time.

Appendix K: Credibility Check Guide

Provide descriptions of the categories emerged and go through the following questions with the participant researchers:

1. Do you feel as though the helping/hindering critical incidents and wish list items are accurately represented?

If all PRs agree:

a. Is anything missing?
b. Is there anything that you would like to change or add?
c. Do you have any other comments?

If any PR disagrees:

a. Do the category headings make sense to you?
b. Do the category headings capture your experience and the meaning that the incident or factor had for you?
c. Are there any incidents in the categories that do not appear to fit from your perspective? If so, where do you think they belong?
d. Do you have any other comments?

Appendix L: Table for Tracking the Emergence of New Categories

Date of CI/WL Extraction	Participant ID	Date Categorized	New Categories Emerged?